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Returning to post-Katrina New Orleans: Exploring the processes, barriers, and decision-making of African Americans

Kim Mosby
University of New Orleans, kmosby517@gmail.com

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Returning to Post-Katrina New Orleans:
Exploring the processes, barriers, and decision-making of African Americans

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of the Arts
in
Sociology

By

Kim Mosby

A.A. Des Moines Area Community College, 2005

B.A. New York University, 2007

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explores the post-Katrina experiences of African Americans in Houston and in New Orleans. When the levees failed, residents from New Orleans were scattered across the country. Houston housed the largest population of displaced low-income African Americans from New Orleans. As the rebuilding process began, housing, employment, education, and healthcare policies in New Orleans changed. These institutional changes employed urban revitalization and poverty removal strategies adapted to disaster recovery. This study differs from previous research by examining these changes with an intersectional approach. It explores how African Americans frame obstacles as they attempt to return to a city with reformed housing, employment, education, and healthcare policies. To do this, I analyze three different cases 1) those that returned to New Orleans, 2) those still displaced in Houston, and 3) those that relocated to Houston after returning to New Orleans for over a year.

Key Words: Hurricane Katrina, disaster recovery, African Americans, Houston, New Orleans, displacement, decision-making, social policy, intersectionality, social institutions

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Seven years after the levees breached, New Orleans residents struggle to place Hurricane Katrina into the past tense. Homes, businesses, schools, and hospitals in eighty percent of the city flooded. Social institutions and support networks also washed away as recovery strategies reshaped housing, employment, education, and healthcare. These changes created new obstacles to return and forced poor African Americans with limited resources to create new support networks to survive.

Following one of the worst disasters in the history of the United States, scholars, urban planners, and engineers evaluated what went wrong in New Orleans and suggested how recovery could improve social conditions in the city. Post-Katrina policy changes affected every aspect of life. However, planning processes largely left out the voice of those most affected by the storm and those with the fewest resources to adapt (Nelson, Ehrenfreucht, and Laska, 2007). Processes that did incorporate resident participation had many issues. Demographics of those able to participate did not proportionally represent pre-Katrina New Orleans, outreach to displaced residents varied from none to extensive between plans, and some political entities viewed resident participation only as a means to build public support for recovery policies (Nelson et al., 2007; Williamson, 2007). As such, final plans did not always incorporate the resident ideas developed in public meetings.

Research identified poor, elderly, and African American residents of New Orleans as those most impacted by Hurricane Katrina across the Gulf Coast (see Cutter, 2006; Cutter and Emrich, 2006; Gabe et al., 2005). New Orleans victims were disproportionately Black and had higher rates of poverty than the Orleans Parish average. Poor, African Americans were disproportionately represented in the number of those in the city when the waters rose and of those who suffered long-term displacement, often evacuated post-Katrina by governmental

means. The storm also heavily impacted the elderly who represented a disproportionate number of the dead (Bourque et al., 2006).

In the twentieth century, scholars debated how to frame the impacts of disasters. The prevailing thought viewed the impact of disasters as natural (Burton and Kates, 1964). This focused disaster studies research and policy decisions on methods of prediction and ways of engineering safety (Fara, 2001). In the twenty-first century, social science literature emphasizes the role social vulnerabilities play in exacerbating the impacts of natural phenomena (see Cutter, 2006; Cutter and Emrich, 2006; Fara, 2001; Neumayer and Plümper, 2007; Smith, 2006; Weichselgartner and Sendzimir, 2004). Literature on Hurricane Katrina framed the disproportionate effects on poor African Americans within the context of social vulnerabilities created by a racist, classist, and sexist social system of privilege (see Cutter, 2006; Enarson, 2006; Frymer, Strolovich, and Warren, 2006; Fussell, 2006; Gilman, 2006).

In addition to evaluating the impact of the storm, research also suggested and critiqued strategies of recovery (see Brookings Institution, 2005; Clark and Rose, 2007; Gault et al., 2005; Gotham and Greenburg, 2008; Hill and Hannaway, 2006; Luft with Griffin, 2008; Nelson et al., 2007; Popkin et al., 2004). Many sources advocated for the policy changes the city implemented, such as replacing public housing with mixed income communities and restructuring public education to rely heavily on charter schools (see Brookings Institution, 2005; Hill and Hannaway, 2006). Others challenged the effectiveness of these measures (see: Clark and Rose, 2007; Gault et al., 2005; Gotham and Greenburg, 2008; Luft with Griffin, 2008; Nelson et al., 2007; PolicyLink, 2007; Popkin et al., 2004). This research tended to emphasize the undesirable effects these policy changes had in the past when evaluations found them

unsuccessful. They also highlighted the disproportionate negative impact on African Americans who relied on the changed social institutions more so than other racial groups.

In the years immediately following Hurricane Katrina, surveys were conducted to determine if displaced residents wished to return, what obstacles stood in their way, and what concerns they had about returning (See: Collective Strength, 2006; Daniel, Arrington, and Hyman, III, 2008). These surveys did not use in-depth open-ended questioning and reporting to capture the narrative voice of participants. Thus, these studies limited the ability of respondents to express their experiences and to frame obstacles to return. In addition, these surveys reflected an individual approach to understanding obstacles rather than viewing obstacles as interrelated.

Because Hurricane Katrina and the levee failure impacted all sectors of life, the current trend among researchers is to examine the effects on their particular area of interest such as domestic violence, education, or healthcare. In this process of studying obstacles individually, scholars indicate the interrelatedness of issues, such as doctors needing housing for their families and schools for their children in addition to office space and clientele to facilitate return (Appleseed, 2006; Berggren and Curiel, 2006). Intersectional analyses of the obstacles residents must overcome to return are needed because residents cannot focus on only one challenge at a time (Appleseed, 2006). A plan to return to a stable life in New Orleans requires residents to overcome many obstacles at once (See: Appleseed, 2006; Litt, Skinner, and Robinson, 2012).

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore how African Americans frame obstacles to return to post-Katrina New Orleans. The participants are limited to African American New Orleanians because the literature agrees that they were disproportionately affected by the storm and represent the majority of those who face long-term or permanent displacement. This study will provide insight into the experience of a subset recognized as

having fewer resources to cope with the demands of disaster situations. It highlights cases in which disaster response organization and state agency assistance is most necessary to mitigate the effects of disaster and encourage long-term recovery. Through understanding the experiences and obstacles encountered by Hurricane Katrina's victims, policy makers can better understand how post-disaster policy decisions affect marginalized populations and their decision-making processes. In addition, this study seeks to be an exploratory pilot study to direct future research and attract funding and attention to the need for such research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE AND THEORY

Literature Review

Overview

When Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast in August 2005, it captured the interest of researchers, politicians and media outlets. While the hurricane impacted much of the Gulf Coast, most of this commentary focused on the devastation in New Orleans that resulted when the federal levee protection system failed. Hurricane Katrina research covers all aspects of the storm from causes to recovery. For my study, I address research that situated the storm within the disaster studies discourse, the unequal initial impact of the storm, and recovery strategies, with a focus on changes in housing, employment, education, and healthcare policy.

To frame the events following August 29, 2005, some scholars situated New Orleans experience of Hurricane Katrina within the disaster studies literature (Jackson, 2006; Smith, 2006). The current trend in disaster studies underscores the ways social inequalities create social vulnerabilities, which allow natural weather phenomena to have catastrophic impacts on specific populations. This is a change from viewing the impacts of disasters as acts of God/Mother Nature or due to ecological conditions (Fara, 2001; Weichselgartner and Sendzimir, 2004). After a more complex understanding emerged of how society exacerbated the impacts of natural weather phenomena, scholars delineated the variables that create social vulnerabilities (see Cutter, 2006; Enarson, 2006; Frymer, Strolovich, and Warren, 2006; Fussell, 2006; Gilman, 2006). In Hurricane Katrina, those without the resources to evacuate were the ones who died and suffered the greatest emotional trauma as the waters rose. Many highlighted the inherent inequalities in an evacuation process that relied on personal transportation when the 2000 Census

indicated over a quarter of the city's residents did not have access to personal vehicles (Fussell, 2006; Jackson, 2006; Smith, 2006).

Following the storm, local, regional, and national officials came together to direct recovery (Nelson et al., 2007). The city implemented new housing, employment, education, and healthcare policies, which had a basis in urban revitalization and poverty eradication strategies. Many scholars, activists, and community members questioned the effects these policies would have on the city as well as on vulnerable populations that lacked the resources needed to respond to these changes. Within the research on recovery strategies, the voices and lived experiences of those identified as the most impacted – poor and working class African American New Orleanians – have yet to frame the obstacles post-Katrina policy changes created in their process to return. To understand how participants responded to Hurricane Katrina, the levee failure, and the restructuring of social institutions, I begin by examining the societal context that transformed a natural disaster into a catastrophe.

Unnaturalness of natural disasters

Disasters and catastrophic events have been studied for decades. One of the early frameworks within disaster studies conceived disasters as uncontrollable forces of nature that disrupt life (Burton and Kates, 1964). Viewing disasters in such terms had important consequences because researchers emphasized the need for methods of accurate prediction and proper engineering to minimize the effects of disasters (Fara, 2001). In addition, policy decisions regarding disaster preparedness were regulated to the same framework and understanding of disasters as outside of human control (Fara, 2001).

In the shift to understand human causes of disaster, researchers first pointed to ecological conditions such as population density, climate change, and land use as factors that increased

vulnerability (Weichselgartner and Sendzimir, 2004). In more heavily populated areas, phenomena such as earthquakes, tsunamis, and hurricanes have the potential to do more damage because more people and property stand in their path. However, in 2004 Hurricane Jeanne did more damage and killed more people in Haiti than in Cuba (Más, 2006). Even though the hurricane was a stronger than when it struck Haiti, Cuba suffered no fatalities, (Más, 2006). Más (2006) attributed the different impacts to variations in storm preparedness between the countries.

To be adequately prepared for natural disasters, planners and policy makers need to understand social vulnerability and its causes. Weichselgartner and Sendzimir (2004) stressed that researchers must look deeper into the role of humans in creating vulnerability and, as such, affect policy decisions regarding storm preparation to reduce disaster costs. Fara (2001) contended that many researchers study disasters as events that disrupt normality and fail to see that disaster is largely the result of life as usual, in that social inequality places specific groups at risk. Cutter and Emrich (2006), through the creation of a social vulnerability index, determined that socioeconomic status is the greatest indicator of vulnerability. Neumayer and Plümper (2007) also concluded that socioeconomic status is a major factor in the gendered effect of natural disasters. Their quantitative study of mortality rates illustrated that more women than men died as a result of natural disasters, but the correlation weakened as the socioeconomic status of women increased (Neumayer and Plümper, 2007).

Smith (2006) and Jackson (2006) examined the social context in which disasters strike. Jackson (2006) compared the death toll in the United States to those in developing countries, showing that smaller, weaker events can be more deadly without the resources to properly prepare or respond. Smith (2006) stated, “in every phase and aspect of a disaster – causes, vulnerability, preparedness, results and response, and reconstruction”, life and death are

manifestations of who society values. The context of inequality in resources to prepare for and recover from the event largely predicts the impact of any disaster on the affected population (Smith, 2006). Those with more resources are able to cushion themselves from the devastating effects, which include avoiding death, injury, and loss of property. Both viewed Hurricane Katrina's aftermath as an example of the unnatural impacts of natural disasters.

Smith (2006) and Jackson (2006) stated that in New Orleans immediately following Hurricane Katrina there was an attempt to hide the social vulnerability of poor African Americans. Media, government, and politicians framed the disaster as natural, and therefore unavoidable, which directed attention away from what could have been prevented. For example, Congressional Representative Richard Baker's stated, "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did" (Harwood, 2005). However, Smith (2006) and Jackson (2006) asserted people died because the city evacuation plan relied on personal transportation, which left many poor African American residents effectively trapped as the waters came in. The extensive research on Hurricane Katrina's impact further illustrates the social vulnerabilities that transformed a hurricane into a catastrophe.

Impact of the storm

Following the storm, many social scientists focused on the unequal impact of Hurricane Katrina, which seemed to strike hardest at those with the least ability to cope. The Social Science Research Council (2008, 1) created an online "forum addressing the implications of the tragedy that extend beyond "natural disaster," "engineering failures," "cronyism" or other categories of interpretation that do not directly examine the underlying issues—political, social and economic—laid bare by the events surrounding Katrina." The SSRC forum presented over thirty articles to frame Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath within the context of social

vulnerabilities. Within this backdrop, Gilman (2006), Cutter (2006), and Strolovitch et al., (2006) provided statistical analyses to highlight the racial and political dimensions at work in determining Katrina's victims and why they were victims. These articles analyzed the political and social context in which the storm struck and how that manifested to create the disaster Hurricane Katrina represents today.

In 2005, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) conducted a study to determine who was most impacted by Hurricane Katrina (Gabe et al., 2005). This report provides statistics on the demographics of victims in relation to the demographics of the areas affected. Their report breaks down data by geographical region, making it possible to find statistics specifically for New Orleans. The report concludes in Orleans Parish Hurricane Katrina disproportionately affected poor African Americans because they represented 73% of those displaced but only 67% of the city's population based on 2000 Census data (Gabe et al., 2005, 16). Poverty rates among the displaced also surpassed those of the population as a whole in the areas affected. They estimated 34% of displaced African American New Orleanians were poor in comparison to 19.6% in the state of Louisiana, 21.4% in storm-damaged areas of Louisiana, and 14.6% of non-Black displaced New Orleanians (2005, 17).

Cutter (2006), Gilman (2006), and Strolovitch et al. (2006) illustrate how race, class, and gender socially stratify the availability of and access to resources, which produces vulnerabilities to disasters. Through statistical variances they illuminate how those on the bottom of our socially constructed hierarchy – poor, black, elderly, children, and women – are often the most vulnerable because they have the fewest resources to depend on in times of emergency. Their findings matched those of Cutter and Emrich's (2006) study of Hurricane Katrina's impact, in which their social vulnerability index ranked Orleans Parish as the most vulnerable of all counties affected

by the storm. Their model attributed the high level of vulnerability to race, class, and gender variables (Cutter and Emrich, 2006).

The SSRC forum (2008) also incorporated research on the ways New Orleanians coped with their social vulnerabilities at the time of the storm. Fussell (2006) described the ability and importance of social networks to expand access to resources in times when survival depends on personal resources. The hurricane evacuation plan in New Orleans required residents to have transportation, food, and shelter out of the storm's path to avoid the devastating impact. Because social networks tend to include people of the same class, poor folks primarily had only other poor folks to rely on, many of whom were in the same state of vulnerability (Fussell, 2006). While this spelled disaster for some residents, Litt's (2008) qualitative study illustrated the power and ingenuity of women's networks in times of crisis to work together to keep people safe. Her study explored the process by which two poor Black women mobilized their social network to evacuate more than twenty-five people to Baton Rouge before the storm (2008). Litt et al. (2012) concluded after years of following these women that their networks varied in their ability to absorb disaster situations. They contend, "...to improve the current tragedy in New Orleans – demands policy that *simultaneously* builds infrastructure and supports women in creating network strength" (140).

Policies of recovery: Strategies of urban revitalization and poverty eradication

Following Hurricane Katrina, different organizations and agencies proposed ways to rebuild New Orleans (Nelson et al, 2007). Many reports made recommendations based on modified urban revitalization and poverty eradication strategies (see Brookings Institution, 2005; Hill and Hannaway, 2006). Because Hurricane Katrina exposed the social vulnerabilities of marginalized groups, proposals emphasized the need to restructure New Orleans's social

institutions to create a ‘better’ city (Nelson et al., 2007). They also supported the allocation of federal resources through community development block grants and the creation of special tax zones (Brookings Institution, 2005).

Early in October 2005, the Brookings Institution released its perspective on how New Orleans should rebuild. After recapping the importance of the city and the effects of the storm, the report proposed a revitalization plan, which employed many of the policies used to facilitate the recovery of New York City after 9/11. It also suggested a few others that have been used in non-disaster areas. As its main points, the Brookings Institution (2005) supported the creation of a tax-credit zone for businesses, known as the Gulf Opportunity Zone or GO Zone, the use of community development block grants to revitalize neighborhoods, as well as giving tax-credits to homeowners, providing rent vouchers to low-income residents, and replacing public housing developments with mixed-income communities. These suggestions represent the main thrust taken by the government to aid recovery.

Nelson et al. (2007) reviewed four different planning processes that government agencies used to create recovery policies. The mayor, the City Council, the Louisiana Recovery Authority, and FEMA, each initiated different planning processes at different times (2007). The multitude of plans created confusion and uncertainty among residents, and most did not include a way to prioritize limited rebuilding resources (2007). In addition, planning processes initially left out the opinions of residents at a time when “New Orleans experienced an unprecedented level of neighborhood activism” (2007, 26). The creation of plans changed from the top-down approach used by the Bring New Orleans Back Commission to incorporate public planning sessions with residents as government officials responded to local activism and resident distrust (2007).

Foundations also sponsored planning processes, such as the United New Orleans Plan (UNOP) (Nelson et al., 2007). UNOP held three ‘community congresses’ to solicit resident opinions on how to rebuild; however wealthy, white residents from areas of the city that did not flood represented 75% of the 300 attendees at the first meeting (Williamson, 2007). The second meeting better represented New Orleans pre-Katrina demographics, however, renters still remained underrepresented (2007). The third ‘congress’ delivered the final proposal to those who attended (2007). In effect, only the 2,500 residents who attended ‘Community Congress II’ participated in the creation of the plan, which represented less than 1% of New Orleans pre-Katrina population. Williamson (2007) indicated that some public figures saw the value of these meetings as a way to build public ‘buy-in’ and were not particularly concerned if planners incorporated resident suggestions.

The recovery strategies developed in these top-down planning processes impacted the basic needs of residents in post-Katrina New Orleans – housing, employment, education, and healthcare. The following sections, I review research surrounding conditions in housing, employment, education, and healthcare and subsequent policy changes. This provides a context to explore the challenges residents encountered after Hurricane Katrina.

Housing

At the time of Hurricane Katrina, nearly one third of the population in New Orleans lived below the poverty line; as such, many residents resided in public housing developments (Fussell, 2006). In the 1990s, the federal government created a program called Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere (HOPE) VI to revitalize severely distressed public housing developments (Popkin et al., 2004). Following the storm, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in accordance with HOPE VI used flood damages as justification for the

demolition of New Orleans's remaining public housing developments (Luft with Griffin, 2008). This decision was made and carried out even though many of these developments sustained minimal damage. Many scholars and activists questioned the decision to demolish public housing in the middle of a housing crisis (Clark and Rose, 2007; Luft with Griffin, 2008). According to Policylink (2007), only thirty-seven percent of pre-Katrina public housing units were to be replaced under HUD's recovery plan. This decision was made at a time when New Orleans homelessness rates doubled to nearly 12,000 residents (Sinha and Tauber, 2008).

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans city leaders used HOPE VI to change housing conditions. In 2001, the city leaders of New Orleans implemented HOPE VI to raze the St. Thomas Public Housing Development and created River Gardens, a mixed income community, which housed roughly 100 of the 650 families that lived in St. Thomas before its redevelopment (Flaherty, 2010). Some considered the redevelopment project successful because of the viable community the process created. However, others questioned the success based on the small number of former residents who returned post-revitalization.

A year before Hurricane Katrina, the Urban Institute and the Brookings Institution published the most compelling piece of literature to question the replacement of public housing developments with mixed-income communities (Popkin et al., 2004). Their study highlighted the unreliability of mixed-income communities to offer positive change for low-income residents of public housing (2004). The report recounts statistics from different studies on HOPE VI programs across the country (2004). The findings show that typically fifty percent of low-income public housing units were replaced and less than twenty percent of the original residents were allowed to return (2004). They also offered proof that mixed-income communities did little to improve the impoverished conditions of low-income residents who inhabit them (2004). Even

though displaced residents frequently received rent vouchers to find housing in other neighborhoods, they faced greater out of pocket expenses because they were responsible for utilities (2004).

Former residents of public housing using vouchers to return to the city exacerbated the housing crisis because they were not the only ones struggling to find affordable housing in the post-Katrina atmosphere. With a recovery strategy focused on rebuilding housing, programs were created to funnel federal monies to homeowners and landlords to rebuild physical structures (Appleseed, 2006). According to FEMA & HUD estimates, the 2005 hurricanes and levee breaches severely damaged 51,700 rental units in Orleans Parish. This caused rent prices to increase forty-six percent (PolicyLink, 2007; Luft with Griffin, 2008). In response, “federal recovery programs are projected to restore only forty-three percent of the city’s total rental losses (from extremely low income public housing to market rate rentals)” (PolicyLink, 2007). Raising the cost of living adversely impacts low-income residents, especially poor Black women and the children and elders that depend on them, more so than any of their social counterparts (Luft with Griffin, 2008). In the changing economic climate of New Orleans, residents found additional challenges in their process to return and pay for housing.

Employment

The United States Department of Labor estimated by November of 2005 that 500,000 Gulf Coast residents filed for unemployment as a result of Hurricane Katrina (Holzer and Lerman, 2006). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that 200,000 of these jobs were from the state of Louisiana (2006). In June of 2007, the BLS released a comprehensive report on the impact of Hurricane Katrina on the New Orleans’ economy, which estimated job and wage losses over a ten-month period between September 2005 and June 2006 (Dolfman, Wasser, and

Bergman, 2007). During the period studied, the average over-the-year job loss was 95,000 jobs, which accounted for almost \$2.9 billion in lost wages (Dolfman et al., 2007). The peak of over-the-year job loss occurred in November of 2005 with an estimated 105,300 decrease in available jobs (2007).

Hurricane Katrina did not affect all industries equally. Although, almost all industries lost jobs immediately following the storm, some rebounded and reported an increase in available jobs. One example was the construction industry, which experienced an increase of 1,700 new jobs during the time studied as a result of the reconstruction needs of the city (Dolfman et al., 2007). The industries that suffered the greatest job losses were those of “accommodation and food services, health care and social assistance, and retail trade” with 57.6 percent of all job losses and 44.6 percent of lost wages associated with those industries (Dolfman et al., 2007). These sectors of the economy represent the lowest paid positions. African Americans held the majority of these low-income, service sector jobs prior to the storm (Holzer and Lerman, 2006). As a result of Hurricane Katrina related job loss, the average weekly wage in New Orleans increased 28.2 percent between September 2005 and June 2006 (Dolfman et al., 2007).

The Bush administration also created major changes in the labor market by instituting changes to labor policy. On September 8, 2005, President Bush suspended the Davis-Bacon Act, which required contractors awarded federal contracts to pay workers the average pay in the region (James, Sr., 2005). Meant to cut costs and speed recovery, this decision allowed workers to be paid less than \$9 an hour, which was the average hourly rate for construction workers in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina (Edsall, 2005). In addition, affirmative action policies were abrogated and federal sanctions requiring companies to verify workers’ documentation were suspended for 45 days (U. S. Department of Homeland Security, 2005).

Following modified employment policies and an influx of immigrant workers, a discourse around race and employment developed in the media. Journalists remarked that employers hired immigrants for jobs African Americans did not want, doing work African Americans refused to do (Sanchez, 2005). They portrayed Latinos as being “there” – hunting out the jobs for which they were hired – and willing to live in substandard conditions. In contrast, they depicted African Americans as unwilling to go to such lengths for employment (2005).

Wilson (2009, 75) in *More Than Just Race* indicates statistical discrimination functions to reduce the employment of Black males within normal economic practices. The personal narratives of African Americans illustrate statistical discrimination in post-Katrina hiring practices as well (Naughton and Wallace, 2006). The Black day laborers Naughton and Wallace (2006) interviewed recounted their experiences, which started out like those of immigrant laborers – coming to find jobs the whole nation talked about. They lived in similar conditions of homelessness and searched for work in the same parking lots as immigrants (Naughton and Wallace, 2006). However, contractors repeatedly choose non-English speaking Latinos and white day laborers over skilled Black laborers who are willing to work for the same wages (2006). The key informants in the Fletcher et al. (2006) study attributed racial inequities in the construction industry to employer bias based on Latino stereotypes and enabled by the post-Katrina policy changes, which failed to protect the vulnerable employment status of African Americans.

Post-Katrina employment policy changes allowed companies to hire the cheapest workers possible. The media created a discourse around employment that positioned immigrant workers against Black workers. Even though the media reported skilled Black workers were fired and replaced by Latino immigrants willing to work for less, personal narratives suggested that Latino

day laborers demanded the same wages as Black day laborers (Naughton and Wallace, 2006; Seper, 2006). One study found that undocumented Latino immigrants experienced more labor rights violations, such as dangerous working conditions and reduced/missing wages, than their documented counterparts because they fear authorities and deportation in addition to the failure of government agencies to monitor working conditions (Fletcher et al., 2006). These policy changes enabled the exclusion of Black New Orleanians from the construction labor market while exploiting Latino immigrants. In addition, the reconstruction atmosphere of poor living conditions and the lack of schools and public health facilities favored single men over men with families (Appleseed, 2006).

Education

Before the storm, poor and working class African Americans relied on New Orleans public school system, which served a disproportionate percentage of poor and African American students (Appleseed, 2006). Paul Tough (2008) in his *New York Times* article, “A Teachable Moment” stated:

Louisiana’s public schools ranked anywhere from 43rd to 46th in the federal government’s various state-by-state rankings of student achievement, and the schools in Orleans Parish, which encompasses the city of New Orleans, ranked 67th out of the 68 parishes in the state. The school system was monochromatically black — white students made up just 3 percent of the public-school population, most of them attending one of a handful of selective-enrollment magnet schools — and overwhelmingly poor as well; more than 75 percent of students had family incomes low enough to make them eligible for a subsidized lunch from the federal government.

According to Blancher-Wilson (2008, 2), “students were, in many instances, graduating from public schools functionally illiterate.” Prior to the storm, the state board of education turned five public schools into state run charter schools and planned to convert more due to poor

academic achievement levels (Hill and Hannaway, 2006). Months before Hurricane Katrina made landfall, Mayor Nagin suggested converting the twenty lowest scoring schools into charter schools overseen by the city (2006). According to Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, Hurricane Katrina became a “golden opportunity” to remodel the Orleans Parish school system because only 20 of over 120 public school buildings remained functional (2006).

According to a phone interview with Brenda Mitchell and Linda Stelly conducted by Theresa Perry, the state’s immediate response to Hurricane Katrina was closing all Orleans Parish public schools (Mitchell, Stelly, and Perry, 2006). Mitchell, president of United Teachers of New Orleans, questioned the state superintendent who announced that all schools buildings were too badly damaged to reopen in the 2005-2006 school year (2006). Stelly, the Associate Director of Educational Issues for the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), further explained that \$21 million in federal funds was available for New Orleans charter schools post-Katrina (2006). This money was the primary funding available for rebuilding schools post-Katrina because the school district was financially in default prior to Katrina (2006). The 2006 progress report on New Orleans recovery conducted by the Appleseed Project also stated that federal funding for public school redevelopment into charter schools was allocated in response to poorly managed finances by the school board before the storm.

Mitchell et al. (2006) also highlight that the publicized accounts of the state of schools in Orleans Parish neglected an important part of the story. Prior to the storm, the state seized only financial control of the district from the school board, and 93 of 117 schools produced positive growth in the state accountability system with 88 schools meeting the Annual Year Progress as stipulated by No Child Left Behind (Mitchell et al., 2006). In addition to closing schools, the city laid off all teachers (Appleseed, 2006), presumably so they could file for unemployment

(Mitchell et al., 2006). Under a new system, many charter school employment contracts contained stipulations against collective bargaining, which for Mitchell et al. (2006) effectively amounted to union busting.

With the post-Katrina education policy changes, the school system became a mix of public, charter, and private schools overseen, directly or indirectly, by the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB), the Recovery School District (RSD), the Algiers Charter School Association, or the state school board (Appleseed, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2006; Tough, 2008). Test scores and writing samples determine who attends the best-performing schools, (OPSB and state overseen charter schools) which tend to harbor “the only...significant population of the middle-class white students” in public schools (Tough, 2008). RSD charter schools, “required to accept students from anywhere in the city, regardless of academic performance”, enforce selectivity by making demands that force “weaker students and students with less academically focused parents...[to] drop out” (Tough, 2008).

The result of this selectivity leaves the schools operated by RSD as:

the schools of last resort, the schools required to admit every student: the kids who can't get into selective schools, the ones who get kicked out of charter schools, the ones who arrive in New Orleans in the middle of the school year, the ones whose parents couldn't get it together to find them anything better (Tough, 2008).

Although, the Appleseed Project (2006) contended the systemic changes inspired hope; according to Tough (2008), the community viewed the new educational system as a formally established way to keep poor and minority students, who make up the vast population of students *taught* by RSD, educationally disadvantaged while diverting tax dollars to smarter, wealthier, and often whiter children. In that vein, Dr. Mitchell expressed in her interview, “I believe that, when they designed all of this away from the people that are most affected by it, they

intentionally disenfranchised us” (2006, 20). Tough (2008) declared, “in practice, the system is inherently unequal, with each network administered by different rules.” In addition, the Appleseed Project (2006) found the trauma induced by Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath presented mental health challenges for students that teachers must overcome.

Healthcare

Hurricane Katrina and the levee breaches impacted the healthcare industry in New Orleans just as they changed the housing, employment, and education systems. Prior to the hurricane, New Orleans utilized a 2-tier system to provide healthcare to residents (Appleseed, 2006). Within this arrangement, public hospitals treated uninsured and Medicaid patients while private hospitals administered to patients with private insurance or Medicare (2006). However, with the closing of public hospitals after Hurricane Katrina, private hospitals found themselves caring for all patients – insured, uninsured, and even undocumented (Appleseed, 2006; Berggren and Curiel, 2006). For five months following the hurricane, Congress allowed private hospitals to be reimbursed at Medicaid rates for expenses incurred by tending to the uninsured (Appleseed, 2006). While governmental compensation fell short for hospitals, private practice physicians were ineligible for federal reimbursement (Appleseed, 2006; Lambrew and Shalala, 2006). The limited capacity of the healthcare industry, which served more patients with fewer staff, and the uncompensated cost of caring for the uninsured created challenges for reopened hospitals and influenced many doctors and nurses to choose permanent relocation (Appleseed, 2006; Berggren and Curiel, 2006; Lambrew and Shalala, 2006).

The initial impact of Hurricane Katrina displaced 6,000 doctors from the Gulf Coast region. According to the Associated Press (2005):

More than two-thirds of the doctors displaced, or 4,486, came from the immediate New Orleans parishes of Orleans, Jefferson and St.

Bernard. More than half were specialists, with 1,292 in primary care and 272 in obstetrics and gynecology... Also, about 1,300 medical students at Tulane and Louisiana State University moved to other programs in the region, mostly in Baton Rouge and East Texas.

The high level of devastation that impacted all aspects of life caused many of these doctors to search for new jobs and relocate, rather than return to New Orleans (Appleseed, 2006; Berggren and Curiel, 2006). The decision to permanently close instead of rebuild two public hospitals, University Hospital and Charity Hospital, affected the decisions of many of the doctors who chose to settle in new communities. This decision also impacted private hospitals who covered the healthcare gap by treating insured as well as the uninsured residents who prior to the storm would have been treated at the closed facilities (Appleseed, 2006).

University and Charity, both Louisiana State University (LSU) teaching hospitals, served patients on Medicaid and those without medical insurance. Charity Hospital, as a Level 1 trauma center, provided life saving care to New Orleans most disadvantaged residents. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) factsheet, “A trauma center is a hospital that has additional resources and equipment to help care for severely injured patients” (2009, 1). CDC research has proven treatment at a Level 1 trauma center reduced death rates of severely injured patients by 25 percent compared to treatment at a non-trauma center (2010). However, post-Katrina officials claimed it was cost prohibitive to redesign Charity Hospital to accommodate the high-tech, state of the art medical center they envisioned (Appleseed, 2006). Though originally officials called for the demolition of both hospitals because of severe structural damage, University Hospital was later reopened (Appleseed, 2006). This suggests the desire for a new hospital has more to do with LSU’s pre-Katrina goals than an actual need to start from scratch.

To create a new medical center, the city razed a historic neighborhood already in the process of rebuilding. Approximately 165 homes were moved or leveled to create space to construct a V. A. hospital next to the LSU teaching hospital (Nossiter, 2008). Plans allow the two facilities to share expensive equipment while the sheer size of the projects will provide jobs to jumpstart the economy (Appleseed, 2006). However, razing a neighborhood in the process of rebuilding to create two new medical complexes will cost twenty-two percent more and take two years longer than rehabilitating Charity Hospital (National, 2008). Disproportionately, the poor will suffer more from Charity's absence than those with more money and medical insurance who do not face discrimination at other area hospitals. Furthermore, with plans to redevelop both Charity and University Hospitals into residential space, residents fear the city is gentrifying itself into a place with less space for poor minorities displaced by the storm.

Conclusion

A large body of research by social scientists exists on the topic of Hurricane Katrina, the levee failure, and New Orleans. This research encompasses on nearly every aspect of Hurricane Katrina from impact to recovery. Many of the more questionable policy decisions, such as the demolition of public housing, attracted the largest volume of work. Contradictory statements have sometimes been published by the same organization, such as the case with the Brookings Institute, which pointed out the ineffectiveness of HOPE VI and mixed-income communities in improving poverty while recommending the same actions a year later.

The literature also indicates who suffered the most in New Orleans as the result of man-made vulnerabilities. The research states that low-income African American New Orleanians as a group have suffered the most in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Even when the entire Gulf Coast region is examined, poor Black residents in New Orleans remain the most impacted by the

storm. It is for this reason that I limit my study to examining the experiences of this subset. If we can understand the needs of those most affected with the least ability to cope, policy makers will not only be able to improve conditions within the city of New Orleans but can also use Orleans Parish as a template for other urban areas struck by natural phenomena.

My study adds another dimension to the literature available in the field. It fills the gap of how residents view the effects and challenges of the storm and of the recovery process. It provides an opportunity to hear resident voices and opinions in the context of recovery. Many articles on Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans stress the way race, class, and gender interacted to create the catastrophe (Cutter, 2006; Cutter and Emrich, 2006; Gilman, 2006; and Strollovitch et al., 2006). My study offers insight into how those most affected, low-income African American New Orleanians, frame their struggle to return and what obstacles stood in their way.

Another oversight within the literature is the attempt to isolate specific barriers from all other obstacles to understand the effects of just one piece of the puzzle at a time. This reductionist approach serves to minimize the monumental task of returning to post-Katrina New Orleans, where families did not have the option to deal with only one hurdle at a time. My study provides the opportunity to examine the changes in New Orleans in an intersectional framework, where challenges are viewed as interwoven and inseparable from each other as one attempts to return after disaster (Choo and Ferree, 2010). This approach will be helpful in understanding the full impact of the storm and subsequent policy decisions on those most affected because it focuses on their entire struggle as a unified whole.

Research Questions

To gain a deeper understanding of the process to return, this qualitative study seeks to explore how low-income, African American New Orleanians frame obstacles to return to post-Katrina New Orleans. Additional research questions are: How do these obstacles affect the decision-making process? How are these obstacles overcome? What is needed to facilitate return? How do participants frame race, gender, and class in the context of return?

Theoretical Lens: Critical Theory

I approach my study with a critical theory lens. According to Creswell (2007), “critical theory perspectives are concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender” (27). Critical theory lends itself to the deconstruction of social institutions through the questioning of assumptions in search for inequalities and injustices. Agger (1991) asserts, “critical theorists attempt to develop a mode of consciousness and cognition that breaks the identity of reality and rationality, viewing social facts not as inevitable constraints on human freedom but as pieces of history that can be changed” (109). There are two ways that Creswell (2007) mentions critical theory can operate in research design. The first is methodological, affecting the way the researcher reads and writes. The second is substantive, meaning critical theory influences the researcher’s topic of interest and conceptualization of the topic.

In the way I view the struggle to return to New Orleans, race, class, and gender differences are central to determining the ease of the struggle and ultimately the success of the struggle. As such, critical theory is embedded in the way I view the issue because my main

interest is discovering what obstacles have operated that specifically target low-income African Americans and affect their chances of return.

A critical theory perspective allows me to dissect the assumptions the media and local governments portrayed toward the rate of return of poor Blacks and search for inequalities and injustices these assumptions overlook (Agger, 1991). My study stems from questioning the basic tenet that the rate of return is determined by desire to return, as many public voices contend that those who have not returned do not have the desire to return. However, the majority of displaced survey respondents indicate that the desire to return is present, but the means are not (Collective Strength, 2006; Daniel, Arrington, and Hyman, III, 2008). Many outsiders and residents project the situation of those with the means to return onto those who are still displaced, deciding if some were able to return once they made the decision, then everyone else ought to be able to return as well. That particular line of thinking does not incorporate an understanding of the challenges race, class, and gender, which are embedded in every situation within our society. Using a critical perspective, my study scrutinizes the social structure to uncover the role of race, class, and gender in creating inequalities.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

Strategy of Inquiry: Case Study

To explore how African Americans frame obstacles as they struggle to return to post-Katrina New Orleans, I chose to design a case study. This strategy of inquiry allows for in-depth examination of a specific issue via one or more cases over a specified time frame using multiple means of data collection (Creswell, 2007). Other strategies would seek to produce a different type of understanding – either focusing more on the stories of the individuals or the process by which they experience return or the essence of what returning is to them. In addition, using a case study allows the most flexibility in methods and incorporation of data from many sources. This creates a detailed, multifaceted understanding of each case, where each is an illustration of the research topic.

I designed a collective case study (Creswell, 2007). I compare three separate cases to understand how Black residents frame major obstacles to return to post-Katrina New Orleans. My first case focuses on residents who have returned. My second case incorporates displaced residents in Houston, Texas, that have not lived in New Orleans since the storm. Comparing these two cases highlights how obstacles changed. My third case pertains to residents who returned but relocated to Houston after living in New Orleans for more than 6 months. I chose six months as the minimum time requirement because six months is a reasonable amount of time to establish oneself. This case adds the dimension of what is needed by African Americans to stay in New Orleans. Multiple cases allow for the comparison of the many states of return and displacement that residents are currently in.

Role of the Researcher

I became interested in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in a New York City dorm room as I sat glued to a television screen flashing images of thousands of suffering, predominately Black faces. Some were stranded on rooftops while others waded through toxic, contaminated water. All were fighting to survive and escape the floodwaters that followed the storm. In March 2006, I volunteered for my first time in New Orleans. I returned in May to work under the direction of Hurricane Katrina's survivors organized through the People's Organizing Committee (POC) and the New Orleans Survivor Council (NOSC). Over that the summer, I became the volunteer Reconstruction Organizer. In this position, I coordinated a free house gutting program and community gutting events with other organizations. I also began organizing residents in Renaissance Village and other Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailer parks in Baker, Louisiana, into the Baker Survivor Council to facilitate a community return to New Orleans.

In September of 2007, I relocated to New Orleans to volunteer as the Organizing Coordinator with the New Orleans Survivor Council. The style of organizing utilized by POC and NOSC came out of the teachings of Ella Baker and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and focused the organizing effort on those who comprise the bottom of society: poor, Black folks (People's Organizing Committee and International School of Bottom-up Organizing, 2008). In this process, thousands of Hurricane Katrina survivors shared their story with organizers: what they went through in the initial wake of the storm and what they are still experiencing as a result of Hurricane Katrina.

At the first meeting of the New Orleans Survivor Council in January of 2006, over four hundred survivors, those most impacted by the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans,

came together to plan an organized return to the city. In their discussion, they identified four factors that would determine if they and their community would be capable of returning to their former neighborhoods and lives. The four needs they identified were: “a place to live, a place to send their children to school, a place to go when they got sick, and a job” (People’s Organizing Committee, 2007). It is from these mandates that I explore the impact of Hurricane Katrina through a race, gender, and class sensitive perspective. It is important to note that more women than men were involved at all levels of the Survivor Council, including positions of leadership.

Methodology

To collect data for this study, I use in-depth interviews with open-ended questions. This allows the voices and perspectives of participants to come forward (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). I created a limited interview schedule to conduct the interviews (see appendix). It is a basic template of questions to direct respondents toward describing their process of return. To allow participant voices to frame recovery, the schedule does not include specific questions about housing, employment, education, or healthcare. I use follow up questions to examine how participants understand these concepts when they emerge.

At the beginning of the first interview, I ask participants if they moved back to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Their answer determines the interview schedule and their case assignment. After establishing their case, I ask participants to describe life before the storm, so I can understand how their lives changed. Then I ask them to describe their experiences from the time they learned about Hurricane Katrina until the present. In this way, my study explores their challenges, experiences, and decision-making processes over a six year time period. I conclude

interviews with questions to determine income before and after the storm as well as their age if not previously given.

To determine class, I began by using the federal definition, which defines low-income as residents earning eighty percent or less of their city's median income. This did not work because incomes fluctuated between cities and over time. Several participants who earned middle class incomes prior to Hurricane Katrina experienced long periods of unemployment afterwards. As I realized the federal definition did not accurately reflect class between participants, I decided to use additional variables to determine their socioeconomic status. I identified participants as working or middle class according to their income and occupation before Hurricane Katrina and at the time of the interview as well as their level of education, number of dependents, home ownership, and vernacular (Browne, 2011; Davis, 2009; Hughes, 1992; Krieger et al., 1997).

Sampling

To find participants I used purposive and snowball sampling. I contacted organizers, community activists, and researchers in my network. I asked them to identify low-income African American residents who might consent to an interview. I requested they speak to prospective participants and ask if I could contact them. This allowed me to gain entrée via an established trusted relationship. The history of exploitation within the Black community generally and the documented distrust of authority African Americans expressed in the context of Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent flooding made this necessary (Cordasco, Eisenman, Glik, and Golden, 2007). I explained my project and the interview process to prospective participants over the phone. If they chose to participate, we arranged a date and time for the first interview.

It was difficult to find participants in Houston. I made the first of four trips to Houston in September of 2011 without any scheduled interviews. Before the trip, a colleague sent me an article in the *Houston Chronicle* that featured a New Orleans barber, a social aid and pleasure club, and a displaced college professor. I contacted the professor, whom I had met briefly in 2008 through my father-in-law. He led me to two participants and consented to an interview, in which he provided his personal narrative as well as what his research indicated. On my first trip, I visited the barbershop and introduced my project. The owner consented to an interview and afterward began asking his clientele. Each trip I made, I stopped to visit the barbershop. I found one other participant this way.

On my last trip at the end of January 2012, I conducted an informal focus group at the barbershop with the two participants as well as two other individuals, one from New Orleans the other from Houston. All were Black men between 25 and 41 years old. The topic of the focus group was police. Unfortunately, the battery died in the audio recorder, so that focus group was not used in this study. The remaining participants were identified using snowball sampling, with one participant leading me to four others. He brought his best friend to the first interview and recommended I speak to his sister during his follow up interview. When I interviewed his sister, she had their niece and his daughter with her. All three consented to interviews.

Creswell (2007) mentions a strategy of constructing a sample that maximizes the potential to uncover different perspectives. I selected participants that represent different subsets of African Americans. Participants varied by age, ability, employment, gender, number of dependants, marital status, and residential status – homeless, homeowner, renter, public housing resident. Although I initially intended to only interview low-income Blacks, I included middle

class participants to expose class differences. As a result of including participants outside of my original parameters, I interviewed more than fifteen participants.

Data

For my study, I conducted seventeen interviews. All interviews were administered face-to-face and were audio recorded. Video recording was available for all participants. Only six respondents chose to be video recorded. Each received a copy of the interview on a DVD. I interviewed most participants alone and only once. Two participants were interviewed twice because they did not finish within the allotted time. These two participants were interviewed together during the first interview and separately in the follow up interviews. Three other participants were interviewed together, an aunt and her two nieces. They did not require follow up interviews. Interviews were limited to sixty minutes each. When engaged in answering a question at the sixty-minute mark, I pursued the questioning until an appropriate concluding point. All interviews were less than ninety minutes, except the one with three participants, which lasted for two hours. All participants self-identified as African Americans from New Orleans and were over eighteen at the time of the interview.

Case one included five participants who returned to New Orleans. Two were homeowners and the other three were renters. The sample included two women and three men between the ages of 14 and 56 at the time of the storm. Three lived in New Orleans; two returned to the metro areas of Metairie and Slidell. Of these participants, I identified one as middle class and the other four as working class. The earliest participant to return moved back in January of 2006, and the last to return came back in November of 2011. All interviews were conducted in the New Orleans metro between July 2011 and February 2012.

For case two, I interviewed nine participants residing in the Houston metro that never returned to live in New Orleans. One of the interviews was thrown out because background noise interfered with the transcription process. Of the eight interviews I used, five participants were women, and three were men. I identified two as middle-class and the remaining six as working-class. Seven of them were renters, and only one was a homeowner. Participants ranged from 13 to 37 years old at the time of Hurricane Katrina. Most interviews were conducted in Houston between September 2011 and January 2012. Two participants were interviewed in Slidell in January of 2012 with their family member in case one.

Case three included three participants who relocated to Houston after they returned to live in New Orleans for over a year. All three were middle class men. Two were homeowners and one rented in New Orleans East. They were between 30 and 42 years old at the time of the storm. The longest period of living in New Orleans spanned five years from October of 2005 until September of 2010. The shortest lasted for a year and a half between 2007 to 2009. Two of the participants were interviewed in Houston in September and November of 2011. I interviewed the third participant only once. We scheduled this interview during his visit to New Orleans in January of 2011.

Commitments to Participants

I made several commitments to my participants. I offered confidentiality. Only one participant asked to remain anonymous. However, I chose not to use real names because participants have not yet reviewed my findings. To assign new names, I had someone not associated with the project list ten male and ten female names. I numbered the names and drew numbers out of a hat to assign names to participants. I also promised to mail respondents their

interview transcript and my final report. In addition, I committed to ask permission before using their interviews for any purpose outside of my thesis. Participants also received twenty dollars for each interview.

Analysis

I conducted two levels of analysis. First, I transcribed all interviews verbatim (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). I then analyzed each case separately. I used a holistic approach to analyze each case in its entirety (Creswell, 2007). I applied a two-stage coding process. In the first round, I used the following deductive codes housing, employment, education, healthcare, race, class, gender, view of New Orleans, view of Houston, and process of return. However, I only used the data in the housing, employment, education, and healthcare codes. In the second stage of coding, I used inductive codes to group statements according to what they expressed about the deductive category (ie: housing, employment, education, healthcare). In both rounds, I listed quotes under all applicable codes. After coding each case, I analyzed them individually for emergent themes.

Once I completed the within-case analysis, I conducted “a thematic analysis across the cases” (Creswell, 2007, 75). I compared and contrasted the similarities and differences between themes in each case. I also looked to see if themes applied across cases or only to a specific case. The multiple levels of analysis help form assertions about the meaning of each case as they relate to my central research question and to each other (Creswell, 2007).

Reliability and Validity

To ensure the validity of qualitative findings, Creswell (2007) suggests using at least two validation strategies in each study. I use clarifying bias, thick descriptive writing, and member

checking as validation strategies (208-209). I began by indicating my bias, which is based on past experiences. These experiences directly influenced the way I approached the topic of return. For member checking, I interviewed Dr. Mtangulizi Sanyika, a scholar and community activist who focused on the experiences of African Americans in New Orleans after the Hurricane Katrina. My findings did not deviate from what he had personally seen and heard during his work. In addition, I used rich, thick description and pattern matching. I did not saturate the field; however, emergent themes applied to multiple cases.

To ensure reliability, I personally conducted all interviews and used the same interview schedules. By doing this, I made sure all questions were asked the same way. I transcribed each interview verbatim to include pauses, pronunciation, emphasis, and overlap (Creswell, 2007; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). I attempted to code consistently between interviews and cases. This required that I recode healthcare when I decided to include statements about physical and mental health in addition to comments pertaining to healthcare facilities.

CHAPTER FOUR: CASE BY CASE FINDINGS

Case 1: Participants that Returned and Currently Live in the New Orleans Metro Area

Participants in case 1 returned to New Orleans for different reasons at different times. As they negotiated their return to the city, each confronted obstacles in meeting housing, employment, and educational needs. Social networks emerged as central to overcoming these challenges. Family separation appeared as a permanent condition of the storm when participants returned without their families. Variations of *'that's hard'* characterized life after Hurricane Katrina and the levee failure as participants returned to rebuild their lives and their city.

Participant descriptions

Shawn Jackson

Shawn Jackson is a working class renter in his 40s, who worked at Tulane University Hospital before Hurricane Katrina. He rode the storm out with his 18-year-old daughter, his 1-year-old grandson, and his daughter's aunts in a vacant third floor apartment in the St. Bernard Projects. After his daughter and grandson were rescued, he walked to New Orleans International Airport and flew to Atlanta. After thirty days in Atlanta, he relocated to Houston. He returned to New Orleans in November of 2011 when his daughter asked him to help raise his grandson. At the time of the interview in February 2012, he was looking for work, living with his daughter and her two children (now 7-year-old grandson and 10-month-old granddaughter) in her grandmother's renovated house. I met him through his aunt, the administrative assistant for the Sociology Department at the University of New Orleans.

Steven Bell

Steven Bell is a 50-year-old middle class truck driver. Before Hurricane Katrina, he cared for his family home in the Lower 9th Ward, where he lived with his companion of many years, her daughter, and her granddaughter. They evacuated to a hotel in Houston before the

storm. In 2007, he came to Mardi Gras, put in an application with a local trucking company, and got hired, which enabled him to stay permanently. He has been unable to repair the family home because of issues with succession and fraud. At the time of the interview in September 2011, he was still searching for a way to rebuild his family home. I met him through his best friend, whose house I gutted in June of 2006.

Thomas Stevens

Thomas Stevens is a working class 27-year-old college student. When Hurricane Katrina hit, he attended Tulane University and shared an apartment in the Carrollton area with his father, who was a bellman at the Ritz-Carlton. Thomas evacuated to his girlfriend's parent's house in Houston. In January 2006, Thomas returned when classes resumed. He did not know his mother had lost her job with the hospital, which meant he lost his tuition waiver. His father, who refused to evacuate, became severely depressed after being trapped in the floodwaters, and Thomas supported him until his death in 2009. At the time of the interview in August 2011, Thomas lived in Jefferson Parish with plans to return to New Orleans eventually. He operated his own tax company and planned to graduate from Southern University at New Orleans in May of 2012. I met him through Joe Johnson in case 2.

Paulette Watson

Paulette Watson is a 62-year-old, single mother of five children, ranging from 44 to 22-years-old. At the time of Hurricane Katrina, she worked for the Sewer and Water Board and lived with her youngest son and her elderly mother. They evacuated to Mississippi before the storm. After staying with a stranger for a week, she relocated to Houston. She returned in January 2007 to save her retirement benefits. As a result of Hurricane Katrina, she is the only member of her family living in New Orleans. Her adult children did not return after the storm,

and her youngest went to stay with his brother in California because he could not find a job in post-Katrina New Orleans. I met her through her grandson, who works with a colleague's husband on the New Orleans Fire Department.

Josephine Davis

Josephine Davis is from a working class family and started high school days before Hurricane Katrina struck. She evacuated to rural Mississippi with her mom and one of her sisters. When the hurricane hit, her grandmother's house lost electricity and running water, Her dad came and took her to Atlanta to where he evacuated before the storm. When her dad returned to New Orleans in October 2005, she went to Houston with her sister. Eventually, she found her way to her aunt, now living in Katy, Texas, a western suburban of Houston. At the end of the 2006-2007 school year, she moved to her mother's new place in Slidell. She graduated from Slidell in May 2009. At the time of the interview in January 2012, she was 20 years old and lived in her own apartment in Slidell with her 2-month-old daughter. I met her through her aunt, Barbara Davis in case 2.

Housing themes

Housing became a central issue in the wake of Hurricane Katrina as residents found themselves suddenly homeless. Those who evacuated in advance intended to return. Those who rode the storm out in New Orleans knew, as Shawn Jackson described, "New Orleans is gone." As residents realized return would not be immediate, they had to reconcile the demands of their immediate needs with the process of rebuilding. Most immediate on their list was finding a place to stay and a way to eat until New Orleans was reopened (Coker et al., 2006). The National Guard blocked access to some neighborhoods for over six weeks (Nelson, Ehrenfeucht, and

Laska, 2007). This initial return, in which residents were instructed to “look and leave”, was only to assess damages.

As participants recounted finding stable housing after Hurricane Katrina, several themes emerged. First, participants described how they found housing. Social networks played an important part of this process. Secondly, housing emerged as a reason to return with a class divide between homeowners and renters (Groen and Polivka, 2010). Housing pulled homeowners back and pushed renters to stay displaced. Third, the lived experience of returning to New Orleans emerged as a salient theme, where the process of return contrasted participant expectations.

Becoming established in displacement

After Hurricane Katrina, participants had to start over with limited resources. In the process of becoming established, social networks and the perception of available assistance influenced where respondents chose to live until New Orleans reopened. Family and friends shared tips on accessing housing and other resources, and many networks expanded to include strangers (Fussell, 2012; Peek, 2012). Paulette Watson’s account provided the best example of how friends and strangers came together to provide assistance.

We left from [a stranger’s house in] Mississippi and I went to Houston, Texas, because I had a girlfriend living in Houston, Texas. ... We went to Houston over by my girlfriend, and then my daughter, she was staying in New Orleans, but she wasn’t staying with me. She evacuated to Baton Rouge, so it was like really bad out there in Baton Rouge. She asked me. She wanted to come by me, so I told my girlfriend. She had a lot of people. It was like seventeen people staying in her house, so she said she knowed a lady that wanted to take a family in. So I suggested to her that I would go there if she would take my daughter in because she needed somewhere to stay. She knowed my daughter as well, so my daughter went there and her one son, and I went to live in Sugarland, Texas, with another lady and her husband and her kids. And they became family to me as well, and we stayed there three months at their house.

In contrast to the generosity of strangers, many respondents reported being stereotyped and judged in displacement (Peek, 2012). This became a hurdle to becoming established. Shawn Jackson's recounted how negative stereotypes impacted his process of establishing himself in Houston.

When they gave us the voucher, it stated on the voucher: no background check, no deposit, no fees, with this voucher, because the money's coming from the government. Ya'll gonna get paid, so there ain't no sense doing a background check, ain't no sense in running nobody's credit. They just trying to house the people that don't have nowhere to be housed. So I wind up staying there, but the apartment I went to. It was me and my sister, and we gave the lady the voucher, and she's like \$350 deposit. Like hold up, hold up. She can't read the paper right or whatever. It's like 'oh no, it says no \$350 deposit.' So my sister, she's a little more educated than me I guess. She said, 'You know what?' I said, 'What?' She said, 'Watch this.' She said, 'I'm about to call this number right here and tell them that you're asking for [a] \$350 deposit.' So the lady got up from the desk, went, and talked to her manager. The manager's like 'No, no, no, they okay.' We don't need no deposit. They thinking that we kinda like maybe illiterate. No, we understand how to read and write, too. What this paper say? No deposit. No nothing. If ya'll getting paid every month from the government once we [give ya'll] this paper, your rent already paid for. They giving us this for a whole year. So I said okay. I'm lying. I said okay. I'm like, hold up. They thinking we a little whatever you know, so we wind up getting the apartment.

At the end of the account, he indicated an internal conflict in accepting the apartment. Under normal circumstances, Mr. Jackson would not have rented from someone that tried to swindle him. However, Hurricane Katrina changed his outlook. *"We didn't really have an option, like to say, 'I don't want to live here.' We didn't have nowhere to live. You better take this before all them people [come], and everything be gone."* In this statement, Shawn recognized his increased vulnerability after the storm. As participants considered returning to New Orleans, class became a salient factor in the decision making process.

Housing as a reason to return: A class divide

In case 1, participants returned to New Orleans for different reasons. Some identified housing as a reason to return, and others framed it as an obstacle. This highlighted the impact of

class on the decision making process. Homes motivated homeowners to return while high rents prevented renters from returning. Housing provided the strongest reason to return for Steven Bell. In the follow passage, he shared his family history to underscore the importance of his family house and how it compelled him to return (Luft with Griffin, 2008).

He got that home when black folks didn't have a home. He worked for Jews, and you know, Jews hid they money. My grandfather found a suitcase full [of] money, and that's how we were able to get our house. So he bought a double. It was two rooms and a kitchen on both sides. So with that, he brought his family, his sisters and brothers, from Houma. They stayed on one side, and he stayed on the other side with my grandmother and their kids. And each time my family, they moved out and ventured off. They go to work, save money; they find a house, and the next one come in on that side. That's how my family got to New Orleans 'cause they was in Houma and (pause) that's how I got it. I was the one that was taking care. Everybody else moved away, and I took over the house because my last name [is] Bell. I was the last Bell. ...I wanted to come home because my family house. I just I needed to be there. I needed to take care of the family land. And that's what I did.

Homeowner Paulette Watson also described the importance of her house and the stability it provided as a part of her desire to return. Shawn Jackson, a renter, laid out his views of how housing pulled homeowners back to the city while inflated rents pushed renters to choose permanent relocation. From his account emerged an one example of how class impacted the ability to return.

People that came back, mostly, I think, it's homeowners because maybe they been paying their mortgage for 20 years. Okay, I've got 5 or 10 years left. I got to go back and fix my home up. 'Cause after that, that's when grandparents and mothers that done raised their children their whole lives. And like, well, 10 more years, and this will be paid for, and then they can have it. So I think that's why a lot of people didn't come back. A lot of people was renters. And the homeowners that came back, they was a little bit up in age, ya know, almost close to retirement, so I think and that's why the city, to me, that's why the city is the way it is. A lot of people didn't come back, you know, the generation after the people that was homeowners because everything now is rental. If you don't own your home, you gotta rent. You gotta rent. I think the rental price done went down [now]. Before when people was trying to come back, for what they was paying prior to Katrina, they wanted almost 50% more than that. You paying 400 a month; they was talking about 750. How you gonna raise the rent up and we don't

have any employment down here? That didn't make sense. ... If I ain't a homeowner, I ain't going back.

Even with homes to return to, rebuilding presented challenges. Participants provided detailed descriptions of the barriers they encountered and how they overcame them as they rebuilt after the storm.

The lived experience of returning to post-Katrina New Orleans

The lived experience of returning to post-Katrina New Orleans appeared as the final theme in case 1. I use the term *lived experience* to describe participant accounts of what they encountered and how they made ends meet. In this theme, the process of return included challenges that contrasted participant expectations. Comments within this theme were categorized into three groups pertaining to the role of social networks, living conditions in New Orleans, and obstacles in the rebuilding process. As in displacement, social networks operated to provide housing for participants in New Orleans (Litt et al., 2012). Some respondents stayed with friends and family for weekend visits, and others stayed for extended periods of time.

Thomas Stevens's account illuminated the complex costs and benefits of social networks. After he lost his tuition waiver and his dorm room, he lived with various girlfriends. He eventually moved in with his mother, who stayed in a FEMA trailer intended for a male friend in her network. In exchange, his mother required help to find and maintain an apartment for his 'knuckle-headed' younger brother. He also became financially responsible and the primary caretaker for his severely depressed father. His experience illustrated the positive and negative effects of the embeddness of families, where much needed assistance is found at the cost of carrying weaker family members (Stack, 1974).

While social networks provided housing, living conditions were less than desirable.

Conditions varied between accounts; however, respondents always framed them as an obstacle.

Steven Bell recounted adjusting to the lack of services in New Orleans.

It got kinda bad. You come home. You want to use the restroom and you can't use the restroom. That's weird. You got to go to a portolilet to use the restroom. I remember when I came in town, I had to go to the truck stop to take a shower. It wasn't bad for me because I'm a driver, so it wasn't bad. But knowing when you usually come home, you can come home and be comfortable. Like you wasn't comfortable at home. That was, that was bad.

In Miss Watson's account, the physical environment in the city made her happy to return to Houston.

I commuted back and forth trying to fix my house because the back part of my house had caved in and you know coming backward and forward it was just like depressing to me because everything was white here. The cars was white. The buildings was white. The whole street was white. And it was just sickening because you smell the smell of... It was a funny smell you would smell, and I would get sick every time that I came here to take care of my house. I live in Algiers, and the people I was staying with stayed on the East Bank, so they didn't have any lights over then. The people I was staying with had a generator. But the smell of the house, it used to just make me sick. I couldn't eat the whole while I was here, and I'd be glad when it was time for me to go back home, to Texas, because I just couldn't stand this...like... everybody was depressing. Everything was down, and the army people was here. They was driving on down the street and passing out food and just like what happened to New Orleans? So that was kind of depressing to me.

Curtis et al. (2007) described this intersection between mental health and recovery as one of many sources of post-disaster stress. Several participants framed New Orleans recovery as an obstacle to return. Shawn Jackson recounted visiting family and seeing large parts of New Orleans East without grocery stores, street lights, and life years after the storm. The view of a stagnate recovery in their neighborhoods while the French Quarter appears to be 'business as usual' dampened desires to return.

For homeowners, describing the process of rebuilding created a long list of stumbling blocks that complicated their experience. These hurdles included needing housing while

rebuilding, commuting between Houston and New Orleans, receiving assistance, and dealing with fraud, family, and uncertainty over time. Steven Bell found different priorities within his extended family to be his biggest challenge to rebuilding.

We had the little family dispute about how much was going to be paid to the other members of the family up to \$129,000. My mother's sister's kids, they wanted \$60,000. But they never did anything to the house. It was me and my mother that did everything to the house, so I figured they didn't need that much. We was going to give you something, but you going to dictate how much you want? You didn't pay the insurance on the house. You didn't pay the... You didn't do anything to the house. So that's what was the hold up with the moneys.

Before the courts could rule on how to divide the insurance payout, his sister-in-law embezzled the money.

Right now, we're not in my family home because my ex-sister-in-law bamboozled my mother out of our insurance money to rebuild. That's hard. 129 thousand dollars taken. Somebody you trust took it from you. That's hard. And then on top of that, can't get no loan from anybody because 'fore she did it, [my mother] had identity theft where my ex-sister-in-law used my mother['s] name to get credit cards, which she didn't pay for, so nobody wanted to give us no credit to rebuild.

He currently finds himself, seven years after Hurricane Katrina, still searching for a way to rebuild. Family actions and time intersected to expose gaps in housing assistance programs.

Too late to try to talk about Road Home money because all that program is dead now. Can't find anybody to help because it's late. There's people coming and helping rebuilding, but you need the material to get them started. You can find somebody to help you rebuild. You need money for material, permits, things like that. That's what you need money for, you know, supplies.

Miss Watson received an insurance payout and Road Home funds but still reported an unexpected gap. As a single mother on the verge of retirement, she knew rebuilding required more than money. She remarked, “*They gave me the check to fix my house, but I still couldn't fix my house because I didn't know nobody who was going to fix it.*” In Clark and Rose’s (2007) evaluation of the 2006-2007 Gulf Opportunity Zone Rental Housing Restoration Program, they reported a gap between the amount of grants to homeowners and inflated construction costs. In

this gap, gender exacerbated Paulette's uncertainty in the rebuilding process when it intersected with her perception of rampant contractor fraud, her sense of being alone, and her lack of construction knowledge.

People was charging so much money to do everything. It was just ridiculous prices that they was just charging; they was scamming on people. I was kind of skeptical about doing a lot of things because I didn't have enough money, and the money that I did have, I didn't want to just use it up because they charging 2 and 3 thousand dollars for something. Like they charging \$6,000 to put a roof on, and I don't even think nothing was wrong with my roof, but I didn't know. They put the little blue things up on [the roof]. I didn't see no leaking in this part of my house, but the back part of my house I know because I could see outside. But to do my whole roof, they said you had to do the whole thing so it was like dealing with this scamming people just charging you money for everything. ...I didn't know if the man was paying the people right with my money or what, but you had to trust somebody. Because nobody was here to do something for me, and I couldn't do it myself, 'cause I didn't have nowhere to stay.

For Thomas Stevens, some forms of assistance were not accessible. He perceived a limited scope of qualification, which gave homeowners grants to rebuild and temporary housing in trailers. This view is inaccurate. Some renters, via FEMA trailer parks or with permission to use someone else's property, had access to trailers. In his distorted view of aid, he highlighted that assistance programs were not easily accessible or fully understood by those who needed them. However, through his mother's network, he found access to a FEMA trailer (Litt et al., 2012).

[I needed]...a place to live. After disaster housing was scarce, so if I would've had comfort in leaving Texas and be able to have a place to stay and have a place for my dad to stay, and we live comfortably. You know, some assistance in that area. We didn't own a house, so we wasn't able to get a trailer or anything like that. Trailers was provided to homeowners, but we were renters, so we didn't have the benefit of being able to – Well, I don't want to say benefit 'cause it really wasn't a benefit – but if you wasn't able to get temporary housing like some other folks were able to do, so we had to fend for a place to live. If I had to say that I needed anything at the time [it] was just know that I was able to have a roof over my head.

I never received any rental assistance ... I'm sure they had some stuff out there, but I can honestly say, I didn't take advantage of every opportunity. [I was]

juggling so many other things, you know. To stop to try to wait in line or wait on the phone, it just wasn't really worth it, not when you trying to survive. Having to wait. Having to be patient and wait, and you trying to figure out when your next meal gonna be. You're not really having that patience. You're trying to eat, you know. That mentality, trying to survive. It was survival mode. Survival of the fittest. The strongest survive. The weak just get ran over unless they get carried.

The final hurdle emerged in the intersection of healthcare and housing. Three participants reported increased family responsibility because the health of their parents deteriorated after the storm. Mr. Stevens's father became severely depressed and unable to care for himself after being trapped in floodwaters. When Thomas's former pastor called to insist he pick up his father, Thomas began a juggling act, shuffling his father from dorm room to dorm room and apartment to apartment until he finally sent his father to Houston to stay with other family members. This caused a role reversal that he had to reconcile.

Now you would think, I'm the son; he's the father. He should be taking care of me in a sense. He should be guiding, but as a result, I guess, of wherever he was at in life... He was already, as a matter of fact, after my grandmother died, he was a different person, so after Katrina he was like a mute to me.

In this account, he expressed a sense of isolation even among family (Fussell, 2012). Paulette Watson expressed a similar sense of aloneness in bearing the responsibility for her 84-year-old mother. The long 18-hour, bumper-to-bumper evacuation car rides for hurricanes Katrina and Rita were too much for her mother, who would frequently cry out, "I gotta get outta here." Her network in Houston was unable to help because they also suffered from depression and grief (Fussell, 2012). As a result, Miss Watson had to commute to New Orleans to check on the progress of her house with her mother-in-law.

We were just driving all the time, just driving. And she didn't want to do that driving, so I seen a decline in her... I had to be careful with her because she was touching stuff and moving stuff, and I didn't want nothing [to] get on her or something like that.

Housing and community health concerns also emerged that complicated participants process to return (Curtis et al., 2007).

Participants in case 1 framed housing as a major obstacle in displacement and in New Orleans. As participants became established in displacement, decided to return, and faced challenges in the process to return, social networks emerged as their primary source of assistance to overcome the hurdles they found. At each stage, a list of obstacles emerged to complicate their decision-making process. While many addressed housing first, it was just one dimension of their struggle (Coker et al., 2006; Curtis et al., 2007). After finding adequate housing, participants focused on employment issues.

Employment themes

Hurricane Katrina changed the employment landscape of New Orleans just as thoroughly as the housing market. Some employers sent care packages, provided financial assistance, and relocated employees to other job sites (Appleseed, 2006). Other employers closed down and laid off employees as the New Orleans economy became focused on construction sustained by low-wage immigrant labor (Appleseed, 2006; Fletcher et al., 2006). Prior to Hurricane Katrina, four of the five participants in case 1 worked. One reported working three jobs to make ends meet; however, none of them received public assistance. As a teenager, Josephine Davis was the only participant who did not work before Hurricane Katrina.

As participants described finding employment after the storm, two themes emerged. The first theme was becoming established in displacement. Participants recounted the aid pre-Katrina employers sent and their experiences finding work in Houston. Second, the process of returning to New Orleans appeared. In this theme, participants focused on two aspects of their experience: employment hurdles and the role of social networks.

Becoming established in displacement

To become established in displacement respondents needed money to cover gaps in assistance. Two participants received money from pre-Katrina employers. Paulette Watson reported, “my job paid us up to three months.” Shawn Jackson’s social network linked him to his previous employer’s assistance program.

When I got to Atlanta, a friend of mine called me. We worked together. [She] said, ‘Call Tulane,’ and she gave me the 1800 number and said, ‘They giving [those] employed there so many years some income because what had happened.’ They sent me 1800 dollars just off the top for being an employee. They showed a lot of love from Tulane. [They] could’ve went through the savings that I had [at] the credit union, but no, they just sent that. ...I had been there like five years and not in a manager position, so they sent me 18, and I was grateful for that. That was a big blessing. Very much.

The money residents received played a crucial part in their ability to reestablish themselves, especially those pulled to Houston by the housing assistance program (Appleseed, 2006). Mr. Jackson used part of his money to fly to Houston. His employer aid also bridged the assistance gaps he found in Houston (Appleseed, 2006).

It was an apartment. I’m thinking, I ain’t got furniture. I said, I got a bed at the motel. So [my sister] came one day [to the motel]. She like, ‘when you gonna come and move in your apartment?’ I’m like, ‘Sis, move into what? You want me to take the bed out the motel and put [it] in there?’ She like, ‘Boy, you still got a little money from Red Cross and Tulane. Go buy some pillows.’ So I took me to Wal-Mart. I swear ‘fore God. I bought me three throw pillows, and that was my living room set. Got the little fold out chairs. That was my dining room set.

Although, Steven Bell did not recount his pre-Katrina employer sending money, his trade mediated Hurricane Katrina’s impact.

It wasn’t hard for me to get a job because of my trade. I deliver gasoline. The only thing that I had to do was change my license over to Texas, and within three weeks, I was working, so my experience with Katrina wasn’t as bad as people who didn’t have a trade. I was able to keep moving, you know.

Steven Bell depicted an easier transition into displacement because of his trade. She did not explicitly say it. However, Miss Watson alluded that her age kept her from finding employment

in Houston. Mr. Jackson found stable employment in Houston after seven months of searching.

As he described being hired, he concluded, “*so I got the job, and it was good and but [I was] still thinking about home.*”

The process of returning to New Orleans

Even though most participants found jobs in Houston, they still desired to return to New Orleans. As they recounted their process of returning, employment became a means of return more than a motivating factor to return. Only Miss Watson credited her job as motivating her to return. She was also the participant in the study to return to and keep her pre-Katrina job.

I’m at the age that I need to retire. That’s why I came back home because I knowed I had a job. When they sent me a letter saying if I retire how much I would get I knowed I [would] be just like another Hurricane Katrina victim because I wouldn’t have been able to make it off that little \$500 a month, so I had to come back home.

Although she kept her job, she described Hurricane Katrina’s negative impact. With an unfinished house, she could not return to work by March 30th, 2006 and was forced to resign.

The hardest thing for me [was] that I lost time, the years that I had put in with the city because I was with them like 30-something years. And I lost that time because of Hurricane Katrina. I was at the time that I could’ve retired, and I couldn’t retire because I left here, and then I had to resign. Although I was able to come back and buy my time back, just knowing that I’m 62, and now I’m at the age to retire, and I don’t have but \$500 a month of pay that I would be getting. Who can live off of that? So I had to buy that time back. ...They take \$300 out of my check. That’s a lot of money for me, trying to still live now, and everything is still high. My salary was high when I left here, but then I had to come back here and start off like a new employee [that had] never worked, making \$11 an hour.

In January 2007, Miss Watson returned to lower wages. She also faced a reduced social network to help make ends meet because her adult children no longer live in New Orleans. In this way, family separation emerged as a consequence of return. Steven Bell also left his family when presented with a job offer in New Orleans.

It was 2006. I came in for the Mardi Gras. I was waiting on [my family] to come back to the house. It took so long I left. And it just so happened I [stayed]. I was

putting my luggage in the car to go back to Houston, and they called me for the job. I was still making about the same as I was making in Houston, still in the same field, so when they gave me [a] chance to get home and do some things at the house, figuring I'd be [able to] fix the house up, get in it. So that's how I got back here.

In my study, it appears children were more susceptible to family separation. Parents often sent them to family members in areas with stable infrastructures and better living conditions. As a teenager, family separation became a new constant for Josephine Davis. This happened because evacuation and resettlement redistributed her social network from Houston to Atlanta.

My dad had got a job with FEMA with doing the trailers and stuff in New Orleans, so it was either go to Texas or go to back to Mississippi with my mama and I was like no (laughs) no thank you I will go to Texas with my sister. She was going already planning to move to Texas, and I knew my aunt [dad's sister] was there, so I was like, 'I'd rather go to Texas.' ... He didn't want me to go back to New Orleans with him at all. ... At that time, I didn't want to go back because I had heard about how everybody was in trailers, and it was still in chaos, so I wasn't ready to go back. I wasn't prepared to see what was going on either, and I kinda knew that, so I wasn't ready to go back.

Social networks allowed participants to cope with the economic shortages they faced during the process to return. Thomas Stevens provided the best example of how social networks helped shoulder the responsibility of caring for family members and as well as highlighting informal job networks.

[My mother and I,]we coupling our funds. I gotta exist. She gotta exist. [My father and brother] gotta exist. So we just money hungry, trying to get whatever cash flow we can get, however we can get it, to get things taken care of. ...In 2007, I had a job at the airport through the guy who cut my hair. They had an opening. He let me know.

Mr. Stevens and Mr. Bell's perceptions of their networks' ability to link them to jobs contrasted Litt et al. (2012) study of women's networks, in which male respondents perceived a breakdown in the ability of informal networks to provide employment opportunities in post-Katrina New Orleans.

After losing everything, residents needed a means to become established in displacement. Employment operated in different ways to provide financial assistance as participants in case 1 settled into new environments. Some pre-Katrina employers continued to pay employees while others distributed lump sums. Finding employment in displacement provided stability and a means to continue life, but it did not provide a significant pull to keep these participants in Houston.

In the process of returning to New Orleans, employment facilitated more than motivated return, except for a nearly retired, single mother. Participants also encountered significant challenges when they returned such as lower wages, an increased cost of living, and family separation. After respondents found the means to support their families in displacement and in New Orleans, they began searching for quality schools.

Education themes

As participants secured housing and income, they focused on registering their children for school (Coker et al., 2006). Within case 1, participants recounted how the hurricane affected their children's education. As the inductive codes were analyzed, education emerged as a salient factor in the decision making process. Through being forced into different school systems, parents began to realize educational differences between the New Orleans school system and those they found in displacement (Appleseed, 2006; Peek, 2012).

The desire for a quality education affected how families thought about returning to New Orleans. As participants discussed their decisions to return, they compared educational opportunities in New Orleans to those in displacement. Within this framework, the status of New Orleans primary and secondary schools pushed students away while better educational opportunities in displacement persuaded families to stay. In contrast, post-secondary education pulled students back to New Orleans in this case. The lived experience of attending school after

Hurricane Katrina also materialized as a salient theme. Perceptions of accessing quality education did not match the accounts of students being stereotyped and isolated (Peek, 2012).

Education as a reason to relocate

Education emerged as a salient decision-making factor in post-Katrina living arrangements. Participants in this case viewed the state of primary and secondary education in New Orleans as a reason to stay displaced. However, college pulled students back to finish their degrees. Participants compared the education systems in Houston and New Orleans to justify their desire for school-aged children to graduate in displacement. Respondents described New Orleans education as ‘the worst in the country’, ‘poor before the storm and worse after’, ‘all messed up’, and ‘confusing’. They portrayed Houston as providing better schools, which would help children excel in the future.

Participants viewed the opportunity to receive a quality education as important enough to warrant family separation. When grandparents, Steven Bell and Paulette Watson, returned to New Orleans, some family members remained in Houston. In the following example, Mr. Bell compared school systems to justify returning without his family.

The education system was much better than it was in New Orleans, so it gave my granddaughter a chance to really excel, where she can be somebody. Down here the school system was real horrible, so I'm glad she's in Houston. I really am. I miss her, but I'm glad she's in Houston, so she can succeed. Here she wouldn't succeed. She wouldn't.

[My daughter] didn't ever come back because she had got a job out there and the schools are real good out there, so her son was in school out there, so now he's in 12th grade, so he'll be graduating next year, so she gonna make a move then about whether she wants to make a move back or not.

In the above quote, Miss Watson discussed her daughter's decision-making process. Paulette also wanted to delay return until her youngest son graduated. However, she had to return to save her retirement benefits. Even though she tried to find a way for him to stay, her son

returned with her because her network in Houston could not take him to school. For Miss Watson, employment's pull to return was stronger than education's push to stay displaced.

Post-secondary education provided a contradiction within this push/pull relationship. In case 1, some participants framed college as a reason to return. Shawn Jackson's sister studied nursing at Delgado Community College. She returned to New Orleans alone to finish her degree. Mr. Stevens's desire to graduate from Tulane motivated his return and determined his time frame. *"I knew whenever I could get back home, really when I found out that school was opening back up, that I was coming back. I was coming back because I wanted I wanted to finish at Tulane."*

Lived experience of post-Katrina education

The experience of attending school in displacement contrasted respondent perceptions of hope and opportunity (Peek, 2012). The inductive codes: mental state, enrolling post-Katrina, getting reestablished, effects of Katrina, fighting, commute and family separation, came together to create an image of the lived experience of education through a student's personal account and that of a single mother. Josephine Davis experienced three new school systems as a result of Hurricane Katrina. She recounted the health effects of being in different academic environments.

My dad came and picked me up and we went to Atlanta to get enrolled in school. The school was bigger than Slidell itself. The school was like a college campus. It took almost 10 minutes to get from one class to the next and it was horrible. I've never experienced it in my life. I came from going to a hall way or a couple of rooms down between classes to walking across campus, like literally five and six buildings. It was a lot to learn. It was something new to experience; honestly, I mean it was kind of interesting. Now that I look at it, it was interesting getting to experience a bigger atmosphere and a wider variety of personalities. But at first while it was happening, I was nervous. I was angry.

I was a little more comfortable in the schools in Texas, but I still was acting up in school. I think [it was] the end of my quarter exam that I threw the book at the teacher. He called my aunt and was like, 'She didn't take her test', and I was like, 'He was cheating'. (laughs) I didn't have a real excuse. I just didn't want to do it, and it was... I don't know. My attitude had changed a lot. ...My grades did go

down, but initially, it was on purpose. But then trying to get my grades back up, I had to work harder, and it was more stress, so it would make me get lower grades, so [Hurricane Katrina] affected it basically.

As Miss Davis described her experiences with education in displacement, several issues arose that became additional sources of stress (Curtis et al., 2006). Other participants found lack of documentation and poor pre-Katrina education standards in New Orleans led to children being held back in displacement (Peek, 2012). For example, Miss Watson gave the following account.

It was a mess just trying to get him in school for the first thing because he went to a private school. In the private school, they didn't have to take whatever that test they was giving you in 9th grade and 10th grade. You didn't take it in private school, but you had to take it there, and then they tried to keep him back. Although he was in 11th grade, they wanted to put him back in 9th grade. Even when I came back here, they wanted to put him in 9th grade, so he didn't finish school here. He went to California and finished school up there where they put him in 11th grade, but they wanted to put him in 9th grade and then they had school in the nighttime when you had to be to school for 4 o'clock til 8-9 o'clock at night. And that was kind of hard for me, going from over here [Algiers] to get him from way uptown every night to go to school or even bringing him to school when he was staying over here. The buses wasn't running like they should've been running. I was just a nervous wreck from 2005 until 2007 when I came back home. A simple task [was] just so hard even getting your child in school when you didn't have no records.

Her son was the only student in case 1 to attend school in post-Katrina New Orleans. She listed several challenges the education system presented when she returned. She indicated evening school hours, lack of transportation, lack of documentation, and inconvenient school locations became obstacles that eventually led her back to family separation. Some of these obstacles, such as lack of documentation, could have been mediated by better pre-storm preparation on the part of parents as well as schools.

As participants in case 1 decided to return to New Orleans, education affected the decision-making process differently. For post-secondary students, college motivated them to return. For those yet to graduate high school, access to better schools made parents want to stay

in Houston until children graduated. However, staying was not always possible as other factors exerted force to pull residents back to the city.

In contrast to the perception of superior education systems, the lived experience of parents and students as they entered new school systems were not as appealing as the ideal presented (Peek, 2012). Enrolling without documentation, entering much larger academic environments, and attempting to fit in created additional stress (Curtis et al., 2006; Peek, 2012). Regardless of the challenges encountered, the perceived educational opportunities outweighed the costs, especially when compared to the issues the New Orleans school system.

When housing and employment needs were included in the decision-making process, participants in this case left their families and returned to reconstruct their lives in New Orleans. Case 2 respondents recounted similar obstacles as those in case 1. However, they responded by staying displaced. In the next section, I explore how they made the decision to stay.

Case 2: Displaced Participants that Never Lived in Post-Katrina New Orleans

In case 2, many accounts began before participants reached Houston. Only the two middle-class participants evacuated to Houston before the storm. Three working class women evacuated before the storm to areas hit by the hurricane. They eventually relocated to Houston. The last three working class participants, two men and a single mother, rode the storm out in New Orleans. One man went directly to Houston. The other spent a few days in an Atlanta shelter before they sent him to Houston. The single mother relocated from Forth Worth to Houston in October 2006.

Participant descriptions

Lisa Wilson

Before the interview, Lisa Wilson introduced me to her family by showing me photo albums. She is the daughter of a teenage mother who worked three jobs to provide for her. She is married to a private practice lawyer; both were born and raised in New Orleans. At the time of Hurricane Katrina, they owned their home, had a 4-year-old son, and expected their daughter, whom they wrongly believed had Downs Syndrome, to be born in November. They evacuated to Houston before the storm and over time accepted relocation as permanent because of the slow pace of recovery. I met her through Joe Johnson.

Joe Johnson

Joe Johnson is a single, middle class man. At the time of the storm, he was in his late twenties and rented an apartment with his sister on the Westbank. He evacuated to a hotel in Houston before the storm. He tried to return in October 2005, but housing conditions, lack of family, and the overall state of recovery deterred him. He plans to return when he has enough money to create positive change for Black folks in New Orleans. I met him through one of my professors that conducted research with his father, a social justice advocate in New Orleans.

Barbara Davis

Barbara Davis was a married, 37-year-old, working-class mother of two teenage daughters at the time of the storm. Originally intending to evacuate to Baton Rouge, contraflow sent her and her husband to Mississippi while her daughters, riding in a more reliable friend's car, successfully reached the capital. After a week of separation, she received word that her brother drove to Baton Rouge, found her children, and took them to his house in Katy, Texas. She relocated to Katy at the insistence of her husband and chose to stay because of the school

system. After Hurricane Katrina, she became a Jehovah's Witness, and her marriage ended. A changed sense of morality and dissatisfaction with the state of recovery helped her accept permanent relocation. I met her via her brother, Raymond Davis, a participant in case 3.

Regina Walker

Working-class, Regina Walker was 13 at the time of the storm. She lived in New Orleans East with her mother, brother, and grandfather. They evacuated to Baton Rouge before the storm and moved to Orlando a month later. Financial difficulties forced several moves, and each move meant a new school. To cope with school-induced anxiety issues, she became home schooled. This enabled her to move in with her aunt, Barbara Davis, in Katy, Texas. As she became established in Texas, she chose to stay permanently. Her mother continues to ask her to come back to Fort Lauderdale, Florida. I met her via Barbara Davis.

Jonisha Upkins

Jonisha Upkins, a working-class, single mother, was 25 at the time of Hurricane Katrina. She lived in the St. Bernard Projects and was expecting her third child on Valentine's Day in 2006. She evacuated to Mississippi before the storm at the insistence of her grandmother. After she was notified that her complex would not reopen, she relocated to Houston. She expressed a deep desire to return to New Orleans, but housing market conditions, poor school standards, and the slow pace of recovery persuaded her to stay in Houston until her children graduate. I met her via her aunt, for a custodian for the University of New Orleans.

Dwayne Edwards

Dwayne Edwards, a working-class, 34-year-old male rode the storm out in New Orleans with his younger brother. They were 'bussed' to Atlanta, where they stayed in a church shelter for a few days before being sent to Houston, where their rest of their family had been sent. After

seeing the economic opportunity in Houston, he did not want to return and found a construction job. His family, including his son and step-daughter, returned to New Orleans, leaving him with only friends in Houston. I met him via Jason Boissiere.

Jason Boissiere

Jason Boissiere, a working-class, 28-year-old musician and barber sought shelter in the Lafitte Projects with his cousin during Hurricane Katrina. Prior to the storm, he sent his estranged wife and two-year-old daughter to stay with his wife's family in Dallas, Texas. He stayed because his car was in the shop. After the levees were breached, he and his companions walked to the Superdome with a grill. They stayed outside and became community chefs until buses took them to Houston. In Houston, he reunited with his extended family at the Reliant Center. His family returned to New Orleans in 2007. He stayed because he did not want to start over again in a city that was not fully functioning and still lacking a majority of its people. He plans to return after he retires. A colleague sent me an article about him in the *Houston Chronicle*. I visited his barbershop on my first visit to Houston.

Edith Jones

Edith Jones is a working-class, single mother. At the time of the storm, she was twenty-one and lived with her mother and 2-year-old daughter. Her mother worked for the Astor-Crowne Plaza and received a room for her family to stay in during the storm. On the seventh day, the hotel put everyone out. Edith pooled her money with strangers to hire someone to drive them across the Crescent City Connection because they heard the police were shooting anyone who walked across the bridge. Two weeks after the hurricane, Edith and her family were evacuated to Keller, Texas. She relocated to Houston in October 2006 to find stable employment. She stated, "*They tried to kill us,*" when explaining why she could not return to New Orleans. I met her via a

colleague who interviewed her in 2007 for a study regarding the rate at which low-income women returned to college after Hurricane Katrina.

Housing themes

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, most participants never expected to call another city home almost seven years after Hurricane Katrina. While many New Orleanians returned, distinct populations remain in Houston that do not have immediate plans to return. Many participants stated at the beginning of their interviews that they would never live in New Orleans again. However, the desire to return emerged in every interview. As participants spoke of New Orleans, they revealed the contradiction that home no longer exists. Even though experiences and reasons for staying in Houston differed, two housing themes emerged. First, participants described their process of becoming established in displacement. Secondly, housing emerged as a reason not to return to New Orleans.

Becoming established in displacement

Within this theme, participants recounted their experience of understanding displacement. The codes that define this theme are living conditions, family separation, receiving assistance, and hurdles to becoming established. The material conditions of displacement varied but participants described their thought processes in the same way. Each participant described a moment when they realized they were displaced. The realization of their displacement reflected an intersection between housing and healthcare. Middle-class, Lisa Wilson described this realization.

I think people from Louisiana, there weren't many people here, but we all started going down to the front desk, trying to find out what was going on with our reservations. Could we stay longer? And that's when we realized that we really don't have a place to go. I'd go down, and I'd tell the front desk manager, 'I'd like to extend my stay.' He'd look at me, and he'd say, 'Okay.' He already knew. But I had so much pride. It's like, 'I'd like to extend my stay.' He said, 'Okay,'

and I said, 'Wow, how long am I extending my stay? Am I gonna live here? No, I can't live here. I have to have a baby. I can't have a baby in the hotel. I have to have a home, but I have no home. Who am I gonna call? I'm it. There's no one to call. It's my husband and I.'

With this realization came an additional understanding about what is really important (Jenkins, 2012). No longer did she have the same pre-Katrina concerns of upgrading material possessions.

I can't believe I just asked for underwear, but it's really all I need. My needs changed. And I said, 'Was I asking for panties two weeks before the storm or was I asking for a new BMW?' All I needed was God and a pair of panties. You know what I'm saying? We put things in perspective, really. Really.

On the other hand, working class, single mother, Jonisha Upkins, who was also pregnant, expressed her realization of homelessness as fear. *"It was scary for me, and I cried. I think I cried like three days after that. I was like, 'I don't have nowhere to go. I'm homeless. What am I going to do?'"* As with Miss Wilson, Miss Upkins experienced the sense of having nowhere to go. In this specific way, Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath leveled a playing field to the extent that most participants, regardless of class, mentioned a sense of homelessness. However, from their narratives middle class participants received better and more encompassing assistance than working class participants.

Every participant in this case held the perception that Houston had aid available. As noted, five of the eight respondents relocated to Houston from other evacuation locations. Social networks in conjunction with the large-scale housing assistance program pulled displaced participants from Georgia, Mississippi, Florida, and other parts of Texas to Houston. All of them relocated to Houston because of their social networks, which arrived in Houston before them. Miss Upkins's account illustrated this process.

In Mississippi, they weren't trying to help us as far as housing. My girlfriend was here in Houston, and she called me and was like, 'They're giving out vouchers, and they're giving us places to live. You should come up here.' So I got my first FEMA check, which was 23-hundred. I got my brakes done on my car, and we headed out. I came to Houston.

In a similar account, Dwayne Edwards's social network encouraged him to relocate to Houston; however, the availability of aid strongly influenced his process as well. He was initially 'bussed' to Atlanta. Like all participants evacuated after the levees breached, he did not know where they sent him until he read a road sign at a rest stop. Mr. Edwards's account illustrated both the push out of one location and the pull to another location.

I went to Atlanta and met with some volunteers and got on a computer. When I left the house [I] got my son['s] picture, because I have a son. First thing I did was put him on line through Red Cross for kids; found him. Then I found my parents. Everybody was residing here in Houston. So, the church that we was boarded at, they gave us some tickets to come on the Greyhound bus to come back to Houston 'cause they didn't have no more finances. We were just there for less than 2 or 3 days, but they only had so much money that FEMA had given them, so the process had speeded up. So that's when [authorities] had said, 'Come down to Houston.' We made several trips. We were on the Greyhound bus. We coming from Atlanta. We had to stop in Dallas to pick up some more New Orleans people. I hate to use the word evacuees or refugees, but we picked up some more New Orleanian people, and after that we proceeded to travel all the way to Houston. Got to Houston; met my sisters. They came and picked me and my little brother up.

Overcrowded living conditions also influenced the decision-making process. Barely a teenager, Regina Walker relied on her family network to provide housing. Due to financial difficulty, her mother sent she and her brother and grandfather to spend the summer of 2007 in Katy, Texas, with her aunt Barbara Davis. After returning to Florida for a few months, she moved back to Katy to escape overcrowded living conditions. Jonisha also experienced overcrowding in her uncle's house in Mississippi, which she left behind by relocating to Houston.

Although the perception of aid pulled participants to Houston, experiences varied. In this process, complex view of assistance emerged. In displacement, respondents received different forms of aid and held different views of that assistance in relation to its ability to fulfill their immediate needs and to sustain them long-term. From the interviews, it appears that where

participants found temporary shelter impacted the type of assistance they received. Those housed in hotels or shelters where they were visible to the public found greater assistance. The participants who stayed with friends and family portrayed a much more difficult process to secure aid. In addition, those participants who arrived in Houston before Reliant City¹ closed reported easier access to receiving aid than those who relocated to Houston after September 2005.

Participants that received assistance beyond government aid explained the help came when strangers ‘took a liking to’ their children. Miss Wilson described frequently returning to her hotel to find strangers waiting to give her things. Every time she questioned the front desk how these strangers knew her and why they chose to help her. One front desk attendant responded, *“She was looking for someone, and she saw you in the lobby one day, and she said, ‘Who is that lady?’ And she chose you, and she wanted to talk to you because she saw your son.”* Miss Jones, at a shelter in Kellar, Texas, also spoke of a family she did not know that provided extra assistance, such as buying her a used car, because they liked her daughter. While Miss Wilson politely declined any assistance she did not want, such as moving to beachfront property or allowing the Amy Grant Show to rebuild her life in North Dakota, Miss Jones’s mother pressured her to accept any generosity that came their way. As such, she accepted a car she knew was ‘garbage’ that broke down beyond repair within three months.

In an exaggerated case of attention, a reporter from Dateline followed the post-Katrina experience of Jason Boissiere’s family. He used the camera lens as a witness when he approached the Director of Housing.

¹ Reliant City was the large scale temporary shelter created in Houston for residents displaced by Hurricane Katrina. It included Reliant Stadium, Reliant Center, Reliant Arena, and the Astrodome. In addition to housing residents, it provided access to medical, police, mailing, banking, social assistance, and federal services (Appleseed, 2006).

At first, they had found some houses that was way out, like secluded. They didn't have anything around it. They had one gas station I saw as we was driving to the house, and that was a few miles back. When we got to the little house, it was like a little trailer home or something. I was looking at them like, 'Naw, it's not home. They're only going to be here for a little while,' but then I was like, 'They don't have nothing around here. We don't have no cars. What [are] we gonna do?'

This other lady helped us. We was looking for apartments, riding around, and I found these apartments to live. Now, they wasn't on the list. It was just a new apartment, and I had a pamphlet. So I guess by the guys from Dateline being there with us, we went back to the Reliant Center, so now they don't know who we are really. So I walked up. I'm like, 'I don't want my people to live at these apartments you picked for them. I found them something else. I found this, and I want to know if we can move in these.'

So they made us sit down on the side while everyone is standing up in line. They just looking at us, and I see these people walk up. They got on black suits looking like the Men in Black or something, so I'm like, yeah, that's somebody right there. I get up go see what's happening. So I go talk to the man. I just walks up on him, ya heard me. I talk to him. Just so happens he was the Director of Housing. I showed him my pamphlet, and I'm like, 'Man, I just found these apartments. I don't like where they was trying to make us stay. This here is convenient. It's close to the bus line or whatever we need to get around for now.' So the man called right then and there on the spot, 'Hey look ya'll, put these on the list for us,' and I moved in the next week.

Repeatedly, Mr. Boissiere spoke about the way the cameras changed his interactions because workers and displaced residents were thrown off by the presence of a Dateline camera crew capturing every moment, action, and reaction at the height of Hurricane Katrina's media exposure. He found a way to use his situation to mitigate their emersion into 'Houstonian' life.

Without the camera lens, Jonisha Upkins had a very different experience with assistance. Pregnant and the single mother of two, Jonisha described the gap between her needs and the available aid.

We went to this place off of Wayside and 610, and we had to stand in these looonnnng lines to get housing. We had no go to person to help us settle. That was it. We give you housing. You go find somewhere to live. That's it. We didn't have [an] advocate for us. Well, I didn't have. No one advocated for me. I didn't get assistance. I lived off my FEMA money for a very long time.

Arriving in Houston after Reliant City closed, she encountered a system able to pay for housing, but she had to find an apartment on her own. Like many other participants, the assistance she received to compensate her for her losses became a means of day-to-day survival instead of a means to replace material investments (Litt, 2012).

From her experiences, Edith Jones began to view assistance as a way for others to profit. This perspective foreshadowed Naomi Klein's (2007) depiction of disaster capitalism.

We ended up here. At the time, it wasn't called La Fountaine; it was called the Raisin. And it's like it was a jungle because from my understanding this was abandoned property. It was vacant for years until they got the whim of Hurricane Katrina evacuees. They don't have anywhere to go. They started building up properties like this one and also the one called the Winnfield; it's abandoned again. It didn't last too long, but that's what they started doing.

In addition to watching Houston business owners profit from a forced migration, she also experienced individual attempts to defraud the rental assistance program.

Whenever you get financial assistance, they get their funds automatically. Management was stealing the funding, so they were threatening to evict us because management was stealing the funding that they were getting directly. Thinking that it was our fault that the rent was not being paid, so you argue with the property manager about that. Management, I'd say the small timers here, had been changed maybe 6 times because they all were stealing the funding from the housing program. [They were] stating that because we weren't on time with our paperwork, they weren't receiving their money. When each month I'm calling to verify that they're getting their money each month, so they were trying to get double in a sense. Wanting me to pay what they were already getting paid from government.

Although experiences contradicted their expectations, participants chose to stay in Houston and 'figure it out'. Perceptions of recovery solidified their decision to stay.

Housing as a reason not to return

Housing conditions in New Orleans influenced the decision-making process. Participants decided not to return because of post-Katrina living conditions, the extent of damage to pre-Katrina housing, perceptions of recovery, and hurdles to overcome (Groen and Polivka, 2010).

These hurdles included lack of housing and assistance, class and its subsequent uneven resources, rent gouging, and uncertainty (Appleseed, 2006; Nelson et al., 2007).

From a working class perspective, Jonisha Upkins described how the destruction of her housing development, poor alternative living conditions, and high rents combined to keep her displaced. As the rest of her family made plans to return to their houses, she realized she could not return to what she had before the storm because she no longer had a home. This exposed a class divide within families. Homeowners returned and renters expressed they had nothing to return to (Groen and Polivka, 2010; Sanyika, 2011). Jonisha reported she could have lived with family, but she desired the autonomy of living on her own. Columbine Park, the mixed-income community that replaced her public housing complex, came with a new set of rules that limited her autonomy.

My house [an apartment in St. Bernard Projects] was completely destroyed, and we couldn't go back. We had nothing to go back to. They tore down the apartment complex I lived in and built this new complex, and they have all these rules. You can't sit with your neighbors on the porch and congregate. I was used to that. Your friends come over and sit on the porch, and we talk, and we drink and be merry. Now if it's not you and your kids, you got the police showing up at your door like you're having a party or something.

So my aunt's like, 'You need to move back to Columbine [Park].' They call it Columbine Park or something, and I was like, 'I'm not moving back there.' My last little girl's daddy is a convicted felon. He can't even come visit me [there] if he's a convicted felon. I was like, 'I can't move there. All these rules - people can't sleep over at your house, and they have to have a pass.' I'm not used to that. I'm used to coming home if I wanna have 10 people sleep over at my house, I can do that without having to have clearance from the front office. They got to do a background check on you, and see if you're a convicted felon or pedophile, and it's like, I can't move back to that.

Unable to return to her apartment complex, she examined alternative living conditions. In her account, the cramped quarters in FEMA trailers were too restrictive to raise children, and rents doubled after Hurricane Katrina (Appleseed, 2006; Clark and Rose, 2007; Luft with Griffin, 2008). As such, neither provided suitable alternatives to facilitate her return. Interacting

with New Orleans on her father's behalf, Miss Jones saw first-hand how difficult maintaining a stable, affordable living arrangement could be. As she thought about returning, the price of housing became an overwhelming hurdle for her.

I go back home as often as I can. I just went back home in August. When I go home, I wish I could stay but the housing is so (pause) oh my God and fluctuating! You have to probably have like 7 or 8 people living with you just to split the bills because the cost is ridiculous. You don't have anywhere to stay. You still have people trying to get on housing programs. It's like, if you're not on housing, you can't get back in the city; simple as that. You're not on housing, you won't have anywhere to stay.

Even though some participants expressed they lost the desire, many still want to return. While the challenges to return have won out in the short-term, the desire to return lingers in long-term plans for the future.

Participants in case 2 intended to return after the waters receded like most residents from New Orleans. As families reunited and discussed returning to New Orleans, older generations, particularly those who were homeowners, returned, leaving the younger generations to 'work it out' with their friends in Houston (Appleseed, 2006; Groen and Polivka, 2010; Luft with Griffin, 2008). A shift in attitudes emerged that hinged on perspectives of recovery. Mixed with a hostile housing market, the hurdles to returning soon outweighed their dreams when New Orleans could not offer what they enjoyed before – most importantly, their sense of community. Not just where to live but where to work became a salient part of the push-pull dynamic that persuaded participants to stay in Houston.

Employment themes

Employment opportunities in New Orleans and in Houston impacted participant decision making processes. With an increased cost of living, shattered social networks, and few resources, the ability to produce stable income became more important after Hurricane Katrina as there were fewer ways to cope with shortages. In analyzing the employment accounts for this case, a

complex web of beliefs and experiences with employment emerged. As I made sense out of the jig-saw-puzzle, I realized most statements fell within one of three categories: New Orleans's push factor, Houston's pull factor, and the experience of working in Houston. The push from New Orleans and the pull to Houston merged to create an understanding of how employment operated as a reason to relocate to Houston. Participant accounts of working in Houston, like those of housing, were mixed.

Concurrent push-pull processes

The economic conditions in pre and post-Katrina New Orleans affected the decision-making process of participants in case 2. Issues in the New Orleans job market posed significant hurdles that pushed them away from returning. These obstacles included business conditions, the pace of recovery, lack of economic opportunity, and a hospitality focused economy. For Lisa Wilson and her husband, the economic conditions in New Orleans influenced them to accept relocation even though they had already begun rebuilding their house.

My husband is barred [in Louisiana], so he had to go back. We had no way to make income. He's not barred here. He kept going there because he had clients there, and he helped those from Houston that had cases there. He just would go back and forth, but he was so tired. Every week or so, going back and forth, trying to fix up our house for us to go back to, and then all of a sudden, he says, 'What I'm seeing at home – literally, it stinks. The city stinks. The system stinks. They're not moving fast enough. The people are moving faster where they are. The same people that I saw doing fine in Houston, they're moving slow, and they're depressed. As I'm coming home, I'm doing more divorces. People are committing suicide. Children are just losing it. The families are broken. What's happening? My case log is turning from one thing to something else. People are wanting divorces. They're fighting over money and finances and FEMA money. Families are fussing over FEMA money. Who's going to get it, and divorcing and fighting. The resources are not there. One parent has a job; the other one doesn't. The wife may get the job; the husband's feeling like he can't support the family. The suicide rate is there. There's no one. Where are the mental patients going? Who's taking care of these people? I have clients that have issues that there's no hospitals to take care of these people unless they travel. Has anyone classified them? Does anyone know? There are people that were supposed to be on trial that are walking around with evidence against them for being guilty, and they are

out running the streets. What's happening? I have a newborn baby.' He tells me, 'You decide. I love my city. But you've got a bunch of lawyers fighting over the same work. There's no business. There's no business. The courts are closed. You know, we're granted reciprocity to practice in Houston.'

Although her husband's employment initially seemed to dictate their return, he found the means to earn income elsewhere as his perception of recovery solidified. Watching the city and his work change, he feared how returning would affect his family. This uncertainty in recovery, as well as in the economy, undermined their sense of security (Nelson et al, 2007).

They were not the only ones to reconsider their decision to return after witnessing recovery. Joe Johnson intended to return as soon as New Orleans reopened. In the following passage, he explains why he did not returned.

I want to go back, but I can't. Not right now. The price of everything has gone up down there, [the] cost of living. I tried to go back [that] October. I was trying to move back, and it wasn't just happening. I went to the facility that I was working [at] on State Street, uptown near Tchoupitoulas. I spoke to some people, and they were all set up in trailers. Everything was so rigged. It's just like, God, you know. It seemed like everything was just taking forever to get back together.

I'm a very patient person, but it's hard to push through that kind of inconvenience when you've just experienced all that has happened. Then, your family's not there. You don't have the kind of support level you need. You don't know what really happened with Katrina and police beating the crap outta people for being outside late. Just the way they beat this 64-year-old man down in the French Quarter. I watched it on the news, and I was like, damn.

See that's the kind of shit right there that makes me not want to go back home. You know 'cause I got to deal with that bullshit. Seriously, is it really that serious? If you'd do that to an elderly guy, what the hell would they do to me? I'm a young black guy. This is not a place for me to raise my family. It's just outta control.

Mr. Johnson had a job to return to, but the atmosphere in New Orleans did not promote his wellbeing, as a young Black man. The stress of dealing with recovery without his social network in a city that he did not trust to treat him fairly dampened his desire to return immediately (Cordasco et al., 2007; Curtis et al., 2007; Nelson et al., 2007). Instead, he decided to wait until

the city has 'its act together' or he has the money to improve living and working conditions for poor and working class Blacks in New Orleans.

The pace of recovery influenced Jason Boissiere's decision to stay in Houston, as well. Despite believing the levees were blown, he and his family still wanted to return (Cordasco et al., 2007).

I stayed because I didn't feel like starting over again. I was a valet parker at U-Park. I valet park cars. They shut that lot down, and I started cutting hair at Fade Away on Reed and Lake Forest. I stayed there like 2 years. Clientele was bumpin'. It was pretty good, and then Katrina hit, and I was like damn. So by us not being able to go home right away, I started cutting hair out here. I got established out here. After two years out here cutting, I done built my business up, and everybody started going back home. I didn't want to go back and just start over because even though people was going back home, the city wasn't fully developed. A lot of people still not back home. Nothing really there in the East. Uptown was pretty cool because they didn't really take no major damage. It was mainly just the East really, but that's a major part. That's a big old section.

Without people in the city and with his neighborhood still devastated, his motivation to return was diminished. Houston pulled him to stay because he had an established clientele. Currently in Houston with only two cousins and a few band members, Mr. Boissiere operates his own barbershop and plans to return when he retires.

Dwayne Edwards stayed in Houston because of its economy, which created an educational opportunity for him.

I worked [as a] longshoreman in New Orleans. That was [a] construction beginning there, so I said maybe I should take a shot at this because I didn't actually want to go back to New Orleans, to be frank with you. There's no job for me there. I've opportunity here. Have to pursue the happiness. Start to see more job growth. I'm not worried about the French Quarters. I'm not worried about Harrah's casino.

There was no job growth in New Orleans. 90% of the people work in some type of hospitality. The state of Texas has a lot of opportunity. This is the capital of the oil industry, construction, etc. Our city doesn't have that. I have a better opportunity here in Houston, which I have furthered my education in the construction field. I started off as a laborer; I've been with this construction company for 5 years. I moved up from a laborer to a foreman, so I've learned

how to read blueprints. So when you see something better, if you want something better, that's what you're going to go for.

Even though employment opportunities in Houston improved Mr. Edwards and Mr. Boissiere economic status, not everyone enjoyed the same experience. Jonisha Upkins and Edith Jones relocated from other areas to Houston because they could not find jobs where they were. In Houston, they hoped to find a way to care for their daughters. However, they each experienced different challenges to finding and maintaining employment. The hope of economic opportunity pulled them to Houston, but their experience, like other participants in case 2, was quite different than expected.

Lived experience of working in Houston

As participants settled into displacement and acquired housing, the job hunt began (Coker et al., 2006). Vouchers covered rent, but most participants paid utilities and other living expenses on their own (Appleseed, 2006). As Barbara Davis recounted, income was necessary when assistance ran short.

They paid our rent; they didn't pay any other bill in our house. And when they give you food stamps, it's never enough from month to month. It's never enough. You always have to spend cash with that. Even if you think, I'm gonna get this to last, it's never enough.

In addition to making ends meet, many participants, both middle and working class, desired the sense of independence employment provides. In contradiction to stereotypes of displaced residents 'just looking for handouts', respondents expressed they desperately wanted the opportunity to provide for themselves and their families. While Mr. Boissiere's social network connected him to job, most participants in this case struggled to find work in Houston. Mr. Edwards, who eventually found a good paying construction job, admitted he filled out applications all over Houston before being hired.

Miss Davis and Miss Jones framed their struggle to find work in terms of being blacklisted from the Houston workforce.

One person that I interviewed with had the courage to tell me, 'It's going to be hard for you to find a job because they've already told us not to hire people from New Orleans,' and that was at a temp agency. They felt like we were going to go back to New Orleans, and they were going to be in a position where they would have to find more workers anyway. That we were not going to stay in these jobs. That we were only transitional until we decided to go back to New Orleans or go elsewhere, so basically they were told not to hire people from New Orleans, and I just felt violated. I just felt like I was judged. You didn't even give me a chance to tell you whether I decided to stay here or even interview me really with the long-term view of hiring me if I was qualified. You interviewed me only because you had. That's how I felt on every interview that I went on. The job that I finally got I was happy to get. I'm still on that same job. I'm not the type of person that likes to job hop. If I apply for a job, I want to see if I can make a career out of whatever job I'm at. That's how I wanted to be viewed, but that's not how I was viewed. Two years, it took me to find a job.

You think about the fact that you have a family. You want to take care of your family, and what little funds they've given you, you can stretch them only so far. You know you eventually are gonna have to have a job to be able to care for your kids. You have all of these things going on, and you have people putting up roadblocks that don't even know you as a person, that are just stereotyping you and basically shutting doors that should be open. And that's what I dealt with for two years until I got a job.

Miss Davis struggled through two years of unemployment because Katy provided her daughters with an educational opportunity New Orleans could not.

Where some participants could not find jobs, Miss Jones had issues maintaining employment in Houston.

I'd say being in Houston, I've had 14 jobs. First I started out at a call center. Didn't work out. You have certain people that didn't like where I was from. They would cause friction on the job, so I would quit. I'm not going to stay where I'm not wanted, and I'm not going to allow you to fire me for something inappropriate that stays on my work record. I've even applied for a job at the Galleria to do security, and the guy told me, 'I brought you in just to see your hand writing, but my supervisor above me told me not to hire anymore people from New Orleans.' I outdid everybody that was in there to do the job. I outdid them on the skills test. I outdid them on the questions. I mean, I don't understand. You're just wasting my time.

As a self-identified 'lesbian stud' with long dreadlocks, she cited problems with 'Houstonians' accepting her sexuality as well as her appearance. She often felt disrespected when co-workers refused to greet her and encountered discrimination because of her sexual orientation, which she does not face in New Orleans.

Miss Jones and her mother faced many sources of discrimination in Houston. While her 62-year-old mother's age prevented her from being hired, Miss Edith stated her biggest challenges to finding and maintaining employment have been her New Orleans heritage, disrespect from co-workers, and not speaking Spanish. In her interview, she remarked, "*Okay, it's four years later, three years later. If I could retreat back home, I would. I wouldn't be here applying for a job if it was just that easy for me to go back home.*" Her statement highlights that returning is not the easy answer most outsiders assume it is.

Jonisha Upkins had a very different obstacle to overcome as a single mother of three. Without a family network to provide childcare, her 6-year-old daughter cared for her younger sisters while Miss Upkins tried to create a new life in Houston.

I keep my kids close because after the storm these... Texas doesn't live like we lived. We're used to leaving our kids at home and going to work, and your neighbor will let you know if something's going on next door. These people, you leave your kids here, they're calling CPS. I had 3 CPS cases opened on me. I feel like they wanna take our kids away. I tell my kids, 'When I'm at work, don't go outside; don't look out the window. Call me if it's an emergency.' I'll come home on my lunch break and check on them.

My oldest daughter for a long time has raised her sisters because I have to go to work, and I don't have adequate childcare, and I don't have any family here. Your friends will watch them for a while, but then that gets old. 'Can't keep watching your kids.' So I trained them to stay at home.

My oldest daughter, I'm teaching her how to cook. She knows how to put pizza in the oven and cook that and nuggets and stuff like that. 'Eat that until Mommy gets home,' or I'll cook and put their food up and tell them to put it in the microwave. Warm it up. Eat that. So they're adjusting. They're adjusting to it.

Cultural differences about childcare practices became a serious hurdle for her. The autonomy of her own apartment came at the cost of living away from her family network. Without her network of family and neighbors in the projects, she struggled to balance what she had to do to feed her children with what she had to do to keep them. As she talked about her experiences with Child Protective Services (CPS) in Texas, she explained how she sent her two youngest daughters to her aunt in New Orleans and her oldest to her cousin in Ohio before the state could take them away.

She made this difficult decision for two reasons. First, she thought that separation would be easier on her children if they were with family instead of strangers. Secondly, she feared fighting the state of Texas to regain custody if they took her children. She did not want to be monitored and forced to prove she could provide adequate childcare to get her children back. She attributed having a black, single mother caseworker, who identified with leaving her children unsupervised to go to work, as the reason her cases were closed after she sent her children away.

Employment was a necessity as families settled into displacement. Even though a few participants had jobs in New Orleans, the pace of recovery created working conditions to which they were not willing to return. For others, New Orleans with its pockets of devastation, missing neighbors, and service-based economy could not offer enough to justify starting over again.

Many participants thought they would find better economic opportunities in Houston. However, experience did not always match expectations. Participants faced several challenges in Houston's economy. These obstacles included being blacklisted from the labor market, dealing with cultural differences, and facing discrimination based on sexuality, physical appearance, and age (Appleseed, 2006; Peek, 2012; Sanyika, 2011). And yet, participants still

chose to work through Houston's obstacles, rather than return to New Orleans. To fully understand the attraction to Houston, educational opportunities must also be considered.

Education themes

At the time of Hurricane Katrina, six of the seven adult participants in case 2 had at least one child. Four of the six were women, and two were men. Of them, three mothers and one father had school-aged children. In this case, only female participants had responsibility for their children during the storm. Both of the fathers, but only one of the mothers rode the storm out in New Orleans. One man did not include descriptions of his children's evacuation experiences, but talked about them in displacement. The other sent his estranged wife and 2-year-old daughter to his wife's family in Dallas, Texas before Hurricane Katrina struck.

Education was a universal concern among all participants in this case. With many of them parents, differences in schools and educational opportunities influenced participants to stay in Houston. Improving the New Orleans school system emerged as a top priority for these participants and a noted deficiency in recovery. As participants recounted their experiences, the following themes emerged: the view of educational systems as a reason to relocate and the lived experiences of education in displacement.

Education as a reason to relocate

In case 2, views of educational differences motivated participants to stay in Houston. Participants thought Houston schools offered a better quality education, better resources, technology, and buildings, in addition to large scale skills testing. They viewed the New Orleans school system as inadequate. To them, New Orleans offered an inferior education and lacked sufficient books, technology, and even space. Miss Jones expressed outrage at the capacity of post-Katrina New Orleans to educate children.

The schools are so swollen that they have to do a lottery for kids to go to school. A lottery? You mean to tell me my child may not have the potential to go to school or get a quality education because they don't have enough schools to go around? That is ridiculous. And they already talk about how behind southern kids are. What is this really doing to them? They're crippling them. And then you have people that don't know any other way of life but New Orleans. They're crippled too, especially if they're other places or if they're so stuck on the spirit of New Orleans that their children can't leave. My mama don't want to leave, so I can't go anywhere. So they're stuck to live [a] mediocre life because that's all their parents know, but now it's even worse because I can't even get a decent education. I don't get it.

Like many parents, she voiced concerns about the effect a New Orleans education would have on children's lives. Many of the mothers in this study thought returning to New Orleans would be disadvantageous to their children's futures. Exposure to higher educational standards prevented some mothers from returning because they hoped their children would have better futures with an adequate education (Appleseed, 2006). Although she knew Houston was better for her family, Miss Jonisha recounted her internal struggle with relocation.

I want to go home, and then every time I would visit it was like I was in a foreign land. I didn't know anybody, and I was like, I can't bring my kids back to this. School systems was to the kaputz, and I was like, I'll just stay here in Houston. But I'll get homesick and want to go home, so we would travel all the time.

Their education school system is very, very, very good. That's probably the only reason that I am here because the school system in New Orleans is not what it used to be, and then it's worser than what it used to be. They got all these charter schools, and the public school system has gone down. You got to either pay for education or put your kids on a waiting list to get into a charter school.

When everyone's finished with school, I'll probably move back, but for right now, I can't take them from what they're familiar with and move them back there, and then it's not what it was. The school system is not what it was.

Even in recovery, participants expressed negative views of the New Orleans school system. Miss Upkins and Mr. Boissiere reported visiting New Orleans to see the good schools of their day shut down or with new names. This created an unsettling sense of unfamiliarity in a familiar place, which highlighted the contradiction between wanting to return home and realizing

home was only a memory. Mr. Dwayne Edwards questioned why it took a disaster to ‘upgrade New Orleans’.

Look what it took to upgrade New Orleans. A hurricane. Now they have new schooling. When I went down there two weekends ago, I seen two or three new schools. Look what it took. Why did it have to take Katrina? Why did it have to take a catastrophe to rebuild New Orleans? That’s why the crime rate is high ‘cause they have no trading school that’s meant for our young Black males in New Orleans. It is what it is.

We had corruption in New Orleans. All these years, where did the money go? Because every year, the state capital gives these states some amount of money for schooling. Where did it go? (pause) We didn’t have no new schools. (pause) We didn’t have any good schools. Everything’s casinos. They building more jails and more casinos than a lil bit. No schools. No trading buildings.

In addition to justifying the state of education in New Orleans, Mr. Edwards linked poor educational opportunities to New Orleans high crime rate. In this, he suggests the creation of trade schools for young Black men as a strategy to reduce crime. Joe Johnson echoed the need for improved facilities and increased educational opportunities to improve class disparities.

They don’t teach people that in the ghetto. They don’t teach people how to start a business and invest in things that people can’t live without. [Recovery is] not just about compensating people, paying them money or whatever, but having programs where people can come in and learn ways to eradicate poverty.

In this case, only male participants witnessed their children return to schools in New Orleans. This created family separation because these fathers stayed in Houston. Dwayne did not want his children to return to New Orleans when he saw Texas schools were superior but did not want the drama associated with separating children from their mothers. While Jason’s daughter was not in school when her mother returned to New Orleans two years after Katrina, his major concern about her returning was “*the state of schooling.*”

The lived experience of education in displacement

While staying in displacement offered access to what was seen as a better educational system, the opportunity came with its own challenges. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, Miss Edith

Jones attended Delgado Community College for nursing. She recounted her frustration as she enrolled in school in Houston.

I was going to school for nursing. The college would not accept my credits. They changed the course work by maybe one or two codings, where the number didn't match up. It's the exact same course, but you wouldn't accept my credits, and I've already taken these courses [but] had to start all over. So what I wind up doing was going to, used to be a school right over here on Forum Place called Sanfaron College. Went there just to do something in the medical field because I felt like my credits were being wasted. I recently, a year ago, no two years ago, went back to college, and I have my associates in communications because again some kind of [way] they accepted my credits. There was no issue of they are not valid credits. This doesn't matter. It's not the same. So hopefully by next year I'll have my bachelor's in technology.

Miss Jones was not the only student forced to start over. Even though Miss Upkins credited a better quality education as a reason to stay, her second grade daughter was placed in kindergarten, which continues to affect her daughter's mental health.

My daughter is doing excellent in school now. When she first came here she just couldn't. These kids are faster paced learners. They are on a totally different system from our kids in New Orleans, so my oldest daughter, she had to repeat kindergarten and first grade because she wasn't reading on their level. She's in the 5th grade now, and she's doing better, but she's supposed to be in the 7th grade. I think that's taking a toll on her because she's older than the majority of her 5th grade class. I still encourage her. 'You're great! You're smart! You're going to be so much better than what you were.' My second daughter, she's excellent. She's an A B student. She would help my oldest daughter because she was reading chapter books in kindergarten, so she would help my oldest daughter with her reading. My oldest daughter was good with numbers, so she would help my younger daughter with the math.

Regina Walker was a middle school student when Hurricane Katrina hit. From her account emerged the behaviors encountered and developed while attending school in displacement. She specifically refers to various schools across Florida. Her experiences resembled the accounts of other participants and those Peek (2012) found in Colorado. In general, she described her experience in terms of being negatively stereotyped and judged by fellow students (Peek, 2012).

I was a loner. [It] was scary enough, having to deal with people that you weren't close to but that you knew all your life, but this is all totally new people, totally new environment. I mean, this was really different. These big schools [had] lots of kids with money, and they wore the best clothes, and we had to go to, I think it was a YMCA, and they were giving free clothes out. We had to wear that, and I felt horrible at that point. They tell you really stupid jokes like, 'oh was that you I saw on the house on the news?'

Her aunt, Barbara Davis, stated her children faced similar attitudes in Katy (Peek, 2012). These attitudes contributed to her daughter getting multiple fights with Texan students. Regina coped by skipping school. Wearing stranger's hand-me-downs only served to exacerbate her awareness of her social class in displacement.

As Mr. Boissiere described his now 8-year-old daughter earning straight A's in New Orleans, one can easily question what that 'A' means. For example, Miss Walker gave the following account.

My grades went down once I moved. Just where my aunt was staying [in Florida] was way more advanced. I thought I did really well [in New Orleans]. I mean I was on the honor roll. I did really well, but when you go to different places, I just realized they are really more advanced. They cover a lot more. They are a bit more anal about the kids, and how they learn, and making sure that everyone gets the right education. So yeah, my grades went down a lot. I would say probably A B average maybe to a B C sometimes D.

Miss Walker's experience illustrated that some students could not maintain the grades they earned in New Orleans as they encountered higher educational standards.

The lived experience of respondents as they entered school in displacement focused on negative events in contrast to their perception of a better educational environment (Peek, 2012). Participants also emphasized the changes to the school system in New Orleans, which they characterized as unsettling and confusing. They portrayed educational opportunity as better in displacement and as a necessity to ensure the wellbeing and success of their children. This motivated the mothers in case 2 to stay displaced until graduation. In case 3, education did not

influence respondent decision-making processes. However, they expressed similar perspectives on housing, employment, and recovery.

Case 3: Participants that Relocated to Houston After They Returned to New Orleans

Case 3 had the fewest participants. The three participants in this case were middle class, men between 30 and 42 years old at the time of Hurricane Katrina. All of them evacuated prior to the storm. Two went to Houston and one evacuated to Atlanta. They reported incomes ranging from \$40,000 to \$90,000 per year before the hurricane; however, post-Katrina they all encountered prolonged periods of unemployment, which ultimately motivated them to relocate to Houston. This case provided insight into men's social networks, which highlighted a gap in the literature.

Participant descriptions

Raymond Davis

Raymond Davis, was a 42-year-old father at the time of the storm. After holding a 'Run Motherfucker Run' party in his French Quarter nightclub, he flew to Atlanta. In October 2005, his social network provided him with a job tip and he returned to New Orleans. After nine months, he was laid off. By then, he and his business partners had reopened the club. As the city recovered, competition grew and the club folded. In September of 2010, he relocated to his sister's [Barbara Davis] house in Katy. At the time of his interviews (September & November 2011), he planned to return as soon as his industry recovers. I met Raymond through Dr. Sanyika.

Lemont Cummings

Lemont Cummings was a 30-year-old homeowner in Gentilly, who worked in marketing and public relations. He evacuated in advance to a relative's house in Houston with his extended family, his girlfriend, and his dog. His girlfriend returned to New Orleans within two months because her law firm was open. He relocated with his job to Pidgin Forge, Tennessee, but returned to Houston within a few months to be closer to family. He and his best friend started a social aid and pleasure club for New Orleanians in Houston, which was featured in the *Houston Chronicle*. At the time of his interview in January 2012, he planned to return in February to marry his girlfriend, now fiancé, in May. I met him through Dr. Sanyika. However, Mr. Boissiere also suggested I interview him.

Marcus Drewsberry

Marcus Drewsberry, a project manager by trade, lived in Kenner with his wife, 6-year-old daughter, and 8-month-old son. They evacuated to Houston before the storm. Their condo sustained minor damage, and at his wife's request, they returned in January 2006. After two months, he was laid off when his company realized the pace of recovery was too slow to be profitable. Unable to find work in New Orleans, the financial strain contributed to his divorce. In 2010, he relocated with his children to Houston because of its economy. At the time of his interviews (September and November 2011), he worked for himself and had no plans to return to New Orleans because of the way the aftermath was handled on all levels of government. I met him through Raymond Davis.

Housing themes

As with all other participants, the three middle class men in case 3 needed shelter after Hurricane Katrina. While one evacuated to Atlanta, the other two evacuated to Houston with

their families before the storm. Two had children; although, only the one who was married evacuated with his children. Case 3 accounts of housing described three distinct areas: reasons to return, decisions to rebuild, and hurdles to return. From these descriptions emerged two themes. First, housing in New Orleans emerged, which encompassed living conditions and decisions to return and rebuild. Secondly, housing assistance in New Orleans emerged as a salient theme, which incorporated a list of challenges to receiving aid in addition to highlighting the role social networks played in providing housing assistance.

Housing in New Orleans

Lemont Cummings was the only participant in case 3 to talk about housing as a reason to return; although, he was not the only homeowner. He recounted his family's decision-making process and their concerns about returning in the immediate aftermath of the storm.

My uncle was here [New Orleans] on the ground with the mayor, so he was giving our family some kind of day-to-day information about when to get back. Our conversations between my parents and myself and my friends was, 'How can we get back down there soon and salvage what we wanna try and get?' We're also hearing all the stories of people that got down a day or two later, stealing from people and looting and going into these people's houses that haven't been affected, so we wanted to go check on our property. We wanted to go see if our stuff was good, which it had been gone through.

In this way, it became apparent that housing did not motivate return in the same way it did for homeowners in case 1. Rebuilding a physical structure because of the importance it had for one's family did not emerge (Luft with Griffin, 2008). Participants in case 3 returned because they and their families identified New Orleans as home. As homeowners, part of Lemont Cummings and Marcus Drewsberry's return process included making a decision to rebuild or sell their homes. The extent of damage to their homes and neighborhoods impacted their decision (Groen and Polivka, 2010). Marcus Drewsberry lived in a condo in Kenner that received little damage.

We happen to be in a condo where our particular elevation was higher than the other houses. My neighbor immediately left of my drive way had two feet of water,

and all I had was a little bit of water, maybe an inch or two, that the wind blew under the door. My neighbor across the street had three feet of water, so it was really just a difference of elevation ...that my place didn't have water. ...We replaced the kitchen floors and shingles on the roof and we were able to continue life. I remember how blessed I was that I didn't have all the rehab to deal with it.

In this account, Mr. Drewsberry illuminated an intersection between housing and healthcare. Because their home did not require extensive rehabbing, which Curtis et al., (2007) indicated as one of many stressors associated with return, Marcus did not express a difficult transition in returning to New Orleans. However, Lemont Cummings and his fiancé's Gentilly home and neighborhood sustained major damages as a result of the levee failure. They ultimately chose to relocate within New Orleans instead of rebuilding their house. This decision was based on their perception of the rebuilding process as time consuming and stressful and their uncertainty of their community's future (Curtis et al., 2007; Nelson et al., 2007). In the interim between returning and buying a new house, he and his fiancé struggled with the lack of available housing in New Orleans to find acceptable living conditions.

December of 05, we started living in what was one of the only places to live, the American Can Apartments. Stayed there for maybe a month and a half, two months before we couldn't take it because the place was infested with rats, and there was nothing they could do about it. Nothing anybody could do about it. But, we just couldn't take it anymore. I mean, it had really gotten to a point where she wasn't even sleeping at the apartment. I might be there by myself trying to catch rats, and she was sleeping by her friend's house, so we left there.

When renter Raymond Davis returned to New Orleans to become a FEMA inspector and reopen his French Quarter nightclub, he and his partners dealt with the lack of housing by adapting their business location to incorporate living space. As Berggren (2006) found in the healthcare industry, post-Katrina adaptation was necessary for survival.

The first three months we lived on the third floor of the club, which [was] at 309 Decatur in New Orleans, called Dream New Orleans. We had the club on the first and second floor, and we kind of turned the third floor into a commune... 'cause there was no hotel rooms. ...In January, one of the guys who used to come to the club all the time, he was a manager of these apartments called the Woodward

White apartments, right down by the convention center. [My partner] was like, 'hey my guys need places to stay.' He was like, 'We gotta honor the people who were here before', so he made a few phone calls and found out this guy wasn't coming back.

His process highlighted the right to return that this apartment upheld for its pre-Katrina residents. The United Nations and international law dictate that internally displaced persons have a right to be able to return to their homes and property, and that governments should assist their citizens in displacement and in return (UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, 1998). Luft with Griffin (2008) indicated social justice advocates adopted an “international human right-to-housing framework” to challenge the treatment of African Americans in displacement and recovery efforts (52). Tenants in this upscale apartment complex had their leases respected, where several renters in cases 1 and 2 reported they never talked to their landlord after Hurricane Katrina. With the commitment to respect pre-Katrina leases, Raymond’s social network shielded him from increased rents.

I was able to take his lease and his payments, so instead of having to pay at that time the gouge price of 16 or 18 hundred dollars for the loft, I still ended up paying about \$850 because of the fact it was made to look like I was living with him before Katrina. ...and that just for a loft. It wasn't even like a one-bedroom, just a loft apartment.

Lemont Cummings also recounted high rents, a challenge that Mr. Drewsberry did not face because he was able to return to his home. Even though Lemont did not rebuild, his experience is representative of homeowners who needed housing in New Orleans until their homes were repaired.

What we were paying for rent was what anybody's mortgage would be and didn't really matter what kind of house you get. The rent was so high you could buy any house and have a smaller mortgage... I mean, [for a] two-bedroom apartment, we was paying 1600 dollars a month, and that's outrageous. Pre-Katrina that's 7, 800 dollar property, maybe a thousand at the most, depending on the quality of it. But 16, 1800 dollars – naw. I mean everybody was getting robbed.

The participants in case 3 framed housing as a process. In this process they encountered housing scarcity and increased rents (Appleseed, 2006; Clark and Rose, 2007; Luft with Griffin, 2008). Within this framework, social networks operated to cover gaps in available assistance (Fussell, 2012; Litt, 2012).

Housing assistance in New Orleans

A detailed description of assistance in New Orleans emerged from case 3's view of recovery. Participants talked about how they received assistance, challenges to receiving assistance, and the role of assistance in recovery. Many recounted receiving support from within their social networks, which yielded connected them to housing (Fussell, 2012; Litt, 2012).

Marcus Drewsberry and Raymond Davis also provided housing assistance to their family.

Marcus was called upon to handle his parents' house in New Orleans East when they were too distraught to return. In 2009, Raymond's daughter returned to live with him, and his apartment became her 'get-away spot'.

The discussion of assistance also brought out a list of obstacles. Mr. Drewsberry's main issue with assistance was its limited scope. Assistance was primarily for rebuilding homes (Appleseed, 2006; Clark and Rose, 2007). However, what Marcus needed was a job to support his family and pay his mortgage. His unemployment issues fell outside the scope of housing, his experience was that there was no assistance available to him and his family.

At the time the only assistance to anyone was, I think they called it, the Road Home money or something like that. I didn't have a home that was grossly affected by the storm. The damage we had to our home was some missing shingles from the wind and the little water that the wind blew in under the door. Even when we replaced the floor and the roofs that wasn't much of anything.

Mr. Davis focused on the impact of race and social networks on receiving aid. He described a recovery climate of inequality in assistance due to race on a structural level as well as the result of individual action.

I noticed a lot of the racial stuff going on in and around the areas of Metairie. These people were getting tons of money where as the Blacks in the inner city were having to fight just to get things done. Some of the things that I saw that were glaring were like just when a person wanted to get FEMA money or Road Home money, and they found out that this person had been living in this house for 20 years, but had never done the succession. Instead of them just making that an easy maneuver, they sent these people through all kinds of things, asking them for documentation they knew they couldn't produce because they were gone. The flood took 'em. Even if I could prove to you that my mother owned this house, the papers were gone. I could only tell you this. I can only tell you that we lived here. I can produce an electric bill or something to show you I lived here all these years, but it was gone, so how was I supposed to do that, in other words?

He blamed the legal plight of succession on a system that lacked educational resources to inform residents of legal issues surrounding succession as well as maintaining pre-Katrina standards of proving homeownership knowing most residents lacked the necessary documentation due to the extensive flooding. A pessimistic view of housing assistance appeared in relation to its overall role in recovery as Mr. Davis discussed the impact of unsuccessfully navigating the assistance process, specifically for families dealing with succession issues.

What happened to that house? It got tied up in so much legal wrangling, people gave up. They went away. So the city would sell that property for pennies. They'd auction it off, and that's when you started seeing all these people coming in, your Donald Trumps and this, buying up big plots of property. That's when they started talking about green space and everything, redeveloping the city.

Marcus Drewsberry perceived an ulterior motive in the design of federal assistance programs.

The whole Road Home program is nothing but an elaborate land sweep device because to get the Road Home money, you have to sign over a voluntary lien on your land or your property, which means it's basically a loan. A lot of those people that took that money and bought a car or did something else with it, they lost that land. Now they didn't have any immediate plans on fixing that land to begin with, but it's still their land. And if you're going to say, 'We're going to give you a grant to fix your land, but we're going to put a lien on your property, so we can take it,' what's the purpose of that, except, you want the property? It's a land grab. It's an old style, western, railroad land grab buy. ...They gonna take the land from all those people that had Road Home money. All those people are gonna find themselves homeless, and the government gonna be the people putting them out, period.

In this assertion, he displayed the deep mistrust within the African American community for the American government (Cordasco et al., 2007; Nelson et al., 2007).

Housing presented many challenges to returning to New Orleans. In this case, housing operated as a necessity to return more than as a motivation for return. As such, most of the conversation around housing in New Orleans highlighted the decision making process of dealing with damages as well as giving vivid descriptions of the living conditions encountered as they struggled to secure adequate housing. Within their view of recovery, assistance appeared as an unexpected hurdle when it failed to meet their needs and the needs of their community. As these participants described employment opportunities in post-Katrina New Orleans, a fuller understanding emerged of their decision making process to return and then relocate, which did not materialize within the context of housing.

Employment themes

As I searched to understand the role employment played in the decision to return to New Orleans and relocate to Houston, time emerged as a salient variable in the decision making process. As I included time into the equation, I began to see the changing state of New Orleans's economic recovery as experienced by these three men. Their experiences highlighted three themes: the benefits of employment, finding work in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina: a reason to relocate, and employment, time, and the decision-making process.

Working in post-Katrina New Orleans had various impacts for the men in case 3. At different times and to different degrees, employment enabled their return to New Orleans and unemployment motivated their relocation to Houston. Some went through these moves many times while others had a single return and a single retreat. In discussing employment, participants gave voice to two distinct areas. First, they described various benefits of employment. After

which, they recounted the struggle to find employment in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, which produced a long list of challenges.

Benefits of the employment

Each participant in case 3 described some benefit they received because of their employment. Lemont Cummings and Marcus Drewsberry discussed the assistance they received from pre-Katrina employers after Katrina. Mr. Cummings was transitioning between positions at Audobon Louisiana Nature Center and at Fairfield Resorts. His experience showcased how employers handled Katrina differently (Appleseed, 2006).

I was a marketing and public relations manager for their East location, which was the [Audobon] Louisiana Nature Center.Audubon laid everybody off basically. ...However, the company I was working for part time, Fairfield Resorts, did some awesome stuff. They gave us stipends for like 2 months. They gave us rental car privileges because they also own Budget Rent-a-Car [and] Avis Rent-a-Car. So for the 200 employees that I knew of that were in the New Orleans area, they gave us a couple stipends and let us rent cars and then gave us an option to move to other properties.

As the day-to-day manager of his company project, Marcus Drewsberry advocated for assistance for his employees. Under his direction, the company advanced employees, who committed to return, six weeks of pay. For two employees in particularly vulnerable positions of homelessness after the flood, he convinced the company to pay for their hotel expenses when FEMA cut them off. While Marcus was able to help his employees, he personally experienced a gap between the assistance he received and his actual needs.

What they did for me was [a] stipend. It wasn't a 'three checks up' thing because my salary was more geared to what the whole branch made. They paid me a flat amount of six thousand dollars to cover my expenses and that helped, but when you're used to making six grand for a month, six thousand to carry you for four months is not going to do it.

As an entrepreneur, Raymond Davis did freelance production work with his business partners in addition to running a club in the French Quarter, so he did not have an 'employer'

from which to seek assistance. However, his business partners connected him to a post-Katrina job opportunity as a FEMA inspector. It was in this role that he described an unexpected benefit of his new job.

One of the things that my FEMA identification got me was access to things that I would not have gotten as a [guy] just rolling up. Once I flash that little piece of paper, then it was, 'Oh oh come on in'. So I got to firsthand walk on the seventeenth street canal. I got to firsthand walk on MRGO. One of the things we always did, myself and John, once we were in the city was we would not go to our job assignments sometime and just go to where we could see [and] try and ascertain what happened.

In his admission to 'ascertain what happened', African American's distrust for the government surfaced (Cordasco et al., 2007; Nelson et al., 2007). Working for FEMA, he often heard 'jokes' that made him question the state of recovery in addition to the reason for the disaster.

They used to joke when I was down there working for them that they were gonna post the National Guard around, and it was gonna be [a] two gold teeth [maximum]. If you had more than two gold teeth in your mouth, you weren't coming back in the city. It was a joke but... I watched this stuff transpire when I was down there.

These 'jokes' in conjunction with personally examining the levee failures led Raymond to express he believed, like some but not all participants, that the levees were intentionally blown and that there "is a concerted deliberate effort to change [the] footprint and dynamics of [New Orleans]". Cordasco et al. (2007) found African American's experiences with Katrina exacerbated their distrust of authority. This distrust undermined the perception of post-Katrina policy changes because African Americans did not think city officials and planners had the best interests of poor minorities in mind when offering footprint reduction strategies of recovery (Nelson et al., 2007).

Finding work in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina: A reason to relocate

As participants recounted employment after Katrina, they focused on their inability to find stable work in New Orleans's changed economy. All three experienced various challenges

to finding and maintaining jobs in post-Katrina New Orleans. While Raymond's social network connected him to employment opportunities that enabled his return, the work did not last long. Lemont and Marcus resorted to commuting to Houston when New Orleans's economy did not provide jobs for either. As unemployment became a major obstacle to maintaining return, their accounts of New Orleans and recovery included the following issues: economic conditions, uncertainty, family separation, and race.

Because their professions depended on a populated New Orleans, the uncertainty of how the city would rebuild affected all three participants ability to find employment. Companies were uncertain how New Orleans would rebuild and who would return. Marcus and Lemont were laid off because there were no people in the city. Initially, their companies were optimistic about operating in post-Katrina New Orleans. However, they realized the pace of recovery was too slow to justify continuing the projects. Marcus went through this process immediately after Katrina while Lemont experienced it two to three years later.

It was hell because it left me without work, looking for work in a market where the only work was construction, and the only workers they wanted to hire were illegal Mexicans or immigrants because they were willing to work for cheap. I had a construction background, but nobody wanted to hire you because they would have to pay me what the scale would be when they could pay three people what they'd have to pay you. So it was very difficult for me to find a job.

Even though Raymond and Lemont suggested it was possible to find employment outside of one's field, Marcus Drewsberry's story suggested otherwise. As he shared his account of searching for work in New Orleans, race stood at the center of his employment experiences in many different ways. He highlighted economic conditions that preferred low-wage, immigrant labor (Fletcher et al., 2006). As such, even with experience, he was shut out of the booming construction industry. As he tried to find jobs in his trade, he perceived racial discrimination in hiring practices as more apparent and more oppressive after the storm than before.

I'm a project manager by trade. There's not a lot of Black people in what I do anyway. The rules and the certifications and the alignments of that industry, I have a lot of background knowledge about it. I know they're designed deliberately to keep us out as a people because the certifications you have to be a project manager guarantees you a minimum salary of 75/year. Most people can live off that. So the fact is frankly they just don't want us living that well. They want to keep that type of stuff to themselves. So because of that, it's always been a challenge for me to find work as a Black project manager in America.

[After Katrina] people would always bring me in for an interview. 'Great, we want to meet you.' When I'd walk in the door, I'd watch jaws drop. 'Oh, he's black.' And I got everything from, 'Okay, we'll call you back,' to one person who just flat out said, 'You're not really what we're looking for'. I said, 'According to your own description, your own words, you said I was.' 'Well, you're not really what I'm looking for,' (rubs hands) and they basically rubbed their hands [and] let me know I'm the wrong skin color. So I said, okay, and I left. I said, 'Well, there's no sense in us wasting each other's time.'

Claims of racial discrimination were not limited to those searching for work in New Orleans. Peek (2012) reported respondents experienced racial discrimination when searching for employment in displacement as well.

Raymond's experience was different from other participants. He returned and profited from the 'post-Katrina gravy train'. However, FEMA hired 'real' inspectors and terminated his three-year contract after nine months. As an entrepreneur able to open in October 2005, recovery meant increased competition and decreased profits. When he recounted closing the club and relocating to Katy, Texas, he offered the following view of Hurricane Katrina.

In a lot of cases a guy who has a terminal disease, right before he passes, he seems to get better. ...I kinda look at it that way. Katrina - got this terminal disease, and right before my economical death happened, after Katrina it got better. But then that terminal illness - the economics, the realizations of the economical impact hit, and it was gone. I mean, it seemed like over night for me. It seemed like I was doing great. Katrina hit. I came back. I was like (whew) this is unreal, and then all of a sudden within a matter of 56 months, it had dried up, so that was kinda the economical death. I had to do something. I'm here, you know.

Unable to find work in New Orleans, participants relocated to Houston.

Employment, time, & the decision-making process

Employment post-Katrina was an unstable experience for all three participants. While initially employment motivated Mr. Drewsberry and Mr. Davis to return to New Orleans, the economy of post-Katrina New Orleans quickly became a push factor, influencing their decision to relocate to Houston. Each came to the realization about the economy at different times. Raymond, who came back because of a 3-year contract with a company working for FEMA, lost his inspector job by the summer of 2006. As the downtown area began to recover, the club profits decreased until they closed down in 2009. In September of 2010 after five years, he relocated to live with his sister, Barbara Davis, in Houston because he was unable to pay his bills in New Orleans. Within three weeks of moving to Houston, Verizon hired him for a steady \$40K/year plus benefits in his field. At the time of his interviews in the fall of 2011, he continued to wait for an economic opportunity to return home.

Marcus returned to New Orleans twice because of his pre-Katrina employment. Immediately following the storm, he assessed the extent of storm damage to the office. Then, with family-in-law, he returned to reopen the office only to have the company terminate his project two months later. From there, he began a long struggle to find employment, which contributed to the failure of his marriage. In August of 2010 after the divorce, he relocated with his children to Houston for better economic opportunities. In the fall of 2011, he was working for himself, enjoying a steady income with no expectation to live in New Orleans again.

Lemont had a slightly different experience. While his job relocated him to Tennessee, his fiancé returned to New Orleans two months after Katrina because her law firm was open. Thus began his commute, helping her find housing in New Orleans and coming to visit. Unable to

handle being separated from his family, he returned to Houston at the turn of 2006, convincing his best friend to join him in a business venture. When he found a steady job in New Orleans in 2007, he returned on a 2-year contract. However within a year, he was laid off. When his relationship ended, he relocated to Houston for a third time in 2009 to find the peace provided by steady housing and employment. As he planned to return to New Orleans again to be married in the spring of 2012, he admitted his income would continue to be based in Houston. Fortunately, he established a means of income in Houston that only requires his physical presence on a monthly basis.

For the middle class men in case 3, employment emerged as an important decision making factor. Employment opportunities motivated and enabled their return to New Orleans. However when their jobs were not sustainable within a changed economy, prolonged periods of unemployment dictated their relocation to Houston. As participants recounted their experiences of searching for work in New Orleans, many obstacles appear, which further pushed them to relocate. In their accounts, time illuminated a pull-push relationship with the economy in New Orleans. After pulling participants to return, economic ‘realities’ set in, and they chose to relocate to find employment in their chosen professions.

Education themes

Case 3 was the only case with exclusive male voices. Two of the three participants had children, but only one lived with his children before Katrina. Even though he had school-aged children, he did not talk about personal experiences with education during his interview process other than to illustrate his role as their primary caretaker before and after Hurricane Katrina. Education did not emerge as a motivating factor in the decision-making process. However, the lived experience of education in displacement appeared as a salient theme.

Lived experience of education in displacement

Experiences with education in displacement were among the challenges two participants described. Their encounters with students and teachers created dissatisfaction in displacement. As Peek (2012) reported “both parents and children had negative encounters with school personnel and students that came to overshadow many of their positive experiences” (41). Raymond was the only participant in case 3 to recount enrolling a child in school in displacement. As Peek suggested, his perception of the school his daughter attended in Atlanta focused on the negative aspects of their experience.

They just took her. No paperwork, no anything. Once I told them we're from Katrina, 'Don't worry about any transcripts, papers, we'll get all of that stuff in time.' We told them what she was. She kind of told them the classes she had. They set her up on her curriculum. ...There were maybe 20 to 30 kids in that school that were from New Orleans. One of the things that really bothered me was that she said they put them all together. I thought that was a bad thing. They made them go to classes, everything together, thinking that that was a support system kind of thing. I'm like, that's crazy. That's crazy because kids can be cruel. You're allowing these kids to say that's the New Orleans group, that's them, as opposed to allowing them to mingle in with the other students. I thought, okay, you're saying bring them in, but then you're isolating them as a group.

To me I think that had some effects on my daughter because she always talked about how the kids would always say, 'Yeah, that's those New Orleans kids,' as opposed to, 'that's just one of the other students.' ...She always liked school, but it was different for her there. She said, 'Yeah, they always say we're from New Orleans, we're bad.' They have this stigma that [if you are from] New Orleans, you were either criminally inclined [or] backwards. By being in a group, you would be picked out easily. They would tell them things like, 'You're from New Orleans; ya'll just want somebody to do something for ya'll. You're looking for handouts,' that kind of thing, so she would say things to me, 'Why do they think because we're from New Orleans, we're bad?' I'm like, 'I don't know.' I said, 'Hang in there, and if you need me, just call me.' She had her cell phone. She would call me some days, 'Come and get me,' and I'm like, 'What do you mean?' And she's like, 'I just don't want to be here.' I'm like, 'You gotta be in school babe, you gotta.' She's like, 'Yeah, but it's tough.'

Raymond and his daughter were not the only ones to experience negative stereotypes in displacement (Peek, 2012). Although Lemont Cummings does not have children, he encountered

the negative impressions some teachers had of New Orleanian students. To cope with Hurricane Katrina, Lemont assisted his cousin's fraternity in Houston as they collected and passed out supplies to those evacuated from the floodwaters to various shelters in the city. In this situation, not everyone realized he was from New Orleans. He recounted a situation that ended in a physical confrontation between him and a teacher.

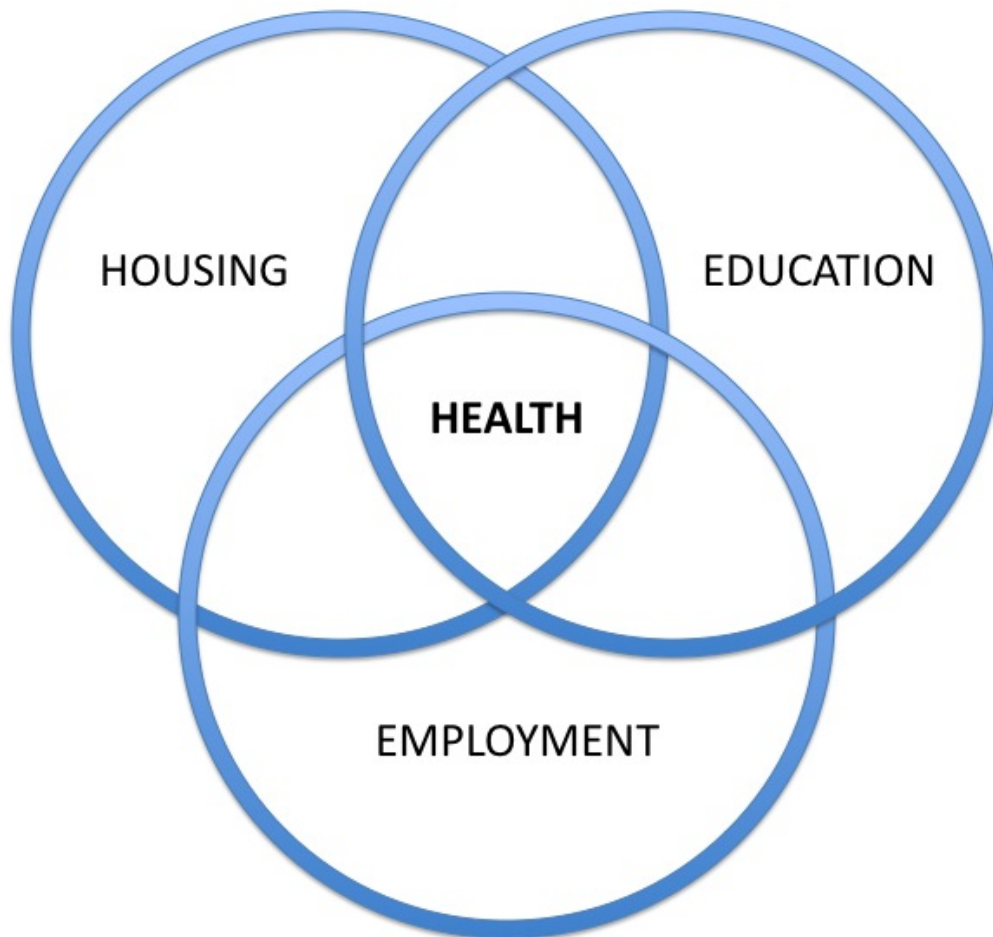
One guy was talking, and evidently he was a teacher. ... I'm listening to one of these gentlemen talking, and he's talking to one of his frat brothers, and he's making just very derogatory, negative comments about the kids that are coming from New Orleans. And this is all in the midst of these kids sleeping on cots on the floor in the stadium, or cots on the floor of a gym of a church or a reception hall somewhere, and this guy's main focus was 'I don't understand why I have to teach people [who] don't know stuff already, catch them up, and not make my bonus. I don't want to have to take on these kids and not make my bonus.'

As Peek (2012) stated, "African Americans were the more frequent targets of stereotypical comments and negative assumptions, ranging from perceived illiteracy to criminality" (45). These accounts of education in displacement illuminated the negative mental health impacts students and parents faced as they entered different educational systems.

The men in case 3 all expressed views of education, but it did not motivate their decision making process. Only Marino Davis included descriptions of interacting with schools in his interview. While it was easy to enroll his daughter in displacement, practices that separated and isolated New Orleans students marred his perspective of the school system. As displaced students were targeted and stereotyped, both the parents and the students recounted negative mental health effects.

CHAPTER FIVE: HEALTH AT THE INTERSECTION OF HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT, AND EDUCATION

Diagram 1: Health



Participants in all three cases framed mental and physical health conditions as a consequence of Hurricane Katrina and the levee failure (see: Appleseed, 2006; Berggren and Curiel, 2006; Coker et al., 2006; Curtis et al., 2007). In this process, health emerged at the intersection of coping with displacement, housing, employment, and educational needs. In the following section, I review how participants framed health in their decision-making processes to return to New Orleans, to stay in displacement, and to relocate to Houston.

Case 1: Returned to New Orleans

Health themes

Within case 1, statements about healthcare centered upon mental and physical conditions that participants and their family members experienced as a result of the storm (Coker et al., 2006; Curtis et al., 2007). A cycle appeared where the negative health impacts on some family members made them burdens to other family members, which increased the negative health impacts on the caregivers. As a whole, health operated to make returning more difficult because strong family members had to carry the weak. This became a hurdle that made returning slower and harder as participants had to compensate for increased family caretaking responsibilities.

Impact of Hurricane Katrina and the levee failure on mental and physical health

A list of mental and physical health effects emerged amidst descriptions of participants' lived experiences as they made and carried out plans to return to post-Katrina New Orleans. They listed depression, disorientation, anxiety, anger, high stress levels, as well as becoming an 'emotional wreck' as mental effects (Appleseed, 2006; Coker et al., 2006; Curtis et al., 2007). Physical health impacts included: high blood pressure, abnormal body functions, physical deterioration, memory loss, forgetfulness, and exhaustion (Appleseed, 2006; Berggren and Curiel, 2006; Coker et al., 2006).

A cycle of deteriorating health and increased family caretaking responsibilities

Thomas Stevens described the emotional disconnection within his family that became a major obstacle to his personal recovery.

It was more of an emotional disconnection, more of a lack of camaraderie within the family, more or less, that caused most of the struggles and problems. Nobody was on the same page. Everybody was dealing with their own issues in their own way and [had] their own agenda. And with that being said, the good had to suffer for the bad.

As Thomas indicated, Hurricane Katrina and the levee failure affected family members differently. For Thomas and Paulette Watson, the deteriorating health of their loved ones created increased family caretaking responsibilities that impacted their personal health and experience of return (Curtis et al., 2007). Negative health effects made returning more difficult because they increased the responsibilities of stronger family members, who, in essence, carried the weak.

After Hurricane Katrina, Paulette, who took care of her elderly mother, had the added responsibility of caring for her partially blind brother, who was in a nursing home in New Orleans when Katrina struck. Her brother's health conditions led to amputations in January of 06. At that point, she began commuting to care for her brother who was transferred to an amputee nursing home. She explained, "I was just so tired because my mama had become like really dependant on me. And she was getting forgetful, and her body functions was doing things that wasn't normal for her." In this example, she positioned her mental health condition as a result of caring for her mother's deteriorating physical condition.

Thomas Stevens also experienced added family responsibility as a result of his father's health condition post-Katrina. Many participants described feeling depressed after Katrina. However for Thomas's father, it was debilitating.

He didn't want to go to church. He didn't want to eat. He didn't want to leave his room basically. He had to be; he had to be suffering from depression. That's what it was. It was evidently clear that he was suffering from depression. He just didn't want to deal with it, and he wasn't receptive to any help. He just wanted to exist but not exist.

When called upon to collect his father from displacement due to his severe depression, Thomas assumed responsibility for his father's wellbeing. A cycle of deteriorating health became visible as participants cared for their loved ones. As changes in health increased family caretaking responsibilities, the caretakers experienced an added level of stress that compounded the negative health effects they reported. When Miss Watson recounted juggling what she needed to

do to return with caring for her mother and brother, she stated, “I just was stressed out worrying, and my pressure stayed high because I was just so stressed. I was truly stressed out when I came back here.” Thomas spoke of his mental/emotional state in relation to caring for his family as well. Although, he indicated that his struggle continues.

I'm telling you I was an emotional wreck for years. For years, an emotional wreck from the stressful situation in the spring 05 'til (shoo) I can't even say now 'cause my brother in jail and been in jail for 3 years for nothing, so we're still dealing with it.

To cope with the situation, both called upon their social networks. When possible, they relocated their family members within the family network to members who were not residing in New Orleans, which worked out to varying degrees as they still retained a certain amount of responsibility. Ultimately, they were only released from this increased responsibility when their loved ones died. As Mr. Stevens described caring for his father, the role of his social network became visible as it helped him mediate the increased responsibility.

My dad, well hell, I, we couldn't handle taking care of him, so he wind up leaving to go stay with his sister because my aunt, her daughter, and her four kids lived in Texas after the storm, so he went out there, I guess, quote unquote to help with the kids. He didn't make no money and no attempts to do anything for himself after Katrina. I took care of him to the day he died. I took care of him when he was in Texas too. When it came to some of the medical stuff, my aunt, she's some type of nurse, so she kind of forced him to go to the hospital and get things checked out because he was a diabetic. And you know, diabetics gotta eat [a] certain way, take your medications, and all that stuff, and he neglected all of his health. He neglected everything. He basically was deteriorating in his flesh before my eyes.

Miss Watson's social network could not to mediate her increased responsibilities to the same extent that Thomas experienced (Litt et al., 2012). As the matriarch of her family, she expressed that there was no one to help her with her mother because her only sibling was in a nursing home and her children were too distressed from Katrina to handle the handful her mother had become. While she did not have help with her mother, her ex-sister-in-law helped with her brother for a period of time.

Then he went into [an amputee] nursing home, and that's where he's [stayed] at until his ex-wife came to get him, and they moved to Atlanta. I had to commute back [and] forth to see about him because she left him, and he was partially blind, and he was an amputee, so I had to take care of him plus my mom and my son. It was kinda rough for me, as a single person, trying to do all of this.

Although she had assistance, it brought new challenges as caring for her brother in Atlanta required a six-hour commute.

Hurricane Katrina and the extensive flooding that followed impacted lives in many different ways. Participants in case 1 described the mental and physical health impacts they suffered as a result of a prolonged displacement and difficult struggle to return to normalcy in Orleans (Curtis et al., 2007). Most troublesome were the increased responsibilities that some participants had to assume in order to provide for their loved ones who suffered debilitating health impacts in the wake of Katrina. Caring for family created more stress that compounded the negative health effects these caretakers experienced as they struggled to survive after the storm. Their experiences were not so different from participants in case 2. However, they chose to return while those in case 2 linger in displacement.

Case 2: Still Displaced

Health themes

As case 2 participants referenced healthcare many of their statements focused upon the mental and physical health impacts they and their family members experienced as a result of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. A list of coping mechanisms and sources of stress also emerged from within their stories as they described these effects. In addition, a view emerged of New Orleans's recovery and of healthcare as a cause for relocation.

Impact of Hurricane Katrina and the levee failure on mental and physical health

Multiple sources of stress affected the mental and physical health of participants (Curtis et al., 2007; Berggren and Curiel, 2006; Coker et al., 2006). The mental effects participants described included fearing water and rain, being in denial, and feeling tired, depressed, devastated, stressed, angry, and anxious (Berggren and Curiel, 2006; Coker et al., 2006). Physical responses included false labor pains, high blood pressure, pre-term delivery, and death (Berggren and Curiel, 2006; Buekens, Xiong, and Harville, 2006; Coker et al., 2006). Participants described various coping mechanisms such as smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, crying, praying, focusing on the present, using drugs, finding God, moving repeatedly, home schooling, and relocation (Cepeda et al., 2010; Jenkins, 2012).

Many sources caused this debilitating stress (Curtis et al., 2007). Being labeled, fitting into new environments – especially schools, being unable to return, being pregnant during displacement, experiencing family separation, being unable to find employment, accessing assistance and healthcare, being displaced, lacking counseling to process these experiences, lacking stable housing, and the government's delayed response in rescuing New Orleanians from the floodwaters were all given in the context of creating stress that impacted their health and their decisions about returning to New Orleans.

While the events following Hurricane Katrina changed access to healthcare inside of New Orleans, displacement to a non-storm damaged area did not necessarily result in better access to healthcare. Working class, single mother, Jonisha Upkins left Mississippi in search of stability and a doctor to help her through the second half of her pregnancy.

I didn't have a doctor. They wouldn't take my Medicaid, so I had to apply for Medicaid here, but at first they were saying we can go to any doctor without Medicaid. They'll just bill it back to Louisiana, and then there was a puff. I was a high-risk patient, and I was so far along; no one really wanted to take me. I

finally got in with a doctor in Stan Edwards, but I had to drive all the way to Galveston to have my baby.

My blood pressure was high, so I called my youngest daughter's dad because he was here. I asked him to drive out there with me and he did. We got into it in the hospital, and he just disappeared. He left me. So I was there having a baby [with] no family 'cause my aunt was at home with my other two kids and (pause) he just... left and... I had her two days before Christmas. And by myself scared to death because they was like anything can happen. You have high complications. You can die because of the blood pressure being so high. So I was scared.

As Miss Jonisha continued her story, pre-term labor was only the beginning of her stressful journey with having a child in displacement.

They induced me, and I had a c-section. And I was just scared. Really, really scared. He went to Mississippi to be with his family for Christmas and left us there. That was devastating because I wouldn't ever think he would do that, but he did. And then they released me the day after Christmas, but they didn't release her. She was in ICU, and they were telling me that I could go live in the Ronald McDonald house. I was like, 'I have two other kids. I have to go home to my two other kids,' and the doctor was like, 'Well if I release you and you're on all this medicine if you have an accident, we can't be held liable.' So I have to sign a paper to be released from under his care to go home to take care of my other kids. And I drove back, stitches and all, high on medicine praying all the way home that I get there, made it home and got to spend time with my other kids.

I wanna say two weeks after that I went to driving backwards and forth to see my baby. They finally released her after she made a month. I think she was 4 lbs 6 oz when they released her, and she was on special formula. I was like, I just want my baby to come home. And I [would] go and see her probably twice out the week. Drive out there, and see her with my other kids. She did pretty good. She did pretty good. She was eating good and everything. I would call every day, talk to her nurses and ask how she was doing and tell them that I would be in the next day to come and see her... [to] have her prepared. I bought her some things, little nighties, to sleep in. She would cry after I would leave, and I was like, 'Don't tell me that,' 'cause that drive me crazy. Make me want to stay there all the time, and I just couldn't do it 'cause I had two other kids I had to take care of. My aunt's pretty good about taking care of them, but there's nothing like mommy being at home. They finally released her, I wanna say January, and we took her home. I had to bring her to the doctor a week or so after they released her, but I was happy to have her back at home.

Jonisha Upkins's experience contrasted that of married, middle class, Lisa Wilson. In the third trimester of pregnancy, Miss Wilson and her family evacuated to Houston before Katrina. While she gave birth to a healthy little girl, prenatal testing indicated that their child had Downs

Syndrome. She expressed feeling stress because they were separated from the family network she had prepared to assist in raising a Downs baby and because her insurance company was unavailable. She had to reconcile her place of need with her conception of her social class.

I do not know if I have insurance or not. Everything was local. The insurance company's in Baton Rouge. The entire state of Louisiana is not functional, and these 1800 #s are Baton Rouge. I'm like, no one's ready for any of this. So I had to just get tagged with the rest of the people. I had a head start, but I was just as bad as the people that were rescued. I did not understand what I needed even when I filled out the application for food stamps. I was denied because I talked about my life as if I still had it.

The aid she attracted from strangers in Houston bridged the gaps she encountered in the available government assistance. Even though she experienced pre-term labor pains, too, she carried her daughter to full-term. The strangers who adopted her family in Houston came to the hospital and assisted them through the delivery process by watching their 4-year-old son and becoming a new 'family' support system.

Healthcare as a reason not to return

In addition to the lived experience of health and healthcare in post-Katrina displacement, participants also expressed a view of New Orleans recovery. Following her interview, Lisa Wilson and her husband related their realization that without pediatricians in the city they had no way to take their newborn to wellness checkups to know how much she weighed or to get vaccinations. While her husband commuted for months to repair their house and to work with his client base, they finally decided the slow pace of recovery to provide healthy living conditions, hospitals, and doctors, meant their family had a better quality of life in Houston (Appleseed, 2006; Berggren and Curiel, 2006; Sanyika, 2011).

Healthcare also motivated relocation as a coping mechanism to deal with the continued, highly visible devastation in New Orleans. As Jonisha Upkins described visiting New Orleans

with the intention to return, she recounted how the physical environment was more than she could bare.

I would always say I want to move back home, and then when I go home and I'm driving around, everything is still looking like the hurricane hit. You still have cars turned over. The Lower 9th Ward, where my middle daughter's grandmother lived, I go over there, and it's like a foreign land. But Canal Street, French Quarters, all that is back to up and running. But everything in the outside and the surrounding areas is just still damaged. You're driving by, and you're seeing all these signs on the houses and I was like, 'I just can't... I can't do it. I can't do it.' But every time I would come back to Houston, I would keep chronically depressed, sick to my stomach, can't eat for a couple of days, and stay locked up in my room in the dark and cry. I just wanted to go back home, and I've been here now, six years, so three years, it took me three years adjust to Houston.

Even though relocation prevented Jonisha from seeing the destruction firsthand day after day, ultimately, it did not shield her from the negative mental and physical health effects that continued displacement represented for many participants (Curtis et al., 2007; Berggren and Curiel, 2006; Coker et al., 2006).

Healthcare for participants who never returned to New Orleans impacted their lives in a variety of ways. While the continued devastation in New Orleans limited access to healthcare professionals, it was the mental, emotional, and physical health impacts that participants ultimately chose to highlight in recounting their experiences post-Katrina. As they told their stories, their understanding of healthcare post-Katrina was most frequently reported as the lived experience at the intersection of housing, employment, and educational concerns.

Case 3: Relocated to Houston After Return

Health themes

Case 3 comments about healthcare condensed into statements about mental and physical reactions to the storm, coping mechanisms, compounding sources of stress, views of the healthcare industry, and time. From these statement three themes emerged, which included:

compounding sources of stress and coping mechanisms, death as a consequence of return, and the impact of relocation on health.

Compounding sources of stress & coping mechanisms

In this case, Participants framed the lived experience of health as compounding sources of stress. As Curtis et al. (2007) mapped ‘the geography of stress’, they also described successive sources of stress that New Orleanians encountered before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina and the levee failure. The first source of stress was the initial trauma from the destruction of everything they knew (Curtis et al., 2007). Marcus Drewsberry described it as “*heartbreaking and depressing in so many ways that I don’t think [there’s] anyone who didn’t feel some state of depression over seeing it.*” A second source of stress was the watching people suffer and the sluggish response of the government to provide assistance, which exacerbated African Americans’ distrust for the government following Katrina (Cordasco et al., 2007). A third source is being kept out and unable to return.

Beyond dealing with the emotional aspects of dealing with the losses of the people, fine. That’s something that’s going to happen, and eventually time heals all wounds. We will come around and learn to deal with that as people. The fact that you’re not letting me back in my house to do that, to find myself... One of the things that will help a person to heal is if that red chair was in my house and it got destroyed, the fact that I can look at it and close that chapter helps. When I’m not allowed home to close those chapters that’s the disconnect. That’s what the people in Houston and Atlanta and those other big cities don’t understand, is that we are a displaced people...

As Raymond indicated, dealing with the residents of the cities in which they found themselves displaced, where participants were frequently stereotyped and discriminated against, also added stress, especially when their children encountered discriminatory treatment in schools (Curtis et al., 2007; Peek, 2012). Increased family responsibilities and finding bodies were further sources of stress experienced by participants in case 3. Marcus not only had the

responsibility of cleaning up his home to ensure it was safe for his family to return, he also described his parents' mental state and how that added to his responsibilities.

My parents were so distraught. All this time, they have yet to go back to New Orleans East. They never went back. My mom could not deal with seeing her house that way, so she asked me to do everything. She refused to go back and see it. She just couldn't. To this day, she couldn't bring herself to look at that house. She doesn't want to see what it looks like now, and it's really sad.

Both men also had the experience of finding bodies, which Mr. Davis described as the most traumatic part of his entire post-Katrina experience. Many New Orleanians have heard of people returning to find deceased loved ones inside homes, where search parties spray-painted that there were no fatalities. As an inspector for FEMA, Raymond's depicted how his job of assessing houses led him to find bodies and the trauma he experienced as a result.

We walked from house to house in these neighborhoods cracking walls. But the problem with that was, as we got into these houses, we started finding bodies. (pause) And to this day I've never even talked to anybody. I've never even talked to you [Marcus] too much about that, my family, because that's the most traumatic thing for me. Me and John talk about it sometimes. We talk about that smell. When you put on your hardhat with your light and you go up in the attic and you look and you see three or four bodies. They say the official count is 1800 or something. That's bullshit. That's bullshit. I tell you, it's bullshit. I know. When I hear people saying stuff like that I want to punch them in the mouth because I know better. I know better, and that was one of the things that really got to me. Because they still haven't found most of the people that died in that storm. Most of the people that died in that storm are out to sea. That water came in and left.

When Marcus investigated the smell of death across the street from his godmother's home, he found the body of a woman he knew.

The lady that lived across the street, she was dead in her home, and no one found her. I found her, and just out of curiosity. I was looking at the houses, and I walked over to the place, and I smelled the smell of dead bodies. I kicked open the door, and she was laying there. She had been eaten partially by animals. I'm not sure if it was alligators or some other type of animals, but there were piles of her flesh that were eaten off. It was... it was horrible. And I remember, I remember walking out and throwing up at the sight of it and calling 911. And I stayed there until 911 came, and it took them three hours to come. And I will never forget that I waited for three hours for a woman that I had never said more than hello to in passing if she had happened to look my way. And I remember the markings in the

home that identified whether a body was there or not, so the coroners office could come by and pick up. Someone had marked the house empty, and the first thing you saw when you walked in the doorway was a dead body, so they hadn't even done that. They just marked it, and kept moving. I remember thinking I would never want someone to treat my remains that way. I remember thinking whoever decided to mark this house I hope no one ever comes to your funeral because no one deserves to be treated that way.

He associated his trauma and the neglect of the dead woman's corpse to rescue workers who did not search houses. Cordasco et al. (2007) asserted hurricane evacuees in their study reveal distrust of rescue workers in addition to perceived authorities.

Even though these best friends had similar experiences of finding bodies, Raymond admitted he never openly shared his experiences with Marcus. Finding the bodies caused stress in its own right as graphic images participants cannot easily forget. However, that stress was compounded as they were silent about their experiences, not even sharing them with family. In addition, seeing how their discovery fit into the scheme of recovery also added stress. Raymond still reacts negatively when he hears people speak of Katrina's death toll. Marcus realized when the search party failed to do their job he and others suffered. He also mentioned the disrespect inherent in leaving the dead unfound to rot and be eaten by animals.

As a result of these compounding sources of stress that demanded immediate reaction, participants described the following mental and physical effects – headaches, anxiety, depression, anger, frustration, high blood pressure, and death (Appleseed, 2006; Coker et al., 2006; Berggren and Curiel, 2006). Their coping mechanisms included self-medication with alcohol, aspirin, and food, friends, and relocation.

I remember the headache that I had like it was yesterday because it seemed to last forever. I remember taking aspirin after aspirin and pill after pill trying to get rid of it, and I just couldn't. My anxiety level was really high. I remember actually getting a drink and trying to just lay down and go to sleep. ~ Marcus Drewsberry

Death as a consequence of return

Out of the multiple sources of stress, death as a consequence of returning to post-Katrina New Orleans emerged and became the most salient theme. While Raymond and Marcus described finding the bodies of nonfamily members in their process of returning to New Orleans, both also experienced death within their families as they attempted to return to New Orleans. Raymond asserted,

I get angry at this point because I lost people. I lost family. I lost friends, not just in Katrina, after Katrina. I had to identify an uncle. My aunt was in Dallas. He came back to check on the house, and he ended up getting killed.

His words emphasized that Katrina killed in many ways. It was not only during the storm or as the waters flooded the city that people lost their lives. In his first interview Marcus Drewsberry remarked, “Luckily, no one that I knew [and cared for] personally passed away because of the storm.” However, in his second interview he reported that six family members have died in the past three years.

Since September of ‘09, I lost six family members. They all were health issues. My grandmother’s was actually long term. She was living here in Louisiana when the storm happened. She came back, and she had to leave and go to Shreveport because she got sick and developed a bronchial infection from inhaling mold wherever she was. [She] kinda lingered on and lingered on for about 6 years before she actually [passed]. She had other ailments too. But she died because of the bronchial infection. Cousin Jack, more than anything, [it was] just stress. Stress of working two jobs and living in the conditions he was living in being in Louisiana at that time. I would definitely blame that on the circumstances of the aftermath of the storm. The same thing with Mark. Mark didn’t have a heart problem until the storm. When he came back, he had a heart condition, and they had to put the stint in his heart. So those are three that I would definitely say, yes, it had to do something with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

While he very easily attributed three of the deaths to Katrina, he stated cases could be made to relate the other three to Hurricane Katrina as well. In their stories, death was not only a cause of stress as they dealt with the loss of loved ones. They very strongly expressed that death was a consequence of returning to New Orleans, not just a result of the initial impact.

The role of relocation in health

Relocation presented a contradiction in how it affected health. For some, displacement relieved health issues; for others it undermined mental health. For Mr. Davis, it operated as a source of stress, which he depicted as a ‘mental necrosis’.

I hate to sound like I'm complaining, but I am. I am. It's something that's really deep for me to the point of it's almost a necrosis, a mental necrosis for me. You know what necrosis means? When bones become hard and brittle, and it doesn't take much to break them. That's how I am mentally when it comes to dealing with the fact that I'm not home because it doesn't take much to break me. I mean, it wouldn't take much to break me. I know that because am I good mentally? Hell No. Can I cope with it? I'm doing all right with it, but I know it wouldn't take much to (cracking sound) to crack that.

While he found stable housing and employment in Houston, returning to displacement because of a lack of options for survival in New Orleans has prevented him from feeling at peace with his current living situation. Marcus Drewsberry also discussed the negative impacts of relocation on his children.

I watched my daughter from being a happy, well adjusted at the time seven, eight-year-old to having an eating disorder where she handles stress by eating more. I watched my son kind of develop a homesickness because our home in New Orleans is all he's ever really known. So when we moved [to Houston], he wanted to go back to where he felt a sense of peace and unity from. That he didn't have here because his mom wasn't here.

Within the same family, relocation affected people differently. His children's health became an issue after he relocated to Houston; however, Mr. Drewsberry's health improved significantly.

I found that since I've been gone, and I've been here for a little over a year now. I used to take blood pressure medicine. I don't anymore. I was 275 lbs when I was there. I'm a 185 now. Basically, I'm about 5 lbs away from my goal weight of where I want to be. I used to have headaches everyday. I've had a handful of headaches in a year. My stress level is greatly diminished even though I've had my own struggles here in Houston. I still don't have that central stress that I had in New Orleans.

Lemont Cummings presented another role of relocation as he described his motivation for returning to Houston in 2009.

My story is that for two years, three years after Katrina and maybe even more, maybe four years. I don't think I've lived in one place longer than 6 or 7 months. I was constantly, constantly moving, and I have a dog, so my dog was always constantly moving with me, too. ...Just trying to find a situation to be at peace. That's kinda why I moved to Houston. Let me go over here and see. I know I'll find a place to live. I know I'll find some work, and I know I can just be in one place for an extended period of time, and even if I didn't like it, I can just relax.

In his experience, relocation acted as a coping mechanism. The stability it provided offered relief from the constant struggle to find employment and secure adequate housing, which in conjunction with relationship issues forced Lemont to move repeatedly for several years following the storm.

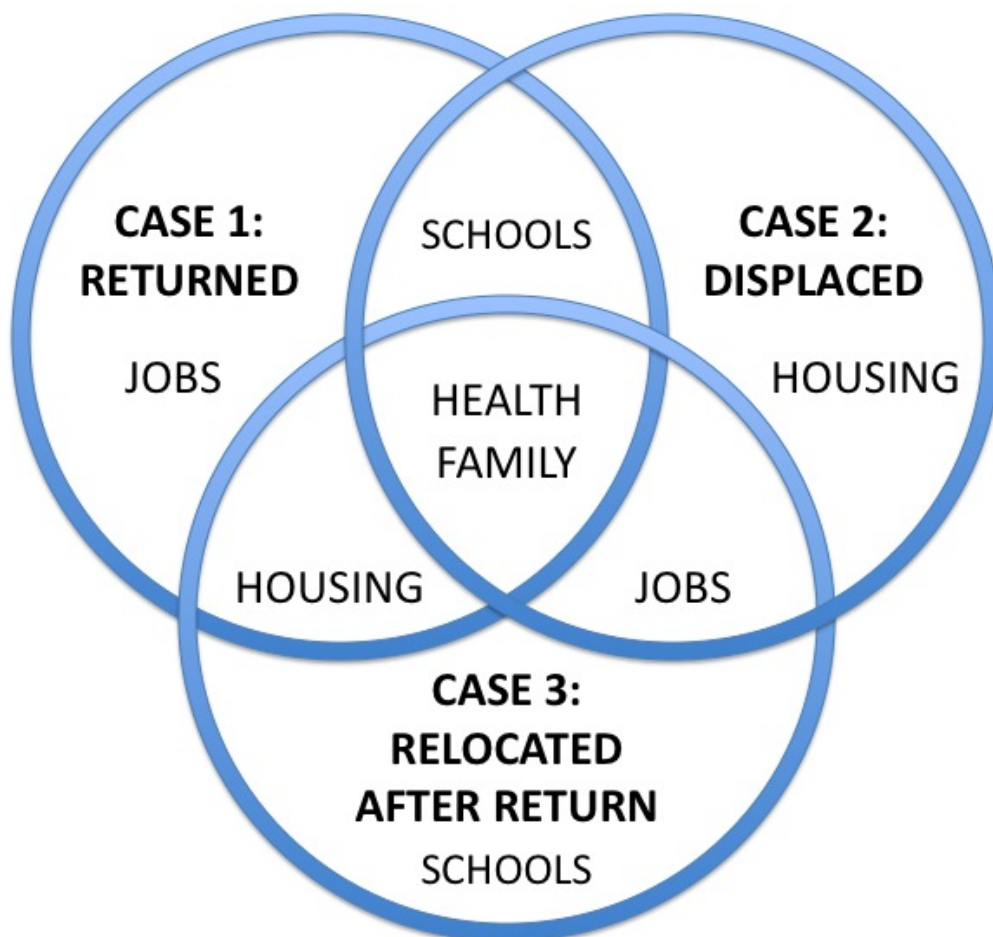
For the participants in case 3, the decision to leave New Orleans and relocate to Houston was not motivated by lack of healthcare infrastructure. However, the mental and physical effects of the compounding sources of stress tipped the scale in favor of relocation when combined with other factors, predominately lack of employment opportunities. Even though life in Houston contained its own stress, Marcus Drewsberry described “*the stress here is more of a manageable gauge because I feel there's a way out. Where as in New Orleans, I felt like it was just a crab bucket. You know, anytime I got to the rim, something else was pulling me back down.*”

As the literature indicated, all participants reported negative mental and physical health effects, which they attributed to the stress caused by Hurricane Katrina and the levee failure (see: Appleseed, 2006; Berggren and Curiel, 2006; Coker et al., 2006; Curtis et al., 2007). However, changes in health affected decision-making processes differently across cases.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Exploring the decision-making process of African Americans following Hurricane Katrina, I came to understand how these individuals interacted with social institutions. They developed strategies for individual survival. Participants relied heavily upon social networks to make ends meet in displacement and in New Orleans. In the following sections, I analyze themes between cases and conclude with a discussion of policy implications and human agency. I also highlight limitations of this study and offer suggestions for future research.

Diagram 2: Cross Case Analysis



Cross-Case Analysis

There were many similarities and differences in the themes that emerged in each case. In each interview, participants expressed a deep desire to return to New Orleans. However, post-Katrina New Orleans was not the New Orleans they knew, remembered, or loved. Each participant resolved this conflict differently. Some returned and adapted to the new climate in New Orleans while others returned to visit but not to stay. Housing, employment, education, and healthcare emerged as vital components of their decision-making process. However, their influence varied between cases. In addition to these four categories, participants spoke of many other variables that impacted their decisions to return. These emergent elements, such as the New Orleans Police Department, political corruption, and the lack of people will be discussed as areas requiring further research.

Housing themes between cases

Each case contained a discourse on housing needs and experiences. *Becoming established in displacement* emerged as a theme in case 1 and case 2 but not in case 3. Although, case 3 participants, all middle class males, included their evacuation & displacement process, they focused their housing discussion on their experiences in New Orleans after they returned. Whereas in cases 1 and 2, participants recounted the process by which they secured adequate housing for their families. Many participants expressed being pulled to settle in Houston as a result of social networks and the large-scale housing assistance program (Appleseed, 2006).

Participants in cases 1 and 2 found the voucher program was not the only aid available in Houston. Many also received assistance from strangers. Although, more so in case 1 than in case 2. Three of the five participants in case 1 received help from strangers that they met via their social networks, at shelters, or at hotels. Only three of the eight participants in case 2 recounted

similar experiences. For these six participants, adding these strangers into their networks bridged the gap between their material and emotional needs and the available federal assistance (Litt, 2012).

Even though cases 1 and 2 recounted similar experiences becoming established in Houston, housing impacted their decisions to return differently. In case 1, a clear class divide emerged. Housing became a motivating factor to return for homeowners because of the meaning of their house (Luft with Griffin, 2008). However, securing affordable housing became a major obstacle for renters (Clark and Rose, 2007; Luft with Griffin, 2008; Litt, 2012). Participants in both cases spoke of high rents and deplorable living conditions as impediments to their return (Appleseed, 2006; Luft with Griffin, 2008).

In case 2, housing became a reason not to return. Participants were primarily renters unwilling and unable to pay inflated rents for substandard housing (Appleseed, 2006; Clark and Rose, 2007). A working class, single mother of three cited the demolition of her apartment in the St. Bernard Housing Development as her main hurdle to return (Luft with Griffin, 2008). In contrast to the older homeowners in case 1, case 2's only homeowner, in her mid-30s, stated housing was not enough to motivate her family to return (Groen and Polivka, 2010). As housing resources intersected with employment, education, and healthcare opportunities, which were easier to access in Houston, she and her husband decided New Orleans could not offer the quality of life they experienced before the storm (Appleseed, 2006).

Housing did not motivate return or relocation for the participants in case 3; even though, 2 of the 3 participants were homeowners. They, like all participants, expressed a desire to assess damages. However, possibly because they were younger, they did not express the same attachment to place the older homeowners did (Groen and Polivka, 2010). Instead, for these three

men housing operated as a necessity when they returned to work in the New Orleans (Appleseed, 2006).

It was within the discourse describing the experience of housing in post-Katrina New Orleans that case 3 emerged as a subset of case 1. Similar to experiences in case 1, social networks enabled participants in case 3 to find acceptable housing conditions in post-Katrina New Orleans (Fussell, 2012; Litt, 2012; Litt et al., 2012). In case 3, a complex view of a middle aged, single man's social network emerged. He depicted his social network as relationships constructed around employment that were able to provide housing. The other men in case 1 and 3 also found housing via their social networks; however, they received aid from family members, both male and female, and from non-related women.

In addition to social networks, participants in cases 1 and 3 had similar perspectives on the effectiveness of assistance in post-Katrina New Orleans. With recovery funding focused on landlords and homeowners (Appleseed, 2006; Clark and Rose, 2007), participants in each case cited the limited scope of the available aid as an obstacle to their recovery. Even if they qualified for this assistance, it did not meet their needs. The only participant who received Road Home funding is still working to cover the gap between the funds she received and the cost of repairing her home (Clark and Rose, 2007).

Employment themes between cases

Employment was a common need among participants in all cases; although, they each presented a different perspective and experience with working after the storm. As such, different themes emerged in each case. However, the themes represented various angles of how employment affected the decision-making process to return to New Orleans or to choose relocation.

Case 1 was the only case where *becoming established in displacement* appeared as a salient employment theme. In displacement jobs provided income to cover the assistance gap (Appleseed, 2006). A middle class male truck driver, who found employment quickly in Houston, depicted another type of benefit when employment intersected with healthcare, “*I didn’t really feel what the other people felt. It’s the people who didn’t have a trade, who were starting over, really starting over. I didn’t feel that because it was just, ‘Okay, you were down for two weeks. Now you can keep on going’.*” In contrast, only one participant in case 2, a barber and a musician, was able to find employment quickly in Houston. Even though he stayed in his trade, he still expressed a sense of starting over because he had to rebuild his client base. Finding a job quickly was atypical for most within my study; although, those who returned did not emphasize it as those in case 2 did (see: Appleseed, 2006; Peek, 2012)

Where case 1 related employment in terms of establishing themselves until their return, participants in case 2 focused on the struggle to find work in displacement. Thus, the *lived experience of working in Houston* emerged as a salient theme for case 2. Many participants recounted difficulties securing a job in displacement (Appleseed, 2006; Peek, 2012; Sanyika, 2011). Most experienced a long period of unemployment before they found work. Many perceived this due to employers’ reluctance to hire New Orleanians when they were uncertain if displaced residents would stay long-term (Peek, 2012). Some case 1 participants mediated this situation through their social networks, which linked them to job opportunities; however, some expressed difficulty finding employment (Fussell, 2012; Peek, 2012). Others hurdles case 2 participants described were age, race, appearance, culture, and sexual orientation in addition to negative stereotypes of New Orleanians (Peek, 2012). Two working class, single mothers cited Texas employment policy as a hindrance to their sense of security (Sanyika, 2011). One

exclaimed, “*This is a Republic state, so it’s ‘at will’. If you lose your job, you damn near got to pull teeth out to get your unemployment, and they wonder why people go postal and wanna kill everybody* (laughs).” The other recounted,

Here, I don’t know what tomorrow’s going to bring especially with that ‘at will’, where I can come in tomorrow, and they can say they don’t like the way my hair is, and they can just fire me. They don’t have to answer to nobody. I won’t get any unemployment benefits. That is nerve wracking, very nerve wracking. To say I got to bite my tongue because you done did something to offend me, but because you’re in charge and you can let me [go] today or tomorrow, I can’t say anything. Don’t stop me though. I mean that is very nerve wracking. Where as to if someone fires you in New Orleans, they have to answer to the workforce, you have to prove what this person did. Where your witnesses at? It’s just a whole different ball game here. Whole different ball game now.

Even with an undermined sense of security and a sometimes hostile job market, participants in case 2 chose to work it out in Houston over returning to the corruption, poor economy, and inadequate education in New Orleans.

From each case emerged a theme expressing the relationship between employment and the decision-making process about returning to New Orleans. Within case 1, employment operated as a means to stay after return more than a motivation for return, except for a single mother on the verge of retirement. In case 2, concurrent push-pull processes emerged where the perception of conditions in New Orleans pushed while those in Houston pulled participants to accept relocation (Sanyika, 2011). For case 3, time interacted with economic conditions to first pull participants back to New Orleans only to push them to relocate later.

Together these themes illustrate the complexity of employment’s influence on participants’ post-Katrina decision-making process. Case 1 related the process by which they returned. This process included finding stable employment. Employment motivated one participant to return, but the others spoke of employment as a necessity to return. Case 3 expressed similar perspectives, and all three participants returned to New Orleans when

employment opportunities arose. Each articulated the necessity of having a job to live in New Orleans (Litt et al., 2012). As such, they all relocated to Houston after being laid off and experiencing extended periods of unemployment.

Within this process, perspectives of better economic conditions in Houston emerged to pull case 3 participants to Houston in the same manner those in case 2 described. Case 2 did not portray an economic pull to New Orleans. In their interviews, the economic condition in New Orleans became a barrier to return (Litt et al., 2012). Many spoke of a lack of economic opportunities outside of the hospitality and tourism industries, which could not compete with job options in Houston (Dolfman et al., 2007; Holzer and Lerman, 2006; Sanyika, 2011). Other participants cited low wages, ‘archaic’ business conditions, and poor working environments as an economic push from New Orleans.

Even though case 3 participants experienced an economic push, they depicted it in different terms than the participants in case 2. From this, a portrait of their experiences with employment in post-Katrina New Orleans emerged as a salient theme. Many participants in case 3, as well as the other two cases, expressed the benefits they received from pre-Katrina employers (Appleseed, 2006). These different measures of assistance helped cover needs unmet by federal sources of aid; although, they did not meet all of participants’ material and emotional needs (Appleseed, 2006).

For case 3, most references of working in post-Katrina New Orleans centered on finding employment. All three experienced long stretches of unemployment after they returned to New Orleans. This led to descriptions of the challenges they encountered. The most salient issues were perspectives of their industry, employer uncertainty in the recovery, and racial

discrimination. Two explained their long-term unemployment and subsequent relocation to find work as a result of the economic condition of their industry. One described,

One of the larger companies that was there [New Orleans] employing the video and audio technicians, they closed shop. They moved their operations fully to Houston and Dallas now. ...I worked for them for a little while before Katrina, but they're no longer based in New Orleans. They no longer have a New Orleans office. They do everything off the road. If it's in New Orleans, they truck everything in. ...They're based in Dallas now because they just couldn't support all that equipment and the staff and the people to maintain it in New Orleans, so they moved everything... and it's weird because they've been there forever.

While both men theorized they could have found employment if they were willing to switch industries, the third participant found racial discrimination locked him out of the job market. He perceived racial discrimination as worse in his industry after the storm. Even with a construction background and a desire to do anything to support his family, he could not find a job because employers preferred to hire cheap immigrant labor (Fletcher et al, 2006; Naughton and Wallace, 2006). A better economy was not the only attraction to Houston, which became apparent as participants discussed education.

Education themes between cases

Participants presented very similar views of education across all three cases. Education emerged as a reason to relocate in cases 1 and 2. The experience of post-Katrina education also emerged within each case. Although for cases 2 and 3, the accounts referred only to education in displacement. Case 1 provided insight into the experience of education in New Orleans after changes to the educational system.

Participants perceived many disadvantages in the school system in New Orleans, both before and after the storm (Appleseed, 2006). When they encountered higher quality educational systems in displacement, many wanted their children to reap the benefits of better schooling (Appleseed, 2006, Peek, 2012). As such, education became a reason to stay. Some parents in

case 2 planned to return to New Orleans, but after seeing the changes in the educational system in New Orleans, they chose to delay return until their children graduate.

Even though participants wanted their children to graduate in displacement, it was not always feasible. In my study, this appeared to be a gendered phenomenon where female participants stayed in displacement with their children and male participants were separated from their children. One exception was a single mother in case 1 who returned to New Orleans to save her retirement. Without transportation for her 16-year-old son to attend school in Houston, she was forced to bring him back to New Orleans with her (Appleseed, 2006). The rest of the mothers, all in case 2, stayed in Houston. The men's experiences varied, but they tended to be separated from their children. For case 2, male participants were separated from their children when the mothers returned to New Orleans, children-in-tow. For cases 1 and 3, this happened when the men returned to New Orleans and the children did not. The exception was the married father in case 3. As primary caretaker of his children, they stayed with him even when he divorced his wife and relocated to Houston.

Case 1 highlighted another exception to the role of education as a reason to stay in displacement. This proved true for primary and secondary students; however, post-secondary education pulled one male participant back to New Orleans (Appleseed, Berggren and Curiel, 2006). Outside of being his reason for returning, campus life provided stable housing and employment, which facilitated his return. His experience exposes a complex intersection between education, housing, employment, and health. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, he attended Tulane University on a tuition waiver because his mother worked at Tulane University Hospital. Without his knowledge, she lost her job after the events following the hurricane, and he accrued expenses he could not repay. As such, he lost his credits, his dorm, and his campus job.

Many other participants described the struggles they and their children experienced within the context of post-Katrina education in New Orleans as well as in displacement (Peek, 2012). In each case, parents and students depicted the negative stereotypes their children met in new environments (2012). This led students to fight with other students and teachers, to skip school, and to express mental health issues such as anxiety and anger (Curtis et al., Peek, 2012). Some parents in cases 1 and 2 also reported their children were held back because of the poor educational standards in New Orleans (Peek, 2012). The participants who were minors at the time reported their grades dropped significantly. Meeting educational needs after the levees breached led many participants to describe the health effects they experienced post-Katrina.

Healthcare themes between cases

I expected healthcare to manifest in relation to healthcare infrastructure, such as hospitals and health clinics. However, I found most references to healthcare in all three cases pertained to the mental and physical health impacts participants experienced and their methods of coping. In each case a distinct theme emerged in addition to a common theme among all cases. The impact of Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent levee failure on mental and physical health emerged in each case along with a list of coping mechanisms.

Participants described various mental and physical effects and coping mechanisms as a result of their experiences post-Katrina. These largely mirrored those indicated in the literature. In each case participants reported feeling stressed, angry, frustrated, anxious, depressed, scared of rain/water, and denial (Appleseed, 2006; Coker et al., 2006). Physical effects included high blood pressure, headaches, false labor pains and pre-term labor, as well as death (Berggren and Curiel, 2006; Bourque et al., 2006; Buekens et al., 2006; Coker et al., 2006; Curtis et al., 2007). Participants reported turning to alcohol, cigarettes, pain medication, and excessive partying to

cope with the aftermath (Cepeda et al., 2010). Many also recounted moving repeatedly as a coping mechanism.

As the literature indicated, most participants expressed a need for counseling for themselves and for their children, which they never received but still wanted and needed at the time of the interview (Appleseed, 2006; Berggren and Curiel, 2006; Bourque et al., 2006; Coker et al., 2006). The silence was pervasive in that many participants stated after their interview that they had never told their 'story' before. Several remarked that they did not know what their family members experienced during periods of separation, implying even within families participants did not speak about their trauma. Many stated they had never looked back upon their experience in a way that indicated the struggle to recover from their loss continued in the present. Almost all reported thinking about Hurricane Katrina and the recovery of New Orleans raised anger, depression, and frustration to this day, which could indicate continued posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Berggren and Curiel, 2006; Bourque et al., 2006; Coker et al., 2006). Within this context, healthcare emerged as a reason not to return for participants in case 2 and one man in case 3.

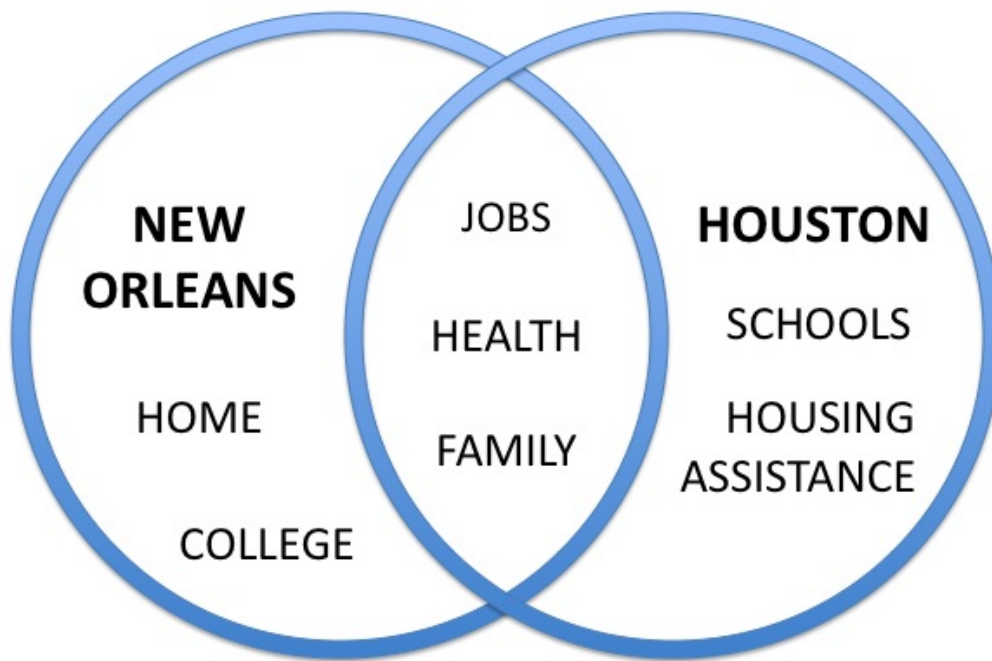
A cycle of deteriorating health and increased family responsibility emerged in case 1. Participants described how the negative physical and mental health impacts on family members led to a deterioration of health (Berggren and Curiel, 2006; Curtis et al., 2007). As their family members became more and more dependant on participant caretakers, their mental and physical health deteriorated as a result of the increased stress and responsibility placed upon them. Ultimately death released them from their caretaker role; however, the death of a mother, a father, and a brother became a new source of trauma (Curtis et al., 2007). In my interview with Dr. Sanyika (2011), "I lost my mama! I will never get over Katrina!" emerged as an invivo code

to express how the effects of Katrina will linger indefinitely for most participants (Coker et al., 2006; Curtis et al., 2007).

As case 3 expressed their interpretation of this experience, *death as a consequence of return* emerged as a salient theme. Participants in case 1 reported family members dying, but only those in case 3 linked the cause of death specifically to the process of returning to New Orleans (Berggren and Curiel, 2006; Curtis et al., 2007). In case 1, death resulted from the negative physical and mental health effects of the initial impact and the displacement process (Berggren and Curiel, 2006; Curtis et al., 2007). Responding to nonverbal and verbal cues, I did not peruse death when it emerged in the interview process in case 1. I only asked follow up questions about death to one participant. This happened when a middle class man in case 3 reported he lost six family members between the fall of 2009 and the time of the interview, November 2011.

Similar to perspectives on death, perspectives on relocation varied as well. In case 3, *the role of relocation in health* emerged as the final theme in contrast to the other cases. Relocation did not emerge in case 1 at all. It emerged as a coping mechanism for a few participants in case 2; although, they phrased it as ‘staying in Houston.’ Because they left New Orleans after they returned from displacement, the men in case 3 expressed a different understanding of relocation. One participant expressed having a ‘mental necrosis’ as a result of moving to Houston where his best friend recounted improvements in his health including weight loss, lowered blood pressure, and a drastic reduction in headaches and anxiety (Curtis et al., 2007). This contradiction in the impact on health emerged within other interviews, although not in the other cases.

Diagram 3: Salient Factors in the Decision-Making Process



Discussion

This study began by questioning the assumption that New Orleanians who wanted to return after floodwaters receded were able to, and that those still living in displacement were doing so as a result of personal preference. I approached this question with an intersectional framework in two ways. I selected a “multiply-marginalized group”, and I proposed to study how intersections between housing, employment, education, and healthcare policy influenced decision-making processes regarding return and relocation (Choo and Ferree, 2010, 130). I used a critical theory perspective to deconstruct respondents’ experiences with social institutions and agree with Dryzek (1987) that “critical theory can indeed inform the creation of political practices and institutions” (657).

I analyzed the process of return to explore how participants framed housing, employment, education, and healthcare. This illuminated the challenges experienced within each institution. However, without analyzing how these institutional challenges compound and multiply as participants encountered these social structures together, an incomplete understanding of motivating desires emerged (Appleseed, 2006). A more thorough explanation of why participants live where they live seven years after the levee failure emerged within the intersection of these institutions in the lived experience of working and middle class, African American New Orleanians. A working-class, single mother found better educational opportunities for her son in Houston, which made her want to stay displaced until he graduated. A more complex decision-making process emerged in the intersection of age, housing, and income (Appleseed, 2006).

My job had said we had to be back by March the 30th or else we had to resign. But my house wasn't finished. ... I'm at the age that I need to retire. I can't stay out here. ... I came back home because I [knew] I had a job. When they sent me a letter saying ... how much I would get [if I retired], I [knew] I would just be another Hurricane Katrina victim because I wouldn't have been able to make it off that little \$500 a month, so I had to come back home.

Many reports evaluating the status of recovery and of residents after Hurricane Katrina referenced intersecting needs (Appleseed, 2006; Berggren and Curiel, 2006; Coker et al., 2006). Appleseed (2006) critiqued the federal government's lack of awareness to provide more than housing assistance and illustrated how some employers demonstrated a higher understanding of employee needs by providing housing, childcare, healthcare, transportation, laundry facilities, etc. for those who returned to work. My research allowed the participants to frame their needs and challenges to return to New Orleans. Respondents indicated many of the factors in the Appleseed Project (2006) study are still necessary today for them to return and/or feel more secure in their return (Coker et al., 2006).

Each participant highlighted different personal needs and experiences in light of Hurricane Katrina's aftermath. However, in each interview, an intersectional process of weighing the pros and cons associated with needs met and unmet in relation to housing, employment, education, and healthcare were crucial to the decision-making process. Policy decisions that altered these institutions had different impacts according to the race, class, gender, age, and ability of the participants. A young, working-class, single mother found her public housing unit demolished, viewed educational changes as 'experimentations', and experienced severe depression at the continued state of devastation. She allowed better educational opportunities to sway her from returning to a city that could not meet her housing, education, or healthcare needs. The single mother quoted above was much older and a homeowner, which research indicates impacted rates of return (Appleseed, 2006; Groen and Polivka, 2010; Luft with Griffin, 2008). The interactions between housing, employment, education, and healthcare still manifested, but for her, their intersection dictated delaying return until her house was repaired, not until her child graduated.

As Dr. Sanyika (2011) suggested, desire to return is not the question. Return was expected as the conclusion of evacuation. However, the 'clean slate' ideology that post-Katrina New Orleans represented an opportunity to restructure the ills of the city made returning to what was known impossible (Appleseed, 2006; Nelson et al., 2007). Post-Katrina structural policy changes affected participant perceptions of New Orleans and its ability to meet their needs. From this emerged a three-part view of New Orleans recovery that manifested most strongly in case 2. In this complex view, participants iterated a problem they saw in the process of recovery (i.e. housing market conditions, employment conditions, poor educational system, etc.). After which, they expressed a justification as to why the problem existed. This always came back to political

corruption and a lack of caring on the part of the city and government for the residents, particularly because they were poor and Black (Bourque et al., 2006; Cordasco et al., 2007; Nelson et al., 2007). As the final component, participants offered recovery strategies or solutions to the problems they identified (Nelson et al., 2007). Following is an example from a middle-class, male participant in case 2.

What really hurt me the most was... oh man, I went back to New Orleans in I think it was ...November. It was cold outside. ...People were sleeping under the bridge. [Claiborne Ave. Overpass]. ...I'm like, 'Damn!' I mean people like professional people, with jobs, suit and tie people, have to take turns on where to wash and all this. It was cold. I'm like... 'What the hell are they doing? How you gonna let two-year-olds and people pregnant out there? You know you don't care.' They just need to go through and clean house. Now, I'm not going to say all the administration because I know that they got good people there, but the people who are in New Orleans now, they need to be compensated. People need new homes, better education system. ...They need to give people what they deserve. They need to just give people new houses, who lived in these certain areas. I know they got money to do it.

Views of inadequate recovery dampened desires to return. As one participant described during the interview process,

Researcher: *What is New Orleans to you?*

Participant: (without hesitation) *Home.* (pause) *It's home. It will always be home.* (pause) *It's my home.*

Researcher: *Do you ever want to live at home again?*

Participant: *No, but it is home. The reason I say 'no' so quickly is I don't see any changes after six years.*

By incorporating those most impacted by disasters into the discussion on rebuilding their communities, leaders can create policy strategies that bolster residents' resiliency and ability to return post-disaster (Fussell, 2012; Litt et al., 2012; Peek, 2012). However, without the marginalized voices of those affected by social policy changes, the outcomes will continue to disproportionately take their toll on marginalized groups as communities struggle to rebuild following catastrophe (Sanyika, 2011).

Policy Implications

My study has several policy implications for disaster assistance and recovery planning processes. All of my participants expressed dissatisfaction with the government response to Hurricane Katrina and the levee failure (Bourque et al., 2006; Coker et al., 2006; Cordasco et al., 2007). Dissatisfaction stemmed from the delayed response of authorities to assist residents trapped in floodwaters, the limited scope of government aid, and the inability of assistance to meet their needs throughout evacuation, displacement, and return (Appleseed, 2006; Bourque et al., 2006; Coker et al., 2006; Cordasco et al., Nelson et al., 2007). Post-disaster assistance must address more than housing and provide more than monetary compensation to replace losses (Appleseed, 2006; Nelson et al., 2007). In many instances, monetary compensation became a means of daily survival instead of a means to replace material investments (Litt et al., 2012). Respondents needed jobs, schools, healthcare, transportation, counseling, and their social networks in addition to shelter and food (Appleseed, 2006; Coker et al., 2006).

Following disaster on the scale of Hurricane Katrina, residents require more than aid. They also need to be incorporated into the recovery planning process (Nelson et al., 2007). My participants supported eradicating poverty, improving education, and creating a better New Orleans; however, they had different ideas than planners and policy makers about how to accomplish those goals. Respondents identified many issues and inequalities within New Orleans recovery. Some conditions existed before the storm, such as inadequate public schools, and others existed as a result of the storm. All participants stated political corruption caused these inequalities (Nelson et al., 2007). After identifying the cause, they offered solutions that better met the needs that emerged in my study. Incorporating their voice and solutions into the recovery process could minimize gaps in aid (Appleseed, 2006; Clark and Rose, 2007; Litt et al., 2012;

Nelson et al., 2007; Peek, 2012). The reliance on social networks to cover gaps in assistance indicates that allowing aid to be redistributed within networks could increase and facilitate accessibility (Litt et al., 2012).

Human Agency

Respondents in my study were not helpless victims of the storm, waiting for someone to do for them. They were active participants in their ‘rescue’ and recovery. Their decision-making process began before the storm and continues today. They consciously made a decision to stay or evacuate based on economic conditions and family situations. After Hurricane Katrina passed, they chose their next step wherever they found themselves – in floodwater, in storm-damaged Mississippi, or elsewhere. Perceptions of assistance and social networks pulled them to regroup in Houston until New Orleans opened. In this way, they illuminated they had the wherewithal to think and take action to influence outcomes in favor of their desires (Gamson, 1991).

In their decision-making process, they considered housing, jobs, schools, and mental and physical health. A comparison process developed in which Houston appeared better able to meet their needs than other cities. In some accounts of Houston, the perception of safe, furnished housing, good jobs, and quality education matched the experience. In most, unexpected challenges arose. Some were conditions of the storm, such as being viewed as temporary residents, and others were conditions of their marginalized position, such as being stereotyped as illiterate, poor, and uneducated (Peek, 2012). They confronted these challenges with aid from their social networks. As Litt et al. (2012) indicated, not all networks had the same ability to mitigate the impact. Participants that incorporated strangers into their networks achieved stability faster than those who did not (Peek, 2012).

As participants became established in displacement, the decision to return meant taking on the obstacles in New Orleans or continuing to deal with Houston's hurdles. Nuances at the individual level determined if participants chose to return or to stay displaced. Regardless of the decision, respondents provided solutions to their issues with pre-Katrina New Orleans and with recovery efforts. The ability to see solutions became an added level of frustration. Respondents perceived the failure of authorities to fix problems as a lack of caring because New Orleans is viewed as a poor, Black city (Bourque et al., 2006; Cordasco et al., 2007; Nelson et al., 2007).

My study implies that planners misjudged the framework residents used to determine return. Planners assumed not all residents would return and offered plans accordingly. However, I found that because return is the expected outcome of evacuation, the participant framework for the decision-making process assumed an eventual return. This led participants to initially think in terms of how and when they could return, not if they would return. It was only after they began to see the rate of recovery and the changes in New Orleans social institutions that some accepted permanent displacement.

To minimize discrimination and resident distrust in recovery strategies, planning processes should incorporate the ideas and solutions offered by marginalized populations (Nelson et al., 2007). Marginalized populations will continue to be voiceless within the perpetuation of the status quo. To change structural discrimination, those discriminated against must participate in the restructuring of society (Sanyika, 2011). Their intimate experiences with oppression provide unique insight, which allows them to recognize discrimination faster than others and offer solutions that are more fair and equitable.

Limitations

Conducting qualitative research presents unique challenges and limitations. Ambert et al. (1995) state, “the process of doing qualitative research is cyclical and evolutionary rather than linear” (884). Coding inconsistency developed when I found data I was not expecting. For example, in healthcare, I expected to find statements about institutional structures. However, mental and physical health effects were salient. My understanding of the data changed as the participant framework unfolded. With the first cycle of analysis complete, the interviews need to be recoded to allow new themes to emerge. For this project, I did not have time to complete another cycle.

In addition to the process of qualitative research, the sensitivity of the topic created limitations. My sample was limited to people willing to talk about their experiences. In their interviews, several respondents identified as being able to discuss Hurricane Katrina and the levee failure. They described others who are unable to because of the trauma they experienced. Different themes, processes, and barriers may emerge by including these other perspectives.

In addition, design flaws limited my study. Finding participants in Houston proved to be very challenging without a physical presence in the city. Initially, I intended to line up interviews in Houston prior to traveling. However, I found I had to be in Houston to locate participants and to schedule interviews. Conducting interviews only on the weekends also affected my sample as some prospective participants were not available when I was in town. Arrangements to interview them over the phone did not materialized because scheduling continued to be an issue. As such, I was unable to locate working class and/or female African Americans who relocated to Houston after returning to post-Katrina New Orleans.

Future Research

To correct some of the limitations of this study, I would recode my data and restructure the presentation of my findings. I would also allow participants to self-identify their social class. In addition, I would conduct follow up interviews to explore themes of police, political corruption, and the importance of people and community. These concepts emerged as hurdles in several interviews among all cases. However, in my design, statements outside of housing, employment, education, and healthcare were not fully pursued.

To further investigate how residents frame challenges in the process to return, more interviews need to be conducted with a larger sample of participants. To see how experiences vary according to different vulnerabilities, such as race, gender, class, age, ability, the sample should consist of a diverse population. Restructuring the design of the study and including various methods of data collection would also strengthen it. I would employ a design that allowed the examination of challenges in Houston in comparison to those in New Orleans.

Future research could also examine the jobs residents assumed as coping mechanisms. Four participants recounted adopting various roles to cope with loss and displacement. One became a chef outside of the Superdome while one became a comedian, lifting spirits on the bus ride from Atlanta to Houston. Another, who volunteered with the Red Cross before Hurricane Katrina, joined the volunteers in Houston as a means of dealing with the long lines to access assistance. The fourth volunteered with his cousin's fraternity in Houston, delivering supplies to those housed in shelters around the city. He expressed his decision to get involved in terms of attempting to find people he knew who did not evacuate in advance as well as a way to connect himself to the recovery effort and provide assistance. Each participant was in a different case.

Research could also explore how residents adopted new positions to help themselves and their communities cope with the aftermath.

In addition, my study raises questions about the effects of long-term displacement on displaced populations. Further research could investigate long-term psycho-social impacts of displacement on participants, their children, and their families, particularly those who have relocated to other cities. It would be interesting to understand how a multigenerational longing to return develops. Studying populations around the world that have endured long-term displacement might indicate future challenges and impacts displaced African Americans residents may encounter.

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APPENDIX

Institutional Review Board Approval

University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research University of New Orleans

Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator: Pam Jenkins

Co-Investigator: Kim Mosby

Date: March 29, 2011

Protocol Title: "Returning Home after Katrina: Understanding the processes, barriers, and decision-making of Katrina evacuees"

IRB#: 05Mar11

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures are compliant with the University of New Orleans and federal guidelines. The above referenced human subjects protocol has been reviewed and approved using expedited procedures (under 45 CFR 46.116(a) category (7)).

Approval is only valid for one year from the approval date. Any changes to the procedures or protocols must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Use the IRB number listed on this letter in all future correspondence regarding this proposal.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project!

Sincerely,

Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair
UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

APPENDIX

Informed Consent Agreement

University of New Orleans
2000 Lakeshore Drive
New Orleans, LA 70148
504-280-6000 | 888-514-4275

Informed Consent Agreement

Purpose of the Study

I am studying low-income African Americans' return to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. To do this, I am interviewing residents who have returned and are living in New Orleans, as well as residents who are still living in Houston, TX, but want to return to New Orleans. The purpose of the interview is to understand what evacuees have experienced.

What to Expect

If you choose to participate, we will arrange a time and place that works best for you for a face-to-face interview that will last between 60 and 90 minutes. In the interview, I will ask you to talk about the your efforts to return to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. You will not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable or that you do not wish to answer. After the first interview if you are willing, we may arrange another interview if we were unable to finish going through the questions. With your permission, the interviews will be recorded with an audio digital recorder as well as a video camera. You will be mailed your own DVD of all of your recordings and interview transcripts when your interviews are complete.

Compensation

You will be paid \$20 for each interview at the beginning of the interview. In the event you become uncomfortable and wish to stop the interview early or if there are questions you choose not to answer, you will still be allowed to keep the \$20.

Benefits of the Study

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. However, this study may be very beneficial for policy makers and service organizations, who will be able to use the knowledge learned from this study to make future decisions on rebuilding after disasters.

Risks

It is possible that topics may come up that may make you feel uncomfortable or that you will not wish to discuss. You will never have to discuss any topic you do not want to talk about. You can stop the interview at anytime.

Confidentiality

All recordings of you will be kept confidential. They will be stored on a password-protected hard drive. Typed transcripts of the interviews will be stored in a locked file cabinet. The

researcher will be the only person to review the video footage. You can choose to be identified by your real name, first name only, or you may use another name.

Questions

If you have any questions about the study, your participation in the study, your rights as a participant in the study, or any injury that is a result of your participation in the study, please feel free to contact the researcher at any time. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Ann O'Hanlon (280-6531) at the University of New Orleans.

Agreement

_____ I know my participation in this project is voluntary. I know that I can stop at any time I want to stop. I know that I would not be penalized in any way if I decided not to participate or continue.

_____ I give permission to be audio recorded as long as the following guidelines are followed: (1) the recordings will be used only for the purpose of this project; (2) copies of the recordings will not be available to anyone outside of the project; (3) the recordings will be destroyed when the information is no longer needed for the project.

_____ I give permission to be video recorded as long as the following guidelines are followed: (1) the recordings will be used only for the purpose of this project; (2) the recordings will be destroyed when the information is no longer needed for the project; (3) I will be given a DVD of the recordings.

By signing my name, I agree that the statements have been read to me, and I understand them.

Name (Printed) _____ Date _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher _____ Date _____

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Compensation Form

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Returning Home after Katrina

Compensation

You will be paid \$20 for this interview at the beginning of the interview. In the event you become uncomfortable and wish to stop the interview early or if there are questions you choose not to answer, you will still keep the \$20.

Please sign and date to verify that you received compensation for this interview.

Name (Printed) _____ Date _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher _____ Date _____

APPENDIX

Interview Schedules

Case 1: Returned to New Orleans

Background

- Talk about your life before the storm.
- Tell me about your family.
- Tell me about where you lived before Katrina.
- Tell me about your job.
- Tell me about your biggest problems before the storm.

Evacuee

- Tell me about the week before Hurricane Katrina.
- How did you find out about the storm?
- Tell me about leaving New Orleans.
- Where did you go and how did you get there?

Life in Houston

- Tell me about your first few months in Houston.
- Tell me about any problems you had to deal with in Houston.
- Explain how you were able to solve those issues.
- Tell me about someone or some agency that helped you get settled in Houston.

Life in New Orleans

- Tell me about the first time you returned to New Orleans.
- Tell me about your decision to return to New Orleans.
- Explain to me what made it hard for you to return to New Orleans.
- Talk to me about what would have made your return to New Orleans easier.
- Tell me about someone or some agency that helped you return to New Orleans.
- Tell me about your biggest problems now that you have returned to New Orleans.

Case 2: Displaced in Houston

Background

- Talk about your life before the storm.
- Tell me about your family.
- Tell me about where you lived before Katrina.
- Tell me about how your job.
- Tell me about your biggest problems before the storm.

Evacuee

- Tell me about the week before Hurricane Katrina.
- How did you find out about the storm?
- Tell me about leaving New Orleans.
- Tell me where you went and how you got there.

Life in Houston

- Tell me about your first few months in Houston.
- Tell me about any problems you had to deal with in Houston.
- Explain how you were able to solve those issues.
- Tell me about someone or some agency that helped you get settled in Houston.

Return in New Orleans

- Tell me about the first time you returned to New Orleans.
- Explain to me what is stopping you from returning to New Orleans.
- Talk to me about what you need to be able to return to New Orleans.
- Tell me about where you can go to get help to return to New Orleans.
- Tell me about your plan to return to New Orleans.
- Tell me about how your plan to return has changed over the past 5 years.

Case 3: Returned to Houston

Background

- Talk about your life before the storm.
- Tell me about your family.
- Tell me about where you lived before Katrina.
- Tell me about your job.
- Tell me about your biggest problems before the storm.

Evacuee

- Tell me about the week before Hurricane Katrina.
- How did you find out about the storm?
- Tell me about leaving New Orleans.
- Where did you go and how did you get there?

Life in Houston the First Time

- Tell me about your first few months in Houston.
- Tell me about any problems you had to deal with in Houston.
- Explain how you were able to solve those issues.
- Tell me about someone or some agency that helped you get settled in Houston.

Life in New Orleans

- Tell me about the first time you returned to New Orleans.
- Tell me about your decision to return to New Orleans.
- Explain to me what made it hard for you to return to New Orleans.
- Talk to me about what would have made your return to New Orleans easier.
- Tell me about someone or some agency that helped you return to New Orleans.
- Tell me about your biggest problems after you returned to New Orleans.

Life in Houston Again

- Tell me about your decision to return to Houston.
- Tell me about how you ended up moving back to Houston.
- Tell me about the problems in New Orleans that made you leave.
- Tell me about your life in Houston since you returned.
- Tell me about which move was easier: to New Orleans or back to Houston.
- Describe how these moves have affected your family.

VITA

Kim Mosby was born and raised in Ankeny, Iowa. After graduating from high school, she earned an associate's degree in liberal arts from Des Moines Area Community College. On August 29, 2005, she transferred to New York University (NYU), where she earned a bachelor's degree in individualized study with a concentration on music business, songwriting, and African Studies from the Gallatin School of Individualized Study. At NYU, she held various offices in student government and in student organizations, including treasurer, community service chair, and vice president. She also coordinated Gallatin's Black History Month in 2007. With the theme *Do you know what it means to miss New Orleans?*, it was the most successful Black History Month in Gallatin history. In September 2007, she relocated to New Orleans to volunteer full-time for the New Orleans Survivor Council. While pursuing her masters in sociology, she worked for The University of New Orleans' Center for Hazard Assessment, Response, and Technology, where she co-authored a hurricane preparation workbook designed for low-level readers. She was also awarded a graduate assistantship from the Department of Sociology. Her research interests include intersectionality, race, class, and gender inequalities, marginalized communities, institutionalized oppression, and how to create an egalitarian society. She can be contacted about this project at kmosby1@uno.edu.