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# The Hurricane Katrina Volunteer Experience; Inclusion into the Life Narratives of Young Adults

Jessie Guidry Baginski  
*Cleveland State University*

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**THE HURRICANE KATRINA VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE:  
INCLUSION INTO LIFE NARRATIVES OF YOUNG ADULTS**

**JESSIE GUIDRY BAGINSKI**

**Bachelor of Arts in Management**

**Ursuline College**

**May, 2000**

**Master of Arts in Education**

**Marietta College**

**May, 2008**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN URBAN EDUCATION**

**at the**

**CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY**

**May, 2011**

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This dissertation has been approved  
for the Department of EDUCATION  
and the College of Graduate Studies by

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Dissertation Chairperson, Elice E. Rogers, Ed.D.

CASAL, May, 2011

---

Catherine A. Hansman, Ed.D.

CASAL, May, 2011

---

Anne Galletta, Ph.D.

Curriculum & Foundations, May, 2011

---

Brian E. Harper, Ph.D.

Learning & Development, May, 2011

---

Dwayne Wright, Ph.D.

Education, May, 2011

## **DEDICATION**

To my husband, Thom and my son, James for their endless patience, support and love;

To my parents for a home always open and food that could always feed 'one more' and my sisters who always welcome me home, even when accompanied by a bus load of strangers;

To the thousands of Katrina volunteers who extended their notion of home into areas ravaged by Katrina;

And to the people of New Orleans – your resilience and joie de vivre was challenged and strengthened by Katrina. You added to the many reasons “I know what it means to miss New Orleans”.

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My thanks to my committee members for their thoughtful and insightful critiques of my study. They provided academic challenge and collegiate relationships to explore facets of this study in identity, social relationships and power, and mentoring – all of which became research conference presentations. My special thanks to Dr. Joann Goodell for her guidance in narrative inquiry and the use of NVivo software. In memoriam, I acknowledge the contributions of Dr. Frank Aquila for fueling in me the mindset to defend my topic. My gratitude to our program directors, Dr. Joshua Bagakas and Dr. Graham Stead, who always challenged us to address the “so what” of a study.

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**THE HURRICANE KATRINA VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE:  
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**JESSIE GUIDRY BAGINSKI**

**ABSTRACT**

Hurricane Katrina left in her wake one of America's oldest and greatest cities in shambles. In 2011, five years after the storm, New Orleans remains in a state of recovery. Statistics reveal many disaster-related facts attributable to the storm. Life stories, however, can open the windows to the soul, inviting us to better understand the human element of this tragedy.

Employing a narrative case study methodology, this study delved into the life stories of three young adults who attended to residents only three weeks after they returned to their homes. Through a series of three interviews with each participant, it explored how their education, social and cultural capital, and family lives prepared them for – and were transformed by their experiences as Hurricane Katrina relief volunteers. Engaging in life narrative method provided understanding of how the crisis volunteer experience was incorporated into the identity of these young adults and how it continues to affect their sense of agency in being active and engaged citizens. The study concludes that mandatory community service and service-learning programs that incorporate education, engagement, and critical reflection, provide foundational learning in civic engagement and foster volunteerism in young adults. The study raises critical



questions regarding the role of institutional systems in ensuring equity and access for civic engagement for young adults.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Shattered*

*Like a windowpane  
Broken by a stone  
Each tiny piece of me lies alone  
And scattered  
Far beyond repair  
All my shiny dreams  
Just lying there  
I'm broken, but I'm laughing  
It's the sound of falling glass  
I hope that you won't mind if I should cry,  
In public, while I wait for this to pass  
'Cause sweet darling I'm shattered  
Into fragments cold and gray  
Sweep the pieces all away  
Then no one will ever know how much it mattered  
Something deep inside of me  
Shattered (Webb, 1981)*

Whether the person in need is a mental health patient, a child in an underperforming urban school, a cancer survivor, an evacuee from a natural disaster, or simply an elderly person living alone, “shattered” is often an apt description of the status of their physical and/or emotional lives. Across broad life scapes of individuals in need is a tie that binds them, a tie to society to ensure they do not slip away between the cracks, alone and forgotten – that tie is a volunteer.

## **National Disasters**

Within the borders of the United States, two disasters within the past decade have struck to the core of our existence as a nation and our belief in the power of volunteers – the terrorists’ attacks of September 11, 2001 and the devastation of Hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2005. Separated by only four years in time, these two events shaped national views of security and well being within the nation’s borders in ways previously unimagined. Immediately following both incidents, there was a national response to help fellow citizens who were directly impacted. In the hours, days and weeks that followed the terrorists’ attacks in New York City, people of the United States witnessed strong, competent and responsive leadership on local and national levels to rescue individuals and salvage property. The media saturated our minds with the injustice of the attacks and the virtue of the rescuers – often fire, police and medical professionals from around the country. However, in sharp contrast to coverage of September 11, the media documented the failures of local, state and national leadership in effectively or efficiently responding to the crisis following Hurricane Katrina. Yet, Hurricane Katrina inspired the mobilization of a much broader citizen response in that volunteers were needed with a wider range of skill sets, and the number of citizens struck was much greater.

These two events have much in common; yet remain distinctive in our national history. Both New York City and New Orleans are noted for their cultural diversity and uniqueness of urban living; both are centers for immigration and commerce. The differences lie in the location and scope of the areas destroyed – and the leadership response. The Twin Towers were office buildings, targeted by outsiders without warning; the city of New Orleans included homes for a half-million people of all

socioeconomic levels – and there was warning of the potential loss of life and property that Hurricane Katrina could bring. In response to the attacks that occurred on September 11 to the Twin Towers, Mayor Giuliani responded quickly to bring order and emergency responders into his city; President Bush supported him and the media carried the message of the injustice of the attacks and no tolerance for terrorists into our homes. Following Hurricane Katrina, the media again carried messages of injustice, but accompanied by clear and haunting evidence of failed leadership as citizens were left dead on sidewalks, stranded on rooftops, abandoned in nursing homes, or herded like cattle into unsafe and inhabitable shelters of last resort.

### **New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina**

New Orleans is one of the oldest cities in our nation. The city was established in September 1717 under French rule on a natural levee in a bend of the Mississippi River; in 1812 it became part of the United States (Campanella, 2008). The city grew to become one of the nation's largest urban centers in the mid 1940's, then suffered a loss in population and economic prosperity during the mid 60's as residents – and its tax base moved out to surrounding suburbs (Campanella, 2008; Piazza, 2005).

In 1965, Hurricane Betsy struck New Orleans, flooding most sections of the city, and causing significant damage to neighborhoods in lower lying areas (Campanella, 2008). As the majority of the city lies between five and seventeen feet below sea level, this brought into focus the critical relationship the city has with its levee system (McKinney, 2006). Following Hurricane Betsy, Congress passed the Flood Control Act of 1965 (Campanella, 2008), placing the responsibility for levee construction on the federal government – a key point that would surface following Hurricane Katrina exactly

40 years later. During the four decades between Hurricanes Betsy and Katrina, the city escaped the wrath of any major hurricanes. On August 28, 2005, Hurricane Katrina battered the city with high winds and storm surge. However, the critical wound came not from the winds or the surge, but the failure of the levees, which had been constructed by the United States Corps of Engineers following Hurricane Betsy to prevent that very scenario.

Thousands of homes were under several feet of water within hours, residents were stranded on rooftops and thousands of others had been moved into shelters of last resort that had begun to have structural failures as well. The resulting human and physical damage was played out in the national media in the weeks that followed. The Red Cross and other agencies were beyond capacity to respond to the calls for supplies and relief help. As the floodwaters subsided, thousands of average citizens across the country searched for ways they could help restore life and lives back to one of the country's most beloved cities.

### **Volunteerism**

Volunteers are defined as people who give selflessly of their time and talent with the intention that their actions will benefit another person, group or organization (Penner, 2004; Wilson, 2000). Volunteerism is pervasive in American society from the high visibility of professional emergency workers (such as police, firefighters and medical personnel) following national crises such as the attacks of September 11, 2001, to the community-based blood donors responding to an ongoing need, to the behind-the-scenes clerical volunteers at churches and non-profits across the country.

The role of volunteerism in the United States recently emerged as a topic of research since the 1950's, making it a relatively young field. Volunteer studies have generated numerous theories regarding prosocial behaviors, role-identity, group-identity, and personal responsibility (Amato, 1990; Callero, Howard & Piliavin, 1987; Finkelstein, Penner & Brannick, 2005; Levine & Thompson, 2004; Penner, 2004). Demographic volunteer studies have shown that human capital factors of education and income are consistent indicators of volunteerism as are social capital factors of group membership and family ties (Amato, 1990; Penner, 2004; Wilson, 2000; Wilson & Musick, 1997). Although the decision to volunteer is an individual one, it is situated in time, place and culture (Wilson, 2000).

Penner and Finkelstein (1998) commented on the societal impact of volunteerism, "if trends toward fewer government services for disadvantaged and ill individuals continues, the need for unpaid volunteers will increase" (p. 525). As volunteerism is most likely to continue in those who have internalized the prosocial roles and feel strongly that others expect them to continue doing so, understanding more about what will motivate and sustain volunteerism across multiple generations is of interest to education, civic and government institutions alike (Finkelstein, et al., 2005). Following the citizen response to the terrorists' attacks in 2001, President George Bush stated, "We have glimpsed what a new culture of responsibility could look like" (Wilhelm, 2006, p.1). In his 2002, State of the Union address President Bush asked Americans to volunteer at least 4,000 hours during their lifetime (Wilhelm, 2006), a sentiment echoed in 2009 by President Barack Obama (Stengel, 2009).

In response to the tragedy on U.S. soil, Hurricane Katrina presented Americans with opportunities to look at the how and why of volunteering from both a traditional, planned lens as well as a through the crisis lens of bystander intervention. The sheer numbers of volunteers who responded to Hurricane Katrina efforts is only part of the story that needs to be told. How did those experiences become part of the nation's life stories, and consequently how do these volunteers define themselves in self-reflection and their role in society?

### **Rationale for the Study**

Hurricane Katrina dealt a devastating blow to the soul and the psyche of America. In an environment of individualism, Katrina sparked a collective response in which citizens of all backgrounds were able find meaningful ways to contribute to the amelioration the pain and suffering of the Gulf Coast residents whose lives were simply – shattered. In the aftermath of her destruction is an opportunity to study the experiences of volunteers in response to a major disaster within the boundaries of our own nation.

Five years after the storm, research on victims and volunteers in the post-Katrina environment is still in its infancy. Government studies will focus on the storm's impact on housing, health, employment, education and census for years to come. The statistical numbers to accompany the losses and recovery efforts will have a place in history, but without the richness of personal accounts of pain, loss, courage and recovery, the historical accounts will be incomplete. Case studies, ethnographies and phenomenologies can provide the depth of human experience and emotional distress needed to convey the magnitude of the devastation and the resilience of humans when supported by society.

Narrative case studies may be first steps to understanding the shared experiences of thousands, each with unique cultural and situational contexts.

Stories abound of college students using their spring, winter and summer breaks to flock to New Orleans to work as volunteers, but little has made its way to formal scholarly research. Simply reporting the numbers of volunteers who responded to the storm is only part of the story. Through studies of the experiences of young crisis volunteers, we can begin to understand their perceptions of social justice and government effectiveness in their own nation, to develop educational curriculum to prepare them to fully engage as member in a democratic society, to develop their leadership potential as they step into adult roles, and to contribute to a basis of knowledge for longitudinal studies in volunteerism among members of the Millennial generation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Many organizations across the service spectrum realized significant increases in volunteer interest following the attacks of September 11 and the devastation left by Hurricane Katrina, prompting some to see these two incidents as watershed moments with potential for civic renewal in our country (Penner, 2004; Walton, 2008; Wilhelm, 2006). Studies on volunteerism following 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina have focused on data of hours served, volunteer motivation, and demographics – and the volunteers studied have been adults (Akin-Little & Little, 2008; Michel, 2007; Penner, 2004; Villagran, Wittenberg-Lyles & Garza, 2006). Following Hurricane Katrina, a few studies emerged which focused on the responses to the disaster by college students, but they were field-specific such as social work or law (Mangan, 2007; Plummer, Ai, Lemieux, Richardson, Dey & Taylor, 2008).



Existing literature lacks rich contextual studies of the experiences as they represent the untold stories of the lives touched in these disasters – both the lives of the victims and the volunteers of all ages (Michel, 2007; Villagran et al., 2006; Wilson, 2000). Absent from the literature are studies on young adults in high schools who volunteered following Hurricane Katrina in formal and informal groups. In numerous studies of planned youth volunteerism, exploration into the type of service performed and the quality of the experience is identified gaps in the literature (Horan, 2005; Metz & Youniss, 2003; Planty, Boznick, & Regnier, 2006). As they are future members of our adult society, we should seek to understand the meaning they made of these experiences and how these experiences shaped their futures.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the meanings made by young adult volunteers from Northeast Ohio of their Hurricane Katrina volunteer experiences using a narrative case study. The study was bounded by service participation in a specific relief trip to New Orleans in October 2005. The participants were seniors in high school at the time of the volunteer experience. They were interviewed and asked to share their stories and photos to document their lived experiences. The narrative process provides a voice for a young adult to reflect upon his/her life story and how the crisis volunteer experience fits within it. Through their narratives, we can begin to understand more about the members of the Millennial generation – their perceptions of a just world, the educational and social opportunities they value in preparing them to engage as members in a democratic society, and their visions of future leadership potential as they step into adult roles.

The study of the experience of young adults engaged in post-Katrina relief work can help us to understand the value of developing human and social capital, and mandating volunteer experiences as secondary education goals. Furthermore, studying young adults five years after the Katrina experience allows for reflection on the role that this and other volunteer experiences played as the volunteer emerged into adulthood.

This study engaged three volunteers from northeast Ohio who shared a volunteer relief experience in reflective inquiry to develop an understanding of the meaning the events held for these young adults and how that may have shaped their post-secondary education, volunteer and career choices.

### **Research Questions**

This study examined the following research questions:

1. What meaning did the Hurricane Katrina volunteer experience have for young adults?
2. How do they include the experience in telling their life stories?
3. How did that experience shape their worldviews and choices for post-secondary education?
4. How did participating in a life-storying narrative process inform their learning and sense of agency as young adults?

### **Significance of the Study**

Penner (2004) notes, “from the perspective of a researcher interested in remedies to social problems, the study of when and *why* [emphasis added] people volunteer may well be of considerably more value than the study of individual acts of interpersonal helping” (p. 648). Volunteerism in response to long-term or persistent needs is a new

area of research (Penner, 2004); studies of volunteerism in the wake of Hurricane Katrina are unique in that they can be seen as opportunities that bridge numerous volunteer theories including bystander intervention, planned volunteerism, and volunteerism to address long-term needs. Qualitative inquiry can move us beyond statistics and into the humanity of the volunteer experience.

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative approach that focuses on how meaning is made through the process of life stories, keeping the narrator as the author of his/her story (Rossiter, 1999). Narrative is based in sensitivity to the richness of the subject and the context of the story that allows us to understand a case in ways not possible through quantitative methods or other qualitative methods where observation is the primary data collection tool (Hoshmond, 2005). This attention to the context and detail of a narrative allows us to connect the narrative to agency (Biesta & Teddar, 2007). As researchers listen intently, we can query into “which sorts of socio-structural, cultural, and socio-psychological contexts are more conducive to developing different modalities of agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1005). As we understand the contexts that shaped the agency of the participants, we can seek to discover their applicability or replicability in other lives.

Autobiographical activities provide significant learning opportunity (Hoshmond, 2005; Rossiter, 1999). Narrative is both a method and a tool significant to adult learning. “When we understand that adult development is experienced and expressed through the construction of life narrative, we can appreciate the importance of the telling of self-stories that make up that life narrative” (Rossiter, 1999). The role of the educator in this process is to be the “keeper” of the learner’s story and provide safe space the

narrative to occur (Kegan, Broderick, Drago, Hesling, Popp & Portnow; 2001; Rossiter, 1999). Kegan et al., (2001) describes this safe space as a holding environment with three functions: 1) to 'hold on', to give a person a sense of self-identification within his/her context without frustration; 2) to 'let-go', to challenge a person to rethink his/her way of thinking and knowing; and 3) to 'stick-around', to provide a sense of stability and continuity as a person experiences and comes to terms with new ways of knowing.

As young adults move into adulthood, the creation and attention to safe spaces for narrative, with its "profoundly empowering implications of understanding adult learning as a restorying process" (Rossiter, 1999, p. 69) demands sensitivity and care on the part of the researcher. The participants were in high school at the time of the experience and at the time of this study are completing college or living as independent young adults. Conducting this study at the early phase of adulthood provides an opportunity for participants to "explore the tensions between stability and change, between identity and transformation" (Rossiter, 1999, p. 63) that is present in their life stories and begin to develop an ongoing use of this powerful approach to life-long learning through self-reflection and narrative.

As the researcher, I aspire to continue to grow in this method of inquiry; developing personal competence in the narrative method may add value to the field in the growth of the number of qualified professionals. The study is significant in my personal development as a researcher as well. As noted by Hoshmond (2005), "as with other forms of qualitative research, narratological inquiry can be expected to transform the engaged researcher" (p. 182). I shared the volunteer experience with the participants, but knew little else about their lives. As I developed a greater understanding of their

narratives, my own narrative was changed, as they are now more mature and significant characters within my life story.

### **Background to the Study: Relief Trips to New Orleans Post-Katrina**

#### **Cohort I: October 21-25, 2005.**

Following Hurricane Katrina, I was involved in two relief trips to New Orleans. As a native of the city, many of my coworkers and friends in Ohio asked how they could be of direct help to those in need. Conversations with my sisters, who were safely out of the city but had taken some older family members to Red Cross shelters for supplies, revealed that displaced citizens were in need of simple things – pillows, socks, slippers, housecoats, and cleaning supplies for when they would be allowed to return to their homes. For the first week to ten days after the storm, evacuated citizens were not allowed to return to their homes. As a hospital employee, one of my sisters was allowed back into the area, but not allowed to stay in her home, as safety forces were not guaranteed. She was able to retrieve a few belongings and then leave again. The homes of my family members had been relatively spared, with only minor water and wind damage. Family members returned to their homes approximately two and one-half weeks after the storm. These homes would be crucial to the relief trips, as they would house the volunteers.

In October 2005, a group of my co-workers in a local transit system, volunteered to lead a supply drive and deliver the supplies directly to those in need. The community in which the transit system operates responded with enough supplies to fill the cargo bays and half the seat space of two 40-foot buses. The transit system was sending a team of twelve employees, two family members, a local reporter, and six students from local high

schools to deliver supplies and help in any way needed. As the timing was still within a critical period, the transit system's buses would be allowed to go across state lines to bring relief workers and supplies as they had been able to do following 9/11. As a native of the city, I relied on personal contacts to connect with the Department of Community Development in Jefferson Parish, adjacent to Orleans Parish.

Arrangements were made to deliver supplies to two churches, one with a large senior population and one with a large family population. When the buses pulled into the first location, the one with many seniors, the line waiting for them wrapped around the building and into the street. Seniors waiting patiently until the buses would unload supplies and set up a line for them to pick and choose the items they needed. Items ranged from cleaning supplies such as buckets, towels and bleach, to new bed linens and pillows, to pet food and walkers. Volunteers assisted in carrying items back to vehicles waiting to take the hurricane victims, who were mostly seniors at this location, back to their homes. Local citizens, church members and the Jefferson Parish Department of Community Development provided a lunch for the volunteer crew.

The second church location was in a suburb west of New Orleans, with newer homes and young families, equally as bereft of supplies. The process was repeated, but also provided toys time to play with the local children who were in the open lawn area, brightening the day for both the children and the volunteers. The reality of the lack of basic service was brought to bear as the Red Cross food truck came by and residents lined up to receive a meal. Several young children invited the volunteer team to join them as they sat on the sidewalk to talk and laugh.

Arrangements were also made to have the entire team of Ohio volunteers help clear debris for two or three homes where residents had no other family to assist them. An elderly couple home owned the first; their yard was filled with rooftop debris from their own home and from homes adjacent to them. They had no electricity and the roof debris was the obstacle, as until it was cleared, electrical lines could not be put back up. After hauling copious amounts of wood and shingles to the curb, the volunteers also assisted in removing water soaked mattresses and other furniture that had been soaked. Some members of the group also took time to talk to the elderly couple to discover they had no other family. Without the assistance from volunteers, they had no options to help them clear the debris. Subsequent locations involved removal of a collapsed shed and its contents for another senior citizen, and clearing of an entire condo that belonged to a couple with disabilities who had been safely evacuated with their most precious belongings, but could not return, nor physically clear the molded contents. Although we had been informed that all valuables had been taken with the couple, one student came across a set of wedding rings and turned them in to be returned to the owners. As the group moved from location to location, we were able to observe first hand the magnitude of the devastation in some areas and gain a sense of how this storm had affected not only businesses, but also homes and neighborhoods both like and unlike their own. Over a period of only three days, supplies were put into the hands of over a hundred seniors and families, rooftop debris and a collapsed shed removed from properties, and one condo emptied of its water-soaked contents.

Each evening, the group returned to the homes of two of my sisters, where hot meals and warm showers awaited. Sleeping arrangements consisted of beds for the adults

and sleeping bags and sofas for student. At the end of the three days, the buses departed for the 21-hour ride back to Ohio. The group realized more needed to be done, but time constraints would not allow us to stay longer. When we arrived back in Painesville, Ohio at 4 a.m., we were greeted by the students' families and coworkers, who came in hours ahead of operating time, to provide us with hugs and hands to help unload and clean the buses.

**Cohort II: June 7-13, 2006.**

Upon our return to Ohio, plans for a second trip began to take shape. The goal was to return to New Orleans during spring break to allow additional students an opportunity to help. However, the primary home scheduled to house the volunteers suffered a major set back – a bicycling accident left one of its inhabitants in the critical care unit for several weeks. Without the home to shelter the volunteers, the trip was delayed until June 2006. During that time, students were recruited to participate through the service coordinators at the schools where students from the first trip originated. A major difference on this second trip was an issue of funding. The transit system could not cross state lines eight months after Katrina so vans would have to be rented. Additionally, the group wanted to have money to cover the cost of supplies for repairing the homes on which we would work as we knew we would be helping low income citizens.

Relying again on personal contacts, I solicited a donation of authentic masks from an artist in New Orleans to use for a raffle; submitted a proposal to the United Way for funding assistance; and appealed to private companies for monetary assistance as well. These actions were able to generate about \$5,000 to offset the costs of van rentals, relief



supplies, and lunch meals for the volunteers. On June 7, 2006, eight adults and thirteen students from four different schools embarked to New Orleans in two 12-passenger vans. Following the 21-hour drive, the vans arrived at the homes of my parent's and my best friend from high school, who lived only five houses away. Local foods had been prepared for us, followed by access to hot showers, beds and space to open our sleeping bags. In the morning, we would go to the first of two homes we would work on that had been assigned to us by the social work coordinator for the Jefferson Parish Department of Community Development.

Over the next two days, this group of dedicated volunteers worked in 98-degree heat to clear and clean the home of an older gentleman with mental health issues. In front of his home was the FEMA trailer he was living in. His home had some water damage, but was in greater need of being cleared and cleaned. The experience of Katrina had left him overwhelmed and not knowing where to begin due to his health issues. The group decided that although we were only asked to repair interior ceilings and walls and some gutters, we wanted to give this gentlemen a gift of a home that was absolutely livable. With his permission, we began at once, tackling the kitchen first to remove spoiled foods, and then to clean, systematically going from room to room, frequently checking with him about the disposition of items. In the living room and dining room, ceiling tiles were replaced, walls repaired and fresh paint applied. On the exterior, the siding was washed to remove mold, gutters repaired, shrubs and bushes trimmed, beds weeded and tomatoes planted. A third day was spent repairing siding that had been torn off of another home, painting the exterior and trim of the home, replacing a storm door and completing some minor interior drywall repairs for another gentlemen who had a developmental disability.

Each night, the volunteers returned to the host homes to find home cooked meals. Additionally, an extended family member offered the use of her newly repaired swimming pool, which provided welcome relief from the heat. Following the three days of home repairs, the group was treated to a tour of the Loyola University Campus, and coffee and beignets at Café du Monde, and a couple of hours of free time to explore the French Quarter. Later that day, we rode and walked through areas of Lakeview and Gentilly that had suffered extensive flooding and damage. We had an opportunity to talk to local residents who were rebuilding their homes from the foundations while living in FEMA trailers. Our final duty was to serve as chaperones for a local Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) dance. Our journey in the heat would be sustained. The air conditioner in the gym failed and the dance was moved outside, where even at night the heat held at 96 degrees. The team wore t-shirts designed by one student in our group so we could be readily identified in community settings. The student volunteers were the center of attention at the dance, as local students were amazed that others would volunteer their summer vacation time to help people they did not know.

The drive home was filled with conversation of the experiences shared and the memories made. However, each student would be returning to his or her respective schools in the fall. I stayed in touch with some as I was asked to write letters of recommendations for them for colleges; others I remained connected via Facebook. Some adults stayed in touch with host families via email and telephone. It seemed clear that a special life memory had been shaped, but how would each person reflect on that down the road?

## **Definition of Terms**

Throughout the review of the literature, the terms community service, service learning and volunteerism were often used interchangeably, especially with regard to youth, adolescent, or young adult activities, yet with differing meanings. For clarification in this study, the following definitions are used.

*Young Adult* – A young adult is anyone between the ages of 16 and 24, based on information obtained by Volunteering in America, an official U. S. Government website that annually tracks volunteer statistics and trends (Volunteering in America, 2008). This age range is consistent with Levinson & Levinson’s (1996) age-graded model of psychological development, which indicates that early life transition into full adulthood occurs between the ages of 17 and 22 years of age.

*Community Service* – Service provided in situations where student engagement “addresses a community need tied to an overall curriculum aspect” (Cress, Collier, Reitenauer & Associates, 2005, p. 7); in religious schools, community service is often to theological underpinnings. Metz, McLellan and Youniss (2003) also term this “*social cause service* “[emphasis original] wherein students were exposed to or dealt with others in need or a public issue such as poverty” (p. 190).

*Service Learning* – Experiences where students engage in community service activities or social cause service “with intentional academic and learning goals and opportunities for reflection that connect to their academic disciplines” (Cress et al, 2005, p. 7).

*Volunteerism* – For students, this involves activities undertaken where the “emphasis is on service for the sake of the beneficiary or recipient” (Cress et al. 2005, p.

7). For adults, we look to Penner's (2004) criteria of the action being planned, long-term, based on a non-obligational relationship between the volunteer and recipient of service, and it is situated within an organizational context. Activities for students might include clerical work at a non-profit office; for adults, this can mean any number of prosocial behaviors ranging from serving as a Red Cross volunteer in several capacities to assisting with political campaigns.

*Crisis Volunteer* – Although no concrete description of a crisis volunteer was discerned from the literature, for this study, one who engages in crisis volunteer work reflects the attributes of being able to respond in ways consistent with by-stander intervention (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005) and is not deflected from action by the high risks environment that may be the setting for engagement (Wilson, 2000). It is perhaps the absence of the planned on-going behavior and predictability of environment that characterizes this category of volunteerism. In most instances, a crisis volunteer has been a person trained for such circumstances, e.g. fire fighters, police and medical professionals. For this study, the notion of a crisis volunteer extends into the average citizenry in response to disasters or emergencies.

Additionally, extensive discussion is centered on human, social and cultural capital.

*Human Capital* – the tools an individual possesses that enables him/her to participate in civic activities; typically considered to be acquired through education and training (Oesterle, Johnson & Mortimer, 2004; Putnam, 2000).

*Social Capital* – The social networks, norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that are outcomes of the individual's social relationships (Marx, 2006; Niemi, Hepburn &

Chapman, 2000; Oesterle et al., 2004; Putnam, 2000). Social capital can serve to bond individuals and enhance mobilization based on their common interests, or to bridge between individuals for linkage of assets and information diffusion (Putnam, 2000, p. 22).

*Cultural Capital* – The civic and moral values of a community that an individual can use as a basis for developing his/her social identity; it is influenced by an individual's level of engagement in social institutions, such as education, religion and family (Oesterle et al., 2004).

### **Summary**

Hurricane Katrina, in spite of her immediate and extended devastation to the lives and landscape of the City of New Orleans, sparked a consciousness within citizens across all ages to respond in ways beyond what the average person could do in response to the terrorists' attacks of September 11, 2001. Framed by existing research on traditional volunteerism, opportunities for youth and young adult engagement in community issues, and narrative as an integral process for adult learning, this study aimed to understand how social forces, educational experiences, and narrative engagement allow young adults to make meaning of their crisis volunteer experience.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Following the attacks of September 11 and the devastation left by Hurricane Katrina, the increase in interest to volunteer to alleviate suffering in our homeland prompted some to see these two incidents as watershed moments with potential for civic renewal in our country (Penner, 2004; Walton, 2008; Wilhelm, 2006). Studies on volunteerism following these crises have focused on data of hours served, motivation, and demographics of adult volunteers (Akin-Little and Little, 2008; Michel, 2007; Penner, 2004; Villagran et al., 2006). Following Hurricane Katrina, a limited number of studies emerged which focused on the responses to the disaster by college students, and tended to be specific to academic fields such as social work or law (Mangan, 2007; Plummer et al., 2008).

Lacking in the literature are the rich contextual studies of the experiences of both victims and the volunteers of all ages to add depth to the human aspect of this tragedy (Michel, 2007; Villagran et al., 2006; Wilson, 2000). Absent from the literature are studies on young adults in high schools who volunteered following Hurricane Katrina in formal and informal groups. We should seek to understand the meaning they made of

these experiences and how they foreground the future of these young adults, who are, in fact, our future.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the meanings made by young adult volunteers from Northeast Ohio of their Hurricane Katrina volunteer experiences using a narrative case study. The study was bounded by service participation in a specific relief trip to New Orleans in October 2005 when participants were seniors in high school. The narrative process gives voice to young adults as they reflect upon their life stories and how the crisis volunteer experience fits within them. Through their narratives, we can begin to understand more about the members of the Millennial generation - their perceptions of a just world, the educational and social opportunities they value in preparing them to engage as members in a democratic society, and their visions of future leadership potential as they step into adult roles.

The study of the experience of young adults engaged in post-Katrina relief work can help us to understand the value of developing human and social capital, and mandating volunteer and/or service learning experiences as secondary education goals. Furthermore, studying young adults five years after the Katrina experience allows for reflection on the role that this and other volunteer and service experiences played in their emergence into adulthood.

This study engaged three volunteers from northeast Ohio who shared a volunteer relief experience in reflective inquiry to develop an understanding of the meaning the events held for these young adults and how that may have shaped their post-secondary education, volunteer and career choices.

## **Research Questions**

This study examined the following research questions:

1. What meaning did the Hurricane Katrina volunteer experience have for young adults?
2. How do they include the experience in telling their life stories?
3. How did that experience shape their worldviews and choices for post-secondary education?
4. How did participating in a life-storying narrative process inform their learning and sense of agency as young adults?

## **Review of the Literature**

To effectively conduct qualitative inquiry into the experiences of young adults volunteering in the near aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, a review of the literature encompasses an overview of the history of the City of New Orleans, its significance to American society and the conditions resulting from Hurricane Katrina. Further, this review of the literature will explore traditional and crisis theories of volunteerism, the linkages between service learning, volunteerism and community engagement along the life span continuum, and the role of narrative for learning through reflection and its potential for agency as young adults continue to mature.

## **New Orleans: An Overview**

New Orleans is one of the oldest cities in our nation. The city was established in September 1717 under French rule on a natural levee in a bend of the Mississippi River; became part of the United States in the Louisiana Purchase from France in 1803; and was



admitted into the Union as the eighteenth state in 1812 (Campanella, 2008). At that time, New Orleans population was approximately 8,000 people in 1,000 dwellings with the population divided among whites, slaves and free people of color at 50, 34 and 16 percent, respectively (Campanella, 2008). New Orleans population rose to just under one-half a million people in the 1940's, making it the fifteenth largest city in the country. In the 1960's, the city's population began to decline, as did that of other major urban centers as development of suburban areas and desegregation orders resulted in "white flight" (Campanella, 2008; Piazza, 2005). In August 2005, the city's population hit its lowest point since 1930 – at 452,000, it represented less than 35 percent of the seven-parish metro area and was slightly below neighboring Jefferson Parish (Campanella, 2008, p. 64).

The city has a rich, multicultural heritage as a former colony of both Spain and France, as port city and as an immigration point of entry into the United States. From the opening of the French Market in 1791, immigrants from many countries were provided opportunities to establish businesses and settle into this unique city along the Mississippi River. A Swedish traveler noted in 1851, "One here meets with various races of people, hears many different languages spoken and sees productions of various zones. Here are English, Irish, German, French, Spanish, Mexicans. Here are Negroes and Indians. Most [who sell] are black Creoles, who have the French animation and gayety, who speak French fluently (Bremer, as cited in Campanella, 2008, p. 246). Her status as an immigrant city continues as Vietnamese families comprise the most recent wave of immigrants to settle in New Orleans (McKinney, 2006). As the city grew, populations moved further away from the river and its natural levees into the deltaic plains, protected

by man-made levees and the development of inland canals that kept areas dry most of the time.

### **Hurricane Betsy: September 1965.**

In 1965, Hurricane Betsy struck New Orleans, flooding the Ninth ward, parts of Gentilly and New Orleans East, “killing 81 Louisianans, injuring 17,600 and causing \$372 million in damage, about one-third in New Orleans”. This unprecedented extent of damage prompted the passage for the Flood Control Act of 1965 by Congress (Campanella, 2008, p. 54). The Act puts the federal government in the business of levee construction and storm protection. As levees were built, the population booms especially in previous flood plain areas such as New Orleans East, paradoxically increased the risk of potential flood damage risk if structures were to fail. In 2004, a “contra-flow” evacuation was ordered pending a hit by Hurricane Ivan (Campanella, 2008). This evacuation resulted in loss of credibility in leadership as citizens experienced frustration in the problems of getting out of the city due to flaws in the plan, exacerbated by the reality that the storm turned and parts of the city did not get a single raindrop.

In 2005, New Orleans remained a critical port city for containerized operations and the tourism industry brought in over 8.5 million visitors and \$4.5 billion each year for the city alone (Campanella, 2008; McKinney, 2006). New Orleans is known for its celebrations such as Mardi Gras, the Jazz Fest, and the Essence Festival among many others. The city seems to celebrate every culture, retaining its core value of multi-ethnicity, often reflected in the metaphor of the indigenous stew “gumbo” (McKinney, 2006, p. 11).

### **Hurricane Katrina: August 2005.**

On August 28, 2005, Hurricane Katrina changed the landscape of New Orleans on physical, emotional and psychological levels. She hit New Orleans with “Category 3 winds, but Category 5 storm surge” (Campanella, 2008, p. 66). Though many citizens had evacuated, thousands remained behind to ride out the storm either due to lack of transportation and affordability of sheltering, or due to lack of confidence in leadership following the 2004 Hurricane Ivan debacle. Of the nearly one million Gulf Coast residents that were evacuated due to this hurricane, nearly half were from the New Orleans metro area (McKinney, 2006). The wind and storm surge damage caused by Katrina was quickly dwarfed by the damage and terror caused by levee failures. Thousands of homes were flooded within hours leaving residents stranded on rooftops, or trapped in the shelters of last resort – the New Orleans Superdome and the Ernest Morial Convention Center. The Superdome had also sustained roof damage and loss of electricity and plumbing. This tragic sequence of events played out on the national media – and with the world watching, New Orleans began to look like a third world country – devastated, despondent, and devoid of the dignity of an American city.

Disaster relief agencies such as the Red Cross were overwhelmed with requisitions for supplies and manpower. The cry for assistance following Hurricane Katrina prompted the Peace Corps to dispatch volunteers within U.S. borders for the first time since it was established in 1960 ([www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov)). Over the next few weeks and months, the nation experienced surges in volunteerism by average citizens anxious to help others restore their lives. However, this was complicated by bureaucratic red tape and a lack of preparedness on local, state and federal levels by both private and public

organizations. In spite of her destruction, Hurricane Katrina came with a silver lining – she allowed us to remember that as a nation of individuals founded in the strong beliefs of community and the right to live with dignity that we had an option to change those stories – as individuals, we could turn stories of despair into stories of triumph.

Volunteers lay at the heart of these stories of recovery. In his poignant memoir, *Why New Orleans Matters*, Tom Piazza (2005) described the individuals who volunteered in New Orleans post-Katrina as “idealistic and tough people from around the country, mostly young but not exclusively so, who see a chance to make a difference” (p. 171).

## **Volunteerism**

### **Traditional theories.**

Volunteering has been distinguished from bystander intervention based on the planned, prosocial, on-going and organizationally situated nature of the actions involved in a volunteer commitment (Finkelstein et al., 2005). People tend to engage in volunteering to satisfy one of six motives: altruistic values, skill use/acquisition, relationship development, gain career experience; reduce personal negative feelings, or psychological growth (Finkelstein et al., 2005). Volunteer motives in youth can be learned from parents through: 1) positive feelings about volunteering, 2) modeling, and 3) managing the volunteer experience for children (Wilson, 2000). Supporting the notion that development is sociocultural and extends over a life span, motivation for volunteering is often one of identification with a larger group and to extend knowledge across generations (Case, 1996). Therefore, across age ranges, volunteer opportunities are consistent with a Vygotskian approach to learning and development as knowledge,

values and skills are transmitted through cultural experiences that provide training and integration into daily praxis (Case, 1996).

Personality attributes tend to have a strong and direct connection to volunteering (Penner, 2004). The Prosocial Personality Battery (PSB) developed by Penner, Fritsche, Craiger and Freifeld (1995), measures two primary dimensions of prosocial personalities – other-oriented empathy, the tendency to be empathetic and concerned about the well-being of others; and helpfulness, an indicator of a history of engaging in prosocial actions (Penner, 2004; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998; Michel, 2007). Prosocial personality orientation requires an enduring proclivity to consider the welfare and well being of other people, to be empathetic, and to act in ways that will benefit them (Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). Penner’s (2004) conceptual model of decision to volunteer incorporates motivation into a dispositional variable and extends the process to include situational and structural variables – what the volunteer brings to the table and the situation. The learning that occurs in volunteer situations is constructivist in nature – it draws upon an individual’s social and cultural capital. It “brings attention to how people learn and construct knowledge as a result of their interactions with homogeneous and heterogeneous network communities” (Alfred, p. 10).

The roles of human and social capital in civic engagement have been studied extensively by Putnam (2000). In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2000) includes broad aspects of engagement in his study to include political engagement, social activities, and volunteering. He focuses on the decline in civic engagement in successive generations and attributes this decline to key issues related to human and social capital: education, family structure, religious involvement, social activities and residential stability (Putnam,

2000). Bridging between Penner's (2004) theories of prosocial behaviors and Putnam's (2000) studies of engagement, Alfred (2009) addresses the role of social and cultural capital in identity formation noting, "group membership supports a sense of belonging and a high degree of perception similarities among affiliated group members" (p. 17). Dense networks such as family and small groups have a larger influence on the shaping of identity; while "looser networks serve to confirm or reshape" constructed identities (Alfred, 2009, p. 17). Civic engagement serves to unify generations and cultures by providing opportunities for bridging between diverse groups and bonding to strengthen relationships within groups (Putnam, 2000).

Education, a primary component of human capital, is the most consistent and highest predictor of volunteering (Michel, 2007; Penner, 2004; Putnam, 2000; Wilson, 2000). Education serves to heighten awareness, build self-confidence and increase empathy (Wilson, 2000). Education, although a factor in human capital, contributes to social capital as it enhances an individual's organizational membership opportunities, resulting in increased opportunities for engagement (Wilson, 2000). An individual's membership in multiple service organizations correlates highly with helpfulness, a measure on the Prosocial Personality Battery (Penner, 2004), and serves to increase the social capital of an individual. Social capital, the relationships individuals have with members of family, community, and organizations, serves to generate trust, increase social integration, build networks, and create higher levels of involvement.

Schools, as structural sites of social capital development, play a role in the development of prosocial behaviors. Volunteering in high school is more likely to lead to volunteering during college years (Marks & Jones, 2004; Metz & Youniss, 2003; Planty,

et al., 2006; Wilson, 2000). Citizenship lessons addressing rights and responsibilities should include the concept of volunteering as a civic responsibility (Wilson, 2000). In a study of students at San Diego State University, both formal and informal planned helping was significantly correlated to social network size, frequency of interactions and residential stability, indicating that planned helping behaviors are tied to social network involvement (Amato, 1990).

The role-identity model developed by Callero, Howard and Piliavin (1987) addresses the integration of volunteer action into an individual's self-concept. The role-identity theory considers both the structure of the volunteer experience and the ongoing time commitment as factors that contribute to an individual's changes in self-perceptions, leading to the integration of the volunteer identity (Callero et al., 1987). In a study of blood donors, Callero et al. (1987) determined that volunteer work, which may have been initiated from external actions or traditional motives, becomes internalized resulting in a new self-concept that drives sustained actions. This theory overlaps with and complements the volunteer process model in which Omoto and Snyder (1995) assert that prior personal experiences, current circumstances and motives are factors in predicting volunteerism. Building on these theories, Penner & Finkelstein's (1998) study of HIV Aids volunteers supported the role-identity and volunteer process theories, but added a dimension of not only sustained, but also increased organizational commitment based on the depth of role integration into an individual's identity. The role-identity model of Callero et al. (1987) and the findings of Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) regarding in-group identity in helping behaviors can also support why employed individuals are more likely to volunteer – as work and work-like activities are integrated into an individual's identity,

the person becomes more intrinsically motivated by those types of actions and volunteering offers autonomy and flexibility in application of multiple roles (Wilson, 2004).

When both a community and an individual value a volunteer role, social validation enhances the likelihood of an individual sustaining that role (Callero et al., 1987). The role of social validation is seen in the work of Amato (1990) in his study of college student helping behaviors and personal responsibility where both students and non-students helping behaviors were closely tied to social network involvement. Michel (2007) also linked the role of social networks to helping behaviors in shelters in Baton Rouge, Louisiana following Hurricane Katrina. She found that social networks provided information about volunteering opportunities and those most likely to respond had prior positive volunteer experiences, which enhanced their sense of personal responsibility in responding (Michel, 2007).

Levels of volunteerism are reconfigured throughout an individual's life based on age, changing levels of human capital and social resources (Wilson, 2000). During formative years, volunteering can impact the lives of young people in four key areas: promoting citizenship and social responsibility; reduction/avoidance of antisocial behavior through social networks and inhibiting opportunities for interaction with law violators; improved physical health due to lower levels of self-absorption and increased social ties; and socioeconomic achievement as adolescent volunteers tend to have higher grade point averages, higher self-esteem and career aspirations (Wilson, 2000). These benefits continue over a lifetime. In his report on existing research on the affects of altruism on mental and physical health through a review of studies on older adults, Post



(2005) found that a positive correlation exists between altruistic behavior and improved mental health in terms of reduced anxiety and depression, and improved feeling of self-efficacy and competence (Hunter & Lin, 1980-1981). Physical health indicators positively related to volunteerism included improvements in immune and cardiovascular system function and some improved mortality (Musick, Herzog & House, 1999). Factors affecting the volunteer commitment are satisfaction, positive feelings and self-efficacy (Omoto & Snyder, 1995); this is supported by Penner and Finkelstein's (1998) study of volunteers assisting HIV-positive patients.

### **Volunteerism and crises: A new paradigm.**

Crisis response volunteerism tends to blur the lines of traditional volunteer motivations, engagement and sustained activity. While personal motivation, prosocial behaviors, human and social capital and role-identity still figure into the volunteer action, the concepts of bystander intervention and in-group membership, typically found in spontaneous, short-term helping, re-emerge and combine with traditional volunteer theories in crisis volunteerism.

Two additional theories affect volunteerism in crises. The Just World Theory proposed by Learner (1998) posits that people see the world as a good and just place and when events disrupt that balance, people act in an attempt to restore equilibrium to their world (Penner, 2004). Greenberg, Solomon and Pyszczynski (1997) proposed the Terror Management Theory, which offers the explanation that individuals volunteer to reduce their anxieties and mortality fears resulting from acts of aggression and destruction.

The role of the media becomes a factor in crisis volunteerism. In 1993, Penner and Fritsche studied the impact of volunteering to help AIDS victims after Magic

Johnson announced he was HIV-positive (Penner, 2004). The results of the study attributed the sustained level of interest in this particular area of volunteering to on-going media coverage (Penner, 2004). This connection to the media was observed in studies following the attacks of September 11, 2001 when data on levels of volunteer interest for three weeks in September in 2000 and in 2001 from a non-profit organization Volunteermatch were compared and analyzed (Penner, 2004). The media served to sustain volunteer interest with stories of rescuers (prosocial modeling), citizen concerns (fear/injustice) and localized impact (community attack) (Penner, 2004). Villagran et al. (2006) argue for the need for culturally relevant messaging using the media following natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina. They contend that in diverse cities, where cultural norms may vary, messaging to recruit volunteers from similar cultures would result in better volunteer matches (Villagran et al., 2006).

Crisis volunteerism relies in part on bystander intervention, the act of assisting an individual in an emergency situation, predicated on emotional response, awareness of the victim's distress, a decision to act – and identification of the victim as an in-group member (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Michel, 2007). Levine and Thompson (2004) conducted a study to extend the Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) of bystander intervention to include the salience of place as an in-group place or an out-group place. Their study among Lancaster University students explored identity salience with disasters occurring in spaces closer to home and in need of financial and political intervention, concluding that it is not only the people that must be considered as in-group, but the place of the intervention as well (Levine & Thompson, 2004).

Levine and Thompson (2004) also assert a connection between socio-spatial levels (inter-individual, intermediate, super ordinate) and personal responsibility. If the boundaries of those spaces are viewed as a series of concentric circles, responsibility tends to be strongest at the center and weaken with outward movement. As identities can shift and become fluid across contexts, personal and social identities become shared attributes, resulting in a cultural “oneness” that is central to helping (Levine & Thompson, 2004, p. 230).

Sirin and Fine (2008) studied Muslim-American teenagers who described living in the U.S. post 9/11 as a world where “souls split open and home exists no more” (p.10). Victims of Hurricane Katrina shared this feeling in the days, weeks, months, and now years following the devastating landfall of this powerful storm. What Katrina offered was a chance for our citizens across the country to both bridge and bond through social connections (Putnam, 2000). As the national media captured the faces of citizens of every socioeconomic class distraught looking at what was once their home, their place of employment, and their city shattered, fellow countrymen searched their souls for new levels of empathy. They heard the victims’ stories, their cries for help, and they responded.

Volunteers used social connections to find new and unique ways to help other like themselves and those unlike themselves, navigating homogeneous and heterogeneous networks in responding to the crisis. Michel (2007) provides a quantitative study of feelings of personal responsibility and incidences of volunteering in shelters among adult residents of East Baton Rouge Parish in November of 2005. She found that higher levels of education, the presence of children at home, prior volunteer experience and feeling of

self-efficacy were related to a willingness to volunteer (Michel, 2007). Akin-Little and Little (2008) offer a narrative of their two-week experience as school psychologists assigned to provide counseling in central Louisiana, about three and one-half hours north of New Orleans in September of 2005. Piazza (2005) notes, “Displaced people go through extreme mental and emotional stress, especially if they have been taken out of one set of understood social conventions and class assumptions and placed in a context completely foreign to those conventions and assumptions” (p. 146). Akin-Little and Little’s (2008) narrative reflects this distress of urban citizens placed into a rural shelter as they note the need for compassion in sheltering communities for those of differing religions and cultures. Research on volunteers in the post-Katrina environment is still in its infancy five years following the storm. Empirical studies on Hurricane Katrina volunteers to review remain limited. Many stories remain anecdotal in nature and are published as short stories in print or on-line magazines, not as researched studies in peer-reviewed journals.

Wilson (2000) reports that the exception to volunteer levels peaking during midlife is in the instances of high-risk volunteering, which attracts younger people. Volunteer assignments in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast brought with them health risks from exposure to mold, tetanus, and other respiratory and sanitation issues. Plummer et al. (2008) studied volunteerism among social work students at four colleges located in the Gulf Coast that were not directly hit by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, finding that previous volunteer experience, hurricane related stressors, altruism and commitment to social work values were the strongest predictors of action. Mangan (2007) reported to the Chronicle of Higher Education on the development of the Student

Hurricane Network, a nonprofit group formed as a result of an outpouring of more than 2,000 students from 80 law schools, who volunteered to help the New Orleans Public Defenders office and individuals navigate the waters of flooded documents, eviction notices and backed-up court dockets.

Hurricane Katrina was the largest natural disaster in the history of America, and it gave thousands opportunities to volunteer in numerous capacities. An issue brief published by the Corporation for National & Community Service (2010) states, “more than a million volunteers have served in the gulf since Hurricane Katrina, providing critical support and helping to meet local needs” (p. 4). This large scale response to domestic volunteering has prompted the development and tracking of a new type of volunteer – the long distance volunteer, one who travels at least 120 miles to serve (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2008). Long distance volunteers tend to be male, Caucasian, and the two largest age groups are those 16-24 and those 45-54 (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2008). Individuals born after 1982 are considered to be member of the Millennial generation and fall within the 16-24 year old age group of long-distance volunteers (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2008; Marx, 2006). Hurricane Katrina also sparked an increase in interest for participants wishing to engage in alternative spring breaks – spring breaks in which students commit themselves to community service work. This increase in volunteer interest is documented in a study, “College students helping America”, which reports that college student volunteering increased by 20% between 2002 and 2005 (Dote, Cramer, Dietz & Grimm, 2006). With the current level of media available to the average citizen, and certainly more widely used by students, research on the quality of the experiences of

young adults, especially those who participate in long-distance volunteering prior to college is untapped.

**Youth/young adult volunteerism: Community service and service learning.**

Volunteerism is a form of civic engagement. Civic engagement in young adults is influenced most by parental behaviors and their own participation in education and religious organizations (Davis, 2004). “Acquiring a sense of civic-mindedness and being engaged in the community early in life is found to be of the utmost importance in developing responsible and culturally active adults,” (Oesterle et al., 2004, p. 1141). Parents who engage their children in discussion of current events and politics at home increase teenagers’ motivation to get involved (Kirlin, 2002). Young adults who are substantially involved in civic activities are more likely to engage in dialog about political knowledge, have higher confidence levels of feeling that they understand politics, and have greater comfort levels of expressing their opinions publicly and with their parents (Niemi et al., 2000).

Religious organizations and educational institutions can enhance the development of human, social and cultural capital as they provide opportunities for volunteering, participation in clubs and activities, and learning the values and norms of the larger community (Oesterle et al., 2004). “Religion provides a framework for moral order, opportunities for basic leadership competencies, coping and social skills and an avenue for facilitation and development of social consciousness and connectedness” (Gibson, 2008, p. 505). Civic engagement in education is experienced through volunteerism, community service, service learning or group participation. Volunteerism and community service are often used interchangeably when describing student service

conducted without the experience being directly tied to a learning goal, although perhaps to a larger curriculum vision (Cress et al., 2005). Students intentionally use skills and knowledge to assist in alleviating a community problem, such as cleaning and painting a playground to create a more pleasant play zone; or simply assisting the elderly with exterior home upkeep to allow them to age in place (Cress et al., 2005). Community service as a requirement for high school graduation has expanded from the domain of private and parochial schools into the public school sector following the National Service Acts of 1990 and 1993 (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Community service and volunteerism aim to effect change in knowledge and attitudes (Niemi et al., 2000).

Service learning is designed to meet specific learning goals, engage students in thinking critically about social issues, and through reflection-based growth and development, foster an increase in life-long civic engagement (Cress et al., 2005; Niemi et al., 2000). Service learning has long been an integral component in higher education in religious universities where it is rooted in the theological teachings of these institutions of higher education. Many Catholic high schools have required community service since the late 1970's. In more recent years many of these high schools have integrated service learning into a year-long course component designed to engage students in social issues within their local, national and global communities.

On a local front, the State of Ohio includes service learning as a requirement for higher education in its 2008-2017 Strategic Plan for Higher Education (Fingerhut, 2008). The plan calls for all Ohio colleges and universities to submit information on community engagement as a portion of a college portrait, stating "Faculty and student engagement in community-based service or research creates educationally enriching experiences for

students and helps communities address problems and improve the quality of life of their citizens by utilizing the university's intellectual and human resources" (Fingerhut, 2008, p. 110). The plan does not, however, delineate how or what is considered to be community service, or how it is to be measured.

At all educational levels, faculty play a critical role in service opportunities by modeling the moral competencies they hope to develop in students (Jagers, 2001). Patton (2008) describes engaging in "pedagogy of discomfort" (p. 15) to embrace the teachable moments embedded in crises. This approach "allows students to be uncomfortable as they think about intersections of the past and present, the role of emotions in constructing meaning, and how normalized discourses about 'truth' can be challenged" (Patton, 2008, p. 15-16). To authentically engage students in this type of learning requires the sense of safe space, what Kegan et al. (2001) describes as a holding space for personal learning; it is not defined as one that avoids exploration of topics, but one in which individuals can explore their beliefs without attack, one that is open to hearing all voices and in which empathy is exercised (Patton, 2008).

### **Volunteerism in millennials.**

There is also a generational component to volunteerism. Levels of civic engagement tend to vary and to become established by generation during the critical transition to adulthood as civic participation trajectories are formed (Oesterle et al., 2004). It is during this period of life transition that volunteerism can contribute to learning and development of young adults. Volunteer experiences can be additive as young adults develop new strategies and skills in responding to needs; they contribute to development as young adults change in the process of making meaning of the experience



(Merriam, 2005). In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam's (2000) research findings on trends of civic engagement indicate a decline in civic involvement among younger generations, perhaps indicating a need for increased opportunities for the experiential learning afforded through volunteerism. Davis' (2004) cohort theory of social/political trends indicates that some of the variances observed by Putnam can be further linked to environmental "shocks" such as wars, economic peaks and valleys, or ideological movements, which occur within adolescence and these shocks have permanent impact on generational values. For members of the Millennial generation in the United States, shocks may include the terrorists' attacks of September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Katrina, as well as global disasters such as the tsunamis that hit Japan in 2011 with their accompanying nuclear disasters.

The Millennials, the generation of children born between the years of 1982 through 2003, will be reaching adulthood between 2000 and 2021 (Marx, 2006). This generational cohort will be informal, technologically-literate, committed to embracing diversity, and solving global issues and injustices – indicating their potential to have strong, human, social and cultural capital (Marx, 2006). From 2004 to 2005, the number of Millennial generation volunteers increased from 7.2 to 8.2 million; they contributed almost 845 million hours of service in 2005; and more than 60 percent of the volunteer activity occurring at religious or educational sites (Volunteering of Millennials, 2008). However, the statistics do not address the types of service or the quality of volunteer service that were performed.

Project-based learning and teamwork opportunities will be most appealing to the Millennials (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Marx, 2006; Stürmer, Snyder & Omoto, 1995).

Additionally “five out of every six Millennials believe their generation has the greatest duty to improve the environment” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 216). Katrina relief provided opportunities for collegial work, environmental remediation and tangible good deeds as individuals from numerous backgrounds coalesced at worksites across the Gulf Coast region. Qualities of global citizenship perspective, in-group identification, and outcome-based interests make studying the volunteer engagement of this generation unique. Crises such as Hurricane Katrina may provide the high-risk opportunities described by Wilson (2000) and take advantage of this emerging generation’s passion for innovation and social conscientiousness.

#### **Volunteerism reflected in public policy.**

Generational commitments to social causes and service are often reflected in public policy. Since the 1960’s government programs and initiatives have been implemented with the goal of increasing volunteerism in American citizens. In 1960, President Kennedy established the Peace Corps to improve America’s relationships with other countries by providing resources and labor to help train other nations in self-sufficiency (Peace Corps, 2009). In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson created the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program (AmeriCorps, 2011). President H.W. Bush signed the National Service Act into legislation in 1990 (Howe & Strauss, 2000); this legislation was foundational for the integration of AmeriCorps into the National and Community Service Trust Act signed by President Bill Clinton in 1993 (AmeriCorps, 2011). AmeriCorps was distinct from the Peace Corps as it focused on meeting the critical needs of education, public safety, health and the environment *within* [emphasis added] U. S. borders (AmeriCorps, 2011).

The service acts of 1990 and 1993, provided the framework for integrating community service into school curriculum; high schools with some requirement for community service grew from 27 percent in 1984 to 83 percent in 1999 (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Encouraging early an early start to volunteerism, President George W. Bush asked citizens to donate 4,000 hours of service over a lifetime; a sentiment echoed by President Obama (Stengel, 2009; Wilhelm, 2006). On April 21, 2009, President Barack Obama signed into legislation PL 111-13, the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, which expands the reach of AmeriCorps and provides for funding for solutions using social innovation (Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009, 2010). The Act reauthorizes the programs carried out by the Corporation for National & Community Service. Following the signing of this legislation, President Obama addressed young volunteers.

I've seen a rising generation of young people work and volunteer and turn out in record numbers. They're a generation that came of age amidst the horrors of 9/11 and Katrina; the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; and an economic crisis without precedent. And yet despite all this, or more likely because of it, they have become a generation of activists possessed with that most American of ideas – that people who love their country can change it (President Barack Obama) (Lee, 2009).

With bipartisan support for this legislation and a rising interest in civic engagement among young adults, the time is now to move beyond traditional data collection of hours served and location of services. We must seek to understand the type of service being performed and the quality of these experiences that may be foundational in sustaining or

discouraging volunteerism through adulthood – it is time to hear their stories with their own voices.

### **Learning Through Narrative**

Discussions about narrative learning can best be summated in the words of Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, “Life can be understood backwards; but...it must be lived forward” (Goodquotes.com, 2010). This retrospective nature is central to how adults make meaning of their lives and to understanding narrative as an approach to adult learning. This approach to adult development has gained recognition as it goes beyond the traditional stage and phase models with their inherent beginning and end point and expands on the notion of having relationship and affiliation as developmental goals (Rossiter, 1999). Five key orientations that must be understood in the narrative approach to development are: 1) narrative is grounded in constructivist epistemology; 2) as a structure, narrative is central to meaning making; 3) narrative is situated on a historical timeline; 4) it is retrospective; and 5) it is embedded in culture (Rossiter, 1999). Narratives are central to our everyday lives in our daily communications and in the way we record our history.

The use of narrative affects our sense of identity and agency – it helps to explain who we are and why we take certain actions (Biesta & Teddar, 2007). It is grounded in our sociocultural experiences and provides us with a literal mirror for us to view ourselves and to reflect out to others. Through narrative we can embrace “the integration of the past, present and future into narrative that gives an individual a sense of continuity necessary for identity formation” (Rossiter, 1999, p. 62). Agency describes our ability to act autonomously within our society (Biesta & Teddar, 2007). Biesta and Teddar (2007)

describe the chordal triad of agency proposed by Emirbayer & Mische (1998), consisting of the iterational, projective and practical-evaluative dimensions. The iterational considers past influences, the projective unites the present with the future, and the practical-evaluative allows an individual to choose from among options that will make the future different from the present (Biesta & Teddar, 2007). This triad is useful for looking at how one reflects on their sense of agency – do past actions confine future imagining, or does the future require changes in the present (Biesta & Teddar, 2007)? The use of narrative constitutes a learning process that requires us to distance ourselves, reflect and evaluate our agentic orientations (Biesta & Teddar, 2007), bringing into focus, “the tension between stability and change, between identity and transformation” (Rossiter, 1999, p. 63). This captures the notion that learning can occur in and through narration (Goodson, Biesta, Teddar & Adair, 2010).

The process of narration can also be described as a site for learning in which learning can occur in two ways: through employment of narration as a tool to facilitate learning, and at the site of the narration itself as internal conversations and external accounts become part of a lifelong learning process (Goodson et al., 2010). The narrative process can result in open or closed narrative learning tied to the potential for action in one’s life; the more closed, less flexible one’s narrative is, the less likely they are open to change and to act upon changing his/her narrative (Goodson et al., 2010). Engaging in narrative recognizes and honors an individual’s lived experiences as sites for learning, allowing her/him to “make deep and authentic connections with new knowledge” (Rossiter & Clark, 2010, p. 90).

Analysis of narrative takes place in two dimensions, the narrative quality and narrative efficacy (Goodson et al., 2010). Narrative quality considers five dimensions: intensity of detail and elaboration; patterns of description versus evaluation and analysis; plot and emplotment; a chronological versus a thematic approach; and a theorized versus a vernacular account (Goodson et al., 2010). The dimension of plot, the presence of one or more organizing principles within a story, and emplotment are critical as “they can be taken as evidence that the narrator has come to some kind of understanding of the life, and thus can be taken as evidence of learning” (Goodson et al., 2010, p. 13). Narrative efficacy addresses what people can and do in the process of narrating their stories; efficacy looks at learning potential and action potential (Goodson et al., 2010). Narrative efficacy considers that as a site for learning, people can become trapped by their own stories, never wanting to move forward, in which case they do not learn from their narrative as they do not consider any new thoughts or perspectives (Goodson et al., 2010). Narrative efficacy can also promote action when it plays a role in how individuals engage with change in their lives (Goodson et al., 2010). “Narrative learning can be an important resource for the achievement of agency...the ways in which narrative learning translates into or has consequences for the ways in which people live their lives” (Goodson et al., 2010, p. 14).

### **Summary**

The review of the literature provides space for understanding the role of schools, families and community organizations ability to impact decisions about when and why individuals volunteer. We can further identify a growing trend in our country to revisit Dewey’s (1938) assertion that the role of education is to create an engaged citizenry.

Utilizing narrative methods can enhance transformational learning as experiences are reflected upon, changes in perception are acknowledged and identity shifts. Rossiter and Clark (2010) state, “By definition transformational learning seeks to facilitate change. And the same is true of narrative. Good stories take us to new places in our heads and hearts” (p. 91). As young adults find their way in society, the use of narrative storytelling as a tool for reflection and agency can help us to understand their worldviews, provide the opportunity to give voice to this generation – and along the way take each of us to new places in self-understanding.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Following the attacks of September 11 and the devastation left by Hurricane Katrina, the increase in interest to volunteer to alleviate suffering in our homeland prompted some to see these two incidents as watershed moments with potential for civic renewal in our country (Penner, 2004; Walton, 2008; Wilhelm, 2006). Studies on volunteerism following these crises have focused on data of hours served, motivation, and demographics of adult volunteers (Akin-Little and Little, 2008; Michel, 2007; Penner, 2004; Villagran et al., 2006). Following Hurricane Katrina, a limited number of studies emerged which focused on the responses to the disaster by college students, and tended to be specific to academic fields such as social work or law (Mangan, 2007; Plummer et al., 2008).

Lacking in the literature are the rich contextual studies of the experiences of both victims and the volunteers of all ages to add depth to the human aspect of this tragedy (Michel, 2007; Villagran et al., 2006; Wilson, 2000). Absent from the literature are studies on young adults in high schools who volunteered following Hurricane Katrina in formal and informal groups. We should seek to understand the meaning they made of



these experiences and how they foreground the future of these young adults, who are, in fact, our future.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the meanings made by young adult volunteers from Northeast Ohio of their Hurricane Katrina volunteer experiences using a narrative case study. The study was bounded by service participation in a specific relief trip to New Orleans in October 2005 when participants were seniors in high school. The narrative process gives voice to young adults as they reflect upon their life stories and how the crisis volunteer experience fits within them. Through their narratives, we can begin to understand more about the members of the Millennial generation - their perceptions of a just world, the educational and social opportunities they value in preparing them to engage as members in a democratic society, and their visions of future leadership potential as they step into adult roles.

The study of the experience of young adults engaged in post-Katrina relief work can help us to understand the value of developing human and social capital, and mandating volunteer and/or service learning experiences as secondary education goals. Furthermore, studying young adults five years after the Katrina experience allows for reflection on the role that this and other volunteer and service experiences played in their emergence into adulthood.

This study engaged three volunteers from northeast Ohio who shared a volunteer relief experience in reflective inquiry to develop an understanding of the meaning the events held for these young adults and how that may have shaped their post-secondary education, volunteer and career choices.

## **Research Questions**

This study examined the following research questions:

1. What meaning did the Hurricane Katrina volunteer experience have for young adults?
2. How do they include the experience in telling their life stories?
3. How did that experience shape their worldviews and choices for post-secondary education?
4. How did participating in a life-storying narrative process inform their learning and sense of agency as young adults?

## **Methodology Application to Problem and Purpose**

The primary aim of this study was to explore how young adults include the Hurricane Katrina volunteer experience into his/her life narratives through the use of a qualitative narrative case study methodology. The use of a narrative allows for the individual story telling in the words of, and through the lens of, the participants (Creswell, 2007). The study also sought to understand what other experiences in which participants engaged prior to the Katrina relief trip that would have contributed to his/her sense of agency in responding. Using a narrative case study approach, the research informs narrative learning theories as it may support or disconfirm their value in the learning experiences of young adults, a population often not interviewed in life history research.

Selection of participants from within a specific volunteer trip provided the boundaries of a case study with the trip serving as the unit of analysis (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002; Stake, 2005). This particular case study was a study of three of the

students from the trip. It can also be classified as an intrinsic case study because, with all of its peculiarities and ordinariness, it is of interest to the researcher (Stake, 2005). This study was informed by the findings from a pilot study conducted in the fall of 2010 with a member of the second cohort of student volunteers – the trip that occurred in June 2006. Following the discussion of the methodology, a brief discussion of the pilot study findings is provided as it informed the narrative framework and analysis.

Although qualitative research does not aim for generalizability, as quantitative methods would, it has the ability to provide evidence that can be understood and applied across populations. Bertaux (1981) notes, “ A single life story stands alone, and it would be hazardous to generalize on the ground of that one alone, as a second life story could contradict these premature generalizations. But several life stories taken from the same set of sociostructural relations support each other and make up, all together, a strong body of evidence” (p. 187).

Life story research utilizes narrative methods with one-to-one interviews serving as the most common data collection tool as they allow for establishment of trust between researcher and participant (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Gathering data for life stories and histories relies heavily on a researcher’s ability to engage participants in conversation (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). In *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, Polkinghorne (1998) states,

Narrative is the scheme by means of which human beings give meaning to their experience of temporality and personal actions. Narrative meaning functions to give form to the understanding of a purpose to life and to join everyday actions and events into episodic units. It provides a framework

for understanding the past events of one's life and for planning future actions. It is the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful (p. 11).

Therefore, in order to understand how the Hurricane Katrina experience was included into the participants' life narratives, the methods first must first engage participants in telling his/her life story; the narrative method provides this deliberate engagement in narrative construction (Goodson et al., 2010).

As a strategy of inquiry, I employed a narrative method. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), "a strategy of inquiry comprises a bundle of skills, assumptions and practices the researcher employs as she moves from paradigm into the empirical world" (p. 25). Narrative studies are consistent with a constructivist paradigm, grounded in an ontology of multiple realities, epistemology of co-construction of meaning, first person rhetorical structure, and methods situated in natural environments (Ponterotto, 2005). Additionally, the study sought to understand the participants' sense of agency – a concept central to folk psychology. According to Bruner (1990), "folk psychology is about human agents doing things on the basis of their beliefs and desires, striving for goals, meeting obstacles which they best or which best them, all of this extended over time" (p. 42-43). Using the narrative method allowed me to engage the participants in conversations about his/her beliefs and how they affected his/her sense of agency.

There are several important considerations in looking at life stories using narrative methods. Polkinghorne (1998) provides us with the conceptual distinction between a story and a narrative, as the latter is a story with a plot, an organizing principle, around which the narration evolves. The plot can be chronological, as would be typical

in Western storytelling, or episodic. The plot functions to give the narrator criteria for selection of events to reflect upon or organize around (Goodson et al., 2010). Bruner (1990) suggests that narratives go beyond descriptions of life stories and include justification for why a life has been lived a certain way from a moral, social and psychological standpoint. Finally, it must be acknowledged that a “narrative of an individual history is a narrative of social history” (Goodson et al., 2010, p. 12). With these considerations in mind, the narrative method provided the dynamic, fluid process required to collect, document and analyze the life story of the participant, and engage in discussion of the value of narrative as a site of learning.

For readers of the study, narrative case studies offer to them the opportunities to share in and learn from an experience vicariously (Rossiter & Clark, 2010; Stake, 2005). Narrative can also take on a pragmatic role for the reader – as he or she shapes meaning from the narrative, he or she can make it personally useful. For educators, the role of such narrative studies is equally pragmatic. Educational institutions, both at the high school and college levels, both public and private, are now requiring community service hours and/or service learning experiences for a graduation requirement (Marks & Jones, 2004; Maurasse, 2001; Metz & Youniss, 2003; Planty et al., 2006; Taylor & Pancer, 2007; Yates & Youniss, 1996). High school educators in particular will be called upon to take a greater role in the development of civically engaged young adults as studies indicate that service experiences that are intense and promote social interaction and are implemented early in high school, are more likely to result in internalization of volunteering as a component of identity, and sustained volunteering into adulthood (Marks & Jones, 2004; Taylor & Pancer, 2007; Yates & Youniss, 1996). Educators of

civic engagement in young adults will need to recognize and align their methods of teaching to those of more traditional adult educators – to step into roles as facilitators of the learning process instead of authorities of knowledge (Kappel & Daley, 2004).

As community engagement is now a required educational element in Ohio's Strategic Plan for Higher Education, 2008-2017, understanding the role and impact of such experiences is useful to enhance our ability to meet the goals of the plan (Fingerhut, 2008). Additionally, teacher preparation programs must consider grounding teacher candidates in social policy and community service methods, contributing to the provision of culturally relevant teaching in the communities in which they will serve. For urban educators this may mean confronting their own self-awareness of the students they will teach (Guy, 1999) and modeling volunteering in the communities where they are employed. Although changes in leadership at the state level may affect the priority given to community engagement within education, the ongoing desire to connect education outcomes to society's values remains at the forefront of discussions on education.

### **Theoretical Framework**

As the researcher in a qualitative study, I used Ponterotto's (2005) discussion of the philosophy of science to guide my reflection on my beliefs and assumptions regarding ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetorical structure and methodology. My beliefs in these areas create my paradigm – my interpretive framework for understanding and action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). My paradigm is primarily interpretive/constructivist; it assumes “relativist ontology, subjectivist epistemology, and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 24). With this paradigm, my goals are ideographic and emic – to understand the uniqueness and complexity of the

individual experience in context (Ponterotto, 2005). As a constructivist, understanding the lived experiences from the perspectives of the participants is important to me. The use of narratives allows me to acknowledge our multiple selves and interdependence, include social and historical context, and make sense of how we negotiate our identity (Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

A relativist ontology accepts the notion of multiple and equally valid realities, which are influenced by context – the experiences of the individuals, their perceptions, sociocultural environment, the researcher-participant interaction (Ponterotto, 2005). This allows me to look for meaning and complexities of views, and to situate them in a historical and social context (Creswell, 2007). In understanding the experience of Katrina from the lens of multiple perspectives, the sharp distinction in realities for different people is evident. There is truly a chasm in the realities between the person who lost all and the one who lost nothing. This was an important issue to understand as we worked with the victims of the hurricane.

The relationship between the researcher and the participant is defined by epistemological stance. Both constructivists and critical theorists engage in transactional/subjectivist relationships (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The distinction lies in intent – the constructivist stance seeks the co-creation of meaning to describe the lived experience; the critical theorist's stance is to incite transformation that ultimately leads to empowerment and/or emancipation (Ponterotto, 2005). As this study focused on the life history and understanding how the Hurricane Katrina volunteer experience fit into the life story of a volunteer, my epistemology was constructivist; it allowed for meaning to be co-created through collaboration between the respondent and the researcher (Goodson &

Sikes, 2001). The nature of the shared experiences encouraged dialog, facilitated the co-construction of meaning, and situated me within the research process (Haverkamp & Young, 2007).

Most often, discussion of paradigms address axioms of ontology, epistemology and methodology. Guba and Lincoln (2005) argue that axiology, the branch of philosophy that deals with ethics, aesthetics and religion, should be a basic dimension of the paradigm proposal. They assert doing this would help us to recognize that ethics are “embedded within, and are not external to, paradigms and would contribute to the consideration of and dialog of spirituality in human inquiry” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 200). I support Guba and Lincoln’s suggestion for inclusion of this into the underpinning of a paradigm, as I do not think that an individual’s ethics and spirituality can be segregated out of how they make sense of the world and the actions they take. Although I will attempt to bracket my biases to allow the voice to the participant to take the lead in telling their life story, as a constructivist, I cannot remove my own values of lived experiences from the study, as meaning is co-created based upon them.

Consistent with a constructivist approach, the rhetorical structure of the study is personalized and relayed in first person as the data gathering and analysis is subjective and dynamic (Ponterotto, 2005). The findings tell not only the story of the participants, but include my own reflections on the process and of our shared experiences.

As a constructivist, I seek naturalistic methods of inquiry. Observation and personal interviews are a natural part of my personal and professional life. Coming from a Cajun culture, storytelling is central to our communication. The Cajun culture is known for its *joie de vivre* and its storytelling laced with wit and language peculiarities. As a



public relations professional for many years, listening closely, reflecting, and constructing stories became strength of my personality. Engaging in the narrative method seemed natural to me. “Life history is an approach best suited to people who are able to listen attentively and beyond what is actually being said, and who can ask pertinent questions in a non-threatening manner. It demands the willingness to share one’s own experiences, if this seems appropriate, and of supreme importance, it requires the researcher to be the sort of person that people will want to talk to” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). The use of a narrative supports a hermeneutical approach to uncover meaning through the process of narration and deep reflection (Ponterotto, 2005).

### **Researcher as Instrument**

For this study, I conducted all interviews with the participants, thereby serving as the key instrument in the data collection (Creswell, 2007). Reflexivity is a critical issue to address integrity in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). This means being aware of my own biases, experiences and values and how they affect the researcher-participant relationship (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) term this “wakefulness” (p. 184). In being wakeful, the researcher is in a keen state of awareness and reflection in the field, when writing field notes and in analyzing data. These values and perspectives should be made apparent in the writing to allow others to understand how “a *particular* researcher’s values and expectations influence the conduct and conclusions of the study”[emphasis original] (Merriam, 2009, p. 220).

Following the volunteer relief trips to New Orleans in both October 2005 and June 2006, I assembled photos from all participants, unknowingly collecting data that was used in this study. As a public relations and marketing professional, those actions

were guided by routine treatment of ways to document events. The technique of “photo elicitation” was employed in the second interview to prompt discussions of certain days and details of the journey and to initiate reflective thoughts of how things have changed for the participant (Creswell, 2007). Third interviews engaged in discussion of the narrative process and its efficacy for the participant. Through twenty-five years as a communications professional, the role-person identity of storyteller has become an integral part of who I am. Throughout my professional career, I have learned the value of the personal story for education and advocacy. Quantitative data tells only a portion of a story; the human connection lies in the narrative.

Audio recorders were used to capture the interviews, although participants were also given the option for video recording. Multiple recorders were set up to guard against failure of one or the other. The use of audio recorders allowed me to have relaxed interviews that flowed as natural conversations. Memos following transcription captured my own reflections about the participant and about my research abilities.

### **Trustworthiness/Credibility**

To establish trustworthiness, I relied on the mutually respectful relationships that were established with the participants in 2006. My role as the researcher was primarily to listen, making each participant the authority of his experience.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the data, the participants were fully informed of the purpose of the study and assured of providing them with a voice through commitment to using direct quotes in the narrative. Transcripts of the interviews were sent to the participant to verify the context and the language the individual intended (Merriam, 2002, Morrow, 2007). Doing this enabled the participants to validate the conversation,

providing what Goodson & Sikes (2001) term, “insiders confirmation” (p. 36). Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that the goals of qualitative research are met if the participant finds that the researcher’s interpretations of their perceptions and views are credible. Especially in collecting life stories, where stories change based on time and social context, it is only the participant who can judge if the work is credible.

By design, case studies lend themselves to triangulation through multiple forms of data collection (Creswell, 2007). Interviews and photos provided a basis for authenticating the narratives. Life stories are the story we tell about ourselves; using photos and other media to triangulate the data situate the story in historical context (Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

### **Transferability**

In qualitative research, the concept of transferability lies in the hands of the reader (Merriam, 2009). Erickson (1986) promotes the notion of concrete universals, wherein instead of searching for statistical evidence that can transfer from a sample to a population, to study a case in depth and detail, and compare it to other cases studied in detail. “Every study, every case, every situation is theoretically an example of something else. The general lies in the particular” (Merriam, 2009, p. 225). The idea of looking at one case and then deciding on its applicability to another is common practice in law and medicine; as we see connections between cases, knowledge expands horizontally (Merriam, 2009).

The researcher can enhance transferability by providing enough thick, rich description and details of the process, context and assumptions of the study to make this possible for the reader (Merriam, 2009). “The current focus on the subjective, multiple

and partial nature of human experience has resulted in a revival of life history methodology. What were previously criticism of life history, its lack of representativeness and its subjective nature, are now its greatest strength” (Monro, 1988. p. 8). A second mechanism to enhance transferability is to provide diversity in the sample population, making it easier for more people to see their own lives reflected (Merriam, 2009).

### **Dependability**

In qualitative research, dependability refers to the reliability of the data. To address data dependability, one must turn to the transcripts and interviewer’s journals (Polkinghorne, 1998). It is recommended that researchers become intimately close to the original recordings, create detailed records for coding rules, including notations for pauses and voice intonation (Polkinghorne, 1998). Goodson and Sikes (2001) also propose closeness with the data noting that self-translating can be time consuming however, it results in familiarity with the data and the ability to identify significance in body language and voice intonation. How people articulate their stories can be more revealing than the words they use.

Dependability was enhanced as experienced increased with each subsequent interview. As a researcher improves his/her interviewing and journaling skills, they become more dependable as a human instrument (Merriam, 2009). Researcher journals enhance dependability in providing factual content of who was interviewed and when – facts that can be verifiable by others (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Researcher journals are also important as they are records of trains of thought, hunches and reflections, which may be used in data analysis (Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

Strategies for enhancing dependability include audit trails and triangulation. The use of the audit trail, an ongoing record of how data was collected, how categories were determined and how decisions were made throughout the study, is a key strategy for ensuring dependability of a study (Merriam, 2009; Shank, 2006). Triangulation can occur using multiple methods – in this case, finding photos of experiences that can corroborate the narrative (Merriam, 2009).

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is determined by others in being able to confirm the way in which data was collected or results obtained. Details of methodologies are captured within their own audit trail, including formats of raw data, details of data analysis, and the formation of themes (Shank, 2006). “The end result is not only a clear picture of the methodology, but also a clear map for creating a similar study” (Shank, 2006, p.115). Confirmability, like dependability and credibility, can be enhanced through triangulation using multiple methods of data collection. The researcher can employ strategies of multiple data checks, documenting them and then conducting a data audit at the end to discover any bias or distortion that may be present. Peer review, especially in the form of devil’s advocate, can enhance confirmability.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations generally include assurance of informed consent, confidentiality toward participants, benefits outweighing the risks to participants, deceptive or covert activities or participant requests outside of social norms (Creswell, 2007). In this study, because of the personal shared experiences with the participants, is an issue of power as I was the lead adult on the relief trips (Morrow, 2007). My own

experiences were largely bracketed in order not to inhibit the participants from telling their stories (Creswell, 2007; Morrow, 2007). However, because I chose to use a researcher's interactive voice, my own emotions and thoughts were interjected at times in acknowledgment of the intersubjectivity of the participant's story and my own (Chase, 2005).

In life history research, there are three key areas in which the researcher must be cognizant of issues of power and ethics (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). The first is within the design of the study and the issues are above including the purpose and intent of the study. The second has to do with the deeply personal nature of the study and the awareness of the vulnerability as participants may expose private lives and experiences. The third is to avoid the promise of emancipation or empowerment; there is no guarantee of emancipation as those in power may not read the study, and although empowerment may come from increased self-worth in having someone listen to your story, it is not a guarantee (Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

### **Institutional Review Board (IRB)**

Prior to the data collection of the study, I submitted the proposal to the IRB for approval to work with human subjects. Protocol preparation included consent to participate forms with requisite information such as the purpose of the study, comments regarding confidentiality of information and the option for anonymity, statement of known risks of participation, expected benefits to accrue to the participant, and the option to withdraw at any time, for any reason (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, information regarding the disposition of data at the conclusion of the study was included in the IRB

proposal. For this study, the dissertation chair will retain data for three years on campus in an electronic format, as it is environmentally and spatially sensible.

Of particular interest to the IRB is the issue of privacy. My participants were given a choice to have his/her real name used, to self-select a pseudonym, or to have a pseudonym assigned (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). If a participant chose to be represented in the study by a pseudonym, no likeness of them would have been used at any point in the data collection. Participants were also given the option to decline to answer any question or end the study at any time. Additionally, permission to access biographical data was requested to compile a profile of the participants based on education and previous volunteer experiences, both shared and unique. Semi-structured interview questions were drafted for the initial interview. The interviews took place via Skype, or face-to-face at public libraries or restaurants selected by the participants.

## **Data Collection**

### **Setting.**

Participant's individual preferences determined the settings for the interviews. Due to distances between us, the participant living in Chicago chose to interview via Skype; one local participant selected his nearest local library for his interviews; and the third drove in from Akron to a local restaurant near the researcher's home for his interviews, which he stated allowed him to stop in and visit with his dad who also lived in the same area. An audio recorder application within my cell phone was used to record the interviews. A laptop with movie software set up as a back up recorder with the camera aimed away from the participants so only the audio would be captured. This

allowed the participants to engage with me in grounded conversation without distraction (Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

### **Participants.**

The study involved three participants who were student volunteers in the relief trip of October 2005. This purposive sampling and the bounding of a case study provided criteria of participation on a specific relief trip with me, thereby ensuring some measure of shared experiences and exposure to cultural situations (Creswell, 2007). Six students accompanied the transit professionals on the trip, originating from three local Catholic high schools and one student was home-schooled. The students selected represented two of the three schools. They were also selected as they could be located and would be accessible for the time parameters of this study. The students were ages 17-18 at the time of the relief work five years ago. Participants were located via a letter sent to their home address at the time of the service, connections on Facebook, or referred via friends who have remained in touch with me over the five-year period. At that time of the service trips, I was not enrolled in the doctoral program. We remained in touch via Facebook, along with several other members of the relief trip.

Polkinghorne (2005) notes that the purpose of qualitative data gathering is “to describe and identify experience as it is constituted in awareness” (p. 138). I had not met with any of the participant’s since the October 2005 trip. Therefore, I did not know if they have any experience in life narration or in any qualitative research process. I approached this study aware that perhaps none of my participant’s would fit the description of a “fertile exemplar – one who could provide substantial contributions to



filling out the structure and character of the experience under investigation”  
(Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 139).

### **Data collection interviews.**

In undertaking life story data collection, multiple interviews are recommended. Three interviews are a suggested minimum for a life story; the first to gather general information and initiate early discussions that can build trust, the second to guide a deeper, reflective conversation, and a third to allow the researcher to fill in the gaps in the life story (Seidman, 1991). Following Goodson and Sikes methods for collecting life story data, my first interviews were generalized to questions about when the participant was born, where he/she grew up, about family life, education and extracurricular interests. I also asked about what he/she saw as key events in his/her life and about career choices and changes.

The second interviews delved deeper into the specifics of memories of the Hurricane Katrina trip and how it relates in his/her thinking to other life events. Life history researchers need to listen to what is being said and to pay attention to the tensions and contradictions in life stories (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Additional questions were based on the transcripts and coding from the initial interview. In encouraging the participants to talk more openly about key experiences and the tensions above, the second interviews fulfilled a key purpose of life story research, “to create space for emergent stories” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 86), to realize we are always changing a subject based on when it is told within our lifespan and the social environment we inhabit at that point.

Polkinghorne (2005) notes that self-reports come with limitations in language, reflexivity and effective communication. As the participants agreed to the use of their images in the study, slide presentations were prepared for each participant's second interview to enhance reflection and memories of the trip and to trigger deeper discussion of the meaning the event held for them. Using photo elicitation provided triangulation of memories of the Katrina trip brought up in the initial interviews.

The third interviews specifically engaged the participants in discussion of the narrative process and its potential efficacy for them. It also created space for elaboration on some aspect that may have emerged in the first two interviews. For example, during the first interview of the pilot study, the participant mentioned that the Cleveland Plain Dealer had taken a photo of their night with the homeless. To attempt to triangulate that comment, I searched the online Plain Dealer archives for the photo, but could not locate any photos or stories going back to that year or event electronically. I was not present for this event in the participant's life, yet I wanted to try to triangulate this experience, as it was central to his own story telling. Therefore, had more time been available, I would have gone to the library or the archives of the Cleveland Plain Dealer to try to access the photo for validation.

### **Data Analysis Method and Classification**

Data collection was in the form of interviews. Interviews were audio recorded using an audio recording application in my cell phone. My laptop was set up as a back up, using iMovie software to capture the audio only of the interview. The recordings were downloaded from the phone onto the Mac Book as an mP3 audio file, and then imported into NVivo 9 software for transcription.

Using NVivo software allows transcription to be done directly in the software. Headphones and the delayed playback feature were useful in transcribing as they filtered out other sounds and allowed for frequent pause and replay of the audio to enhance transcription accuracy. The transcript was then exported into a Microsoft Word document and emailed to the participant for review.

To develop categories or classifications for nodes for analysis, a word frequency search was completed and output as a word cloud – a visual device for illustrating frequency of word use by relative size of the font. Words were restricted to having at least six letters to avoid inclusion of prepositions and the use of ‘ah’ or ‘um’. To ensure that it is a word cloud of the participant’s words, all text of my comments and questions was first purged from the transcript, and then the transcript was imported back into NVivo as a new document. Key words were considered for potential node classifications. Node reports then served to enhance subsequent interview questions.

## **Researcher’s Perspectives**

### **Experiences.**

Although serving many years as a marketing and public relations professional provided me with numerous opportunities to conduct research, they most typically utilized survey software or outside sources to compile and analyze the data collected. They were also primarily quantitative in nature. My master’s thesis was a mixed methods study to test the effectiveness of a program and introduced me to the rigor and challenges of qualitative inquiry. I have conducted several qualitative studies for educational conferences and they form the basis of my experience in authentic academic research.

This study holds personal significance to me. The volunteer relief trips that sparked my interest in understanding how it fit into the life stories of the respondents took place in my hometown of New Orleans. I recall watching the news in utter horror and the feeling of impending invisibility as I watched my hometown rapidly drowning in floodwaters. Was my city going to be as lost as an ancient civilization? It made me reflect on the meaning of my own life, and my purpose in our society. These deep, frightening reflections made me appreciate the willingness of so many people who wanted to help in any way. Our shared humanity was the tie that bound us together.

When the opportunities arose to respond, I realized that my social and cultural connections served two purposes – to allow me to engage in an individual and collective recovery as a native of the city; and to bring together people and resources to serve those who had no other help – the bridging and bonding of Putnam’s (2000) studies. The work of these volunteers was deeply and profoundly personal to me even though we did not deliver supplies to work on homes of anyone I knew before the storm. Little did I know that five years later, I would be delving into the social and educational value of what was what I viewed then as only a compassionate response to a crisis by a handful of high school students. Although I could easily say why I responded, I had never really asked the others adults why they gave up vacation time to do so. I had never taken time to reflect on why I felt a sense of personal agency to reach out to students, or that the experience may have changed them in any significant way. I would have never considered that I would be the “pipeline mediator” (Moje & Martinez, 2007) to open the door for students to act upon or expand their own agency as young adults.

Relative to this study, I feel that I come equipped with a level of expertise in student leadership and volunteering based on at least ten years of program development, implementation, and facilitation in this area. Since the mid 1990's, I have been deeply engaged in leadership development among young adults. I served ten years on Ohio's Youth Leadership Forum, a weeklong program for leadership skill development among high school students with disabilities. As one of the original committee members, I'd always hoped to follow up with the participants of that program to understand if the program made a difference in their lives. For the previous four years and the current year, I am involved in a daylong youth summit at Lakeland Community College. This program brings together approximately 50-60 students from high schools across the Lake County to participate in analysis of the quality of life in the county, participate in visioning change, and developing individual plans for enacting change. Of significance to me, this particular program engages students from all socioeconomic and academic performance levels. The constructivist in me is called to action in these programs. When I participate in these programs each year, I feel an enormous sense of joy as students gain an understanding of themselves, challenge their worldviews and learn how to become change agents in their own lives and the lives of others.

My ongoing fascination with this aspect of young adult life provides me with frequent encounters with individuals engaged in volunteering, rendering them a significant part of my life story as well. This study delved into the when and *why* [emphasis added] of volunteering by young adults as put forth by Penner (2004). The study was transformational for me, as in the process of hearing and retelling the life stories of the participants, my own story was also changed (Biesta et al., 2010; Goodson

& Sikes, 2001, Hoshmond, 2005; Rossiter & Clark, 2010). Both past and present experiences provide the building blocks for my interest in the Katrina volunteers. Beyond the setting being in my hometown, it was a unique set of young leaders with motivation and agency unexplored by research. It was my opportunity to discover, “so what?”

### **Strategies to address bias.**

From the constructivist perspective, my own values and biases cannot be divorced from the study as they are used in the co-creation of meaning. To accommodate and address my biases, I employed the strategy of the use of a researcher’s interactive voice (Chase, 2005). Chase (2005) discusses researchers’ use of three voices – the authoritative, the supportive and the interactive. At opposing ends of a continuum, the authoritative and supportive voices, constrain and centralize the narrator’s voices respectively. Although both of these voices include extensive passages of the narration in their reports, using an authoritative voice interjects the researcher’s interpretations and the supportive voice provides little insight into the researcher’s interpretive process (Chase, 2005). While researchers may move between these voices along a continuum, focusing on the use of the interactive voice allows me to acknowledge the intersubjectivity between the stories of the participants and my own. In using this interactive voice, I can make my own emotions, thoughts and interpretive decisions apparent.

Although use of this voice is at times considered indulgent, it is useful in instances such as this, where enhancing the readers understanding of my role in the story and my relationship with the participants, it will enhance the reader’s understanding of

the participants' narratives (Chase, 2005). Goodson and Sikes (2001) note that one of the ethical challenges to conducting life history research with individuals you know is the recognition of the power in the telling of someone else's story. By using the interactive voice, my own thoughts, perceptions, and vulnerabilities are included in the narrative, mitigating my position of power.

### **Pilot Study: Informing the Study**

In the fall of 2010, a pilot study was conducted using a single participant from the second cohort of high school volunteers. The data collection, including IRB approval, was completed as outlined in this current proposed study. I considered myself fortunate to have for the pilot study a "fertile exemplar" in my participant. He was a highly reflective and articulate young man. Also, as he is preparing to embark on his own thesis paper for graduation, he understood the value and importance of data collection and its nuances for integrity, bias, trustworthiness, and reciprocity. He was intrigued and challenged by his participation as many things were disclosed in our conversations that he had not disclosed to others, even within his family, and yet, he did not restrict me from reporting anything. He reviewed the transcripts and approved their use without restriction. The word clouds and what his story revealed through this approach to discourse analysis intrigued him.

Due to time limitations and scheduling conflicts, I was only able to conduct two interviews with my participant. Life stories need at least three interviews to authentically convey a story and for the researcher to render the data reliable (Polkinghorne, 2005). One other concern is the location of the interviews. All stories are contextually situated; therefore collection of data on campus, although providing a confidential environment,

may have varied from data collected in a more casual setting. This is a double-edged sword issue. On one hand, the participant may not have revealed significant changes in his religious beliefs in a more casual setting; on the other, more genuine discussions about people and relationships may have emerged in a setting where photos or memorabilia associated with people would be seen.

The pilot study provided insight into the potential and limitations of using software such as NVivo. First, the time required to download and transcribe the data is significant; further, I was not able to go back and add observational comments to the video transcripts due to lack of time and competency with the software. Secondly, the first word cloud produced was based on the transcript in its entirety; when I realized that included my own questions and comments, I realized that needed to be corrected for this study. In the pilot study, when my content was removed from the transcript, the word cloud varied only slightly, but I felt assured that it was then based on his words, not mine. Another limitation to the word cloud is that synonyms show as separate words, requiring attention for the analysis in the development of themes or keywords. Conversely, immersion into the use of the software provided with technical competence that will be beneficial for this study.

The pilot study findings were inspiring to me. Not only did the participant's life trajectory support some of the existing literature findings for concepts such as role-identity, the attraction of high-risk volunteering, and the importance of reflection and safe-space for experiencing contested perceptions in young adulthood; but the process itself was meaningful and agentic for him (Goodson et al., 2010; Kegan et al., 2001; Penner, 2004; Wilson, 2000). In his narrative he describes himself as a "global citizen"



consistent with the descriptions of the Millennial generation (Marx, 2006) and one who is attracted to the risk involved with crisis volunteering (Wilson, 2000). A strength of a narrative, especially in adult learning, is that it allows for flexibility and dynamic interaction between the researcher and participant for what Goodson and Sikes (2001) refer to as “space for emergent stories” (p. 86) to be created. In delving into what appeared to be gaps in the participant’s story and more deeply into those he deemed important, he began to recognize the shift in his life focus from otherness to me-ness as he is transitioning from a student to a self-supporting adult. This was a contribution to the efficacy of his narrative process – it is providing both learning and action potential as he makes this critical adult transition; it served an agentic function in how he considers next steps in his life and where volunteering will fit within it. As we completed this study, he offered to continue helping in any way.

### **Summary**

Having multiple participants in the current study allowed me to explore how this particular experience is integrated into each one’s life stories. The commonalities between their stories may reveal the potential to bridge with the narratives of other young volunteers and inform meaningful program development in this area.

The study also challenged my own thinking, consistent with comments about how researchers are affected by their work (Hoshmond, 2005). These insights provide me with continuing and advanced ways to look into the process of life narratives in young adults and the value of service, in one or more of its myriad forms, as an educational requirement. In my own reflection on this study, my own paradigm is shifting to a more critical theoretical underpinning.

The use of a case study and employment of narrative methodology allowed for each participant's story to stand alone, yet contribute to a generational polyvocality as common themes emerged from those stories. The established relationship with me provided the underpinnings for the safe space needed for participants to engage in the self-reflection and discovery that may occur in the process. The timing of this study captured young adult perceptions of where they fit in our society and how they use the past to foreground their future (Flacks, 2007). The process of narrative inquiry to gather these stories contributed to cultural memory, "an activity occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future" (Bal, 1999, vii).

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Following the attacks of September 11 and the devastation left by Hurricane Katrina, the increase in interest to volunteer to alleviate suffering in our homeland prompted some to see these two incidents as watershed moments with potential for civic renewal in our country (Penner, 2004; Walton, 2008; Wilhelm, 2006). Studies on volunteerism following these crises have focused on data of hours served, motivation, and demographics of adult volunteers (Akin-Little and Little, 2008; Michel, 2007; Penner, 2004; Villagran et al., 2006). Following Hurricane Katrina, a limited number of studies emerged which focused on the responses to the disaster by college students, and tended to be specific to academic fields such as social work or law (Mangan, 2007; Plummer et al., 2008).

Lacking in the literature are the rich contextual studies of the experiences of both victims and the volunteers of all ages to add depth to the human aspect of this tragedy (Michel, 2007; Villagran et al., 2006; Wilson, 2000). Absent from the literature are studies on young adults in high schools who volunteered following Hurricane Katrina in formal and informal groups. We should seek to understand the meaning they made of

these experiences and how they foreground the future of these young adults, who are, in fact, our future.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the meanings made by young adult volunteers from Northeast Ohio of their Hurricane Katrina volunteer experiences using a narrative case study. The study is bounded by service participation in a specific relief trip to New Orleans in October 2005 when participants were seniors in high school. The narrative process gives voice to young adults as they reflect upon their life stories and how the crisis volunteer experience fits within them. Through their narratives, we can begin to understand more about the members of the Millennial generation - their perceptions of a just world, the educational and social opportunities they value in preparing them to engage as members in a democratic society, and their visions of future leadership potential as they step into adult roles.

The study of the experience of young adults engaged in post-Katrina relief work can help us to understand the value of developing human and social capital, and mandating volunteer and/or service learning experiences as secondary education goals. Furthermore, studying young adults five years after the Katrina experience allows for reflection on the role that this and other volunteer and service experiences played in their emergence into adulthood.

This study engaged three volunteers from northeast Ohio who shared a volunteer relief experience in reflective inquiry to develop an understanding of the meaning the events held for these young adults and how that may have shaped their post-secondary education, volunteer and career choices.

## **Research Questions**

This study examined the following research questions:

1. What meaning did the Hurricane Katrina volunteer experience have for young adults?
2. How do they include the experience in telling their life stories?
3. How did that experience shape their worldviews and choices for post-secondary education?
4. How did participating in a life-storying narrative process inform their learning and sense of agency as young adults?

## **Participants**

The sample was bound by participation in a Hurricane Katrina relief trip that was organized by Laketran, the regional transit system for Lake County Ohio from October 21 through October 25, 2005. Further, the participants had to be high school students at the time of the trip who were invited to accompany the transit system through the school community service staff or faculty member at their respective high schools. The potential sample pool included six male Caucasian students. Two students attended an urban Catholic high school; three attended two different suburban Catholic high schools; and one was home schooled and had been referred by a parent of another student participant. As the organizer of the trip, I had met all of the sample members in October 2005 and had minor sustained contact with two following the trip to provide letters of reference for college entry.

Letters of intent to conduct a study requesting response of interest to participate were sent to the homes of the sample during the Christmas holiday season in December

2010. Letters were mailed to the last known address of the participants that I had from the relief trip. I received a response via phone call from one participant's mother who provided me with direct contact information to her son. One participant returned my call indicating a favorable interest in participating. I also searched for sample members via Facebook, found four and requested 'friend' status. Three responded immediately, one just prior to data collection.

At the time of data collection, one member of the sample was involved in ranger training in the U.S. Army and would not be available to participate. One sample member's letter had been returned and the last known phone number disconnected, thereby reducing the potential sample size to four participants. One participant who originally expressed interest in participating in the study declined phone calls and email requests to move forward with interviews. Therefore the study was conducted with three participants representing fifty percent of the potential sample.

### **Data Collection Methods**

#### **Pre-interview protocol.**

A pre-interview protocol was completed by each participant to gather data on each participant's education, employment and community service involvement during high school, college and post-college graduation. One graduated from an urban Catholic high school and two graduated from the same suburban Catholic high school. All three participants had attended four-year colleges and graduated in May 2010. All participants are employed full-time; all had participated in numerous community service activities during high school and some in college.

***Meeting the participants.***

The pre-interview protocol gathered demographic information about the participants. Although each participant listed some of the community service activities in which they were involved, the interviews revealed that much was not included on the pre-interview form.

Table 1.

Demographics of Participants

Participant	Sean	Derek	Alex
High School	St. Ignatius	Lake Catholic	Lake Catholic
College	Loyola University New Orleans	Lake Erie College	University of Akron
Major	Finance	Social Science/Criminal Justice	Disaster Mitigation and Emergency Preparedness
Current age	23	22	23
Employment	Client business analyst	Police officer	Bar owner

**First interviews: Life histories.**

The initial interview with each participant followed a protocol to gather information on each one's life history. These included questions about family structure, social participation in sports, clubs and organizations in elementary through college

years, education, community service experiences through high school and college, and reflections on the Hurricane Katrina relief trip of October 21-25, 2005.

Two participants preferred to be audio recorded, therefore I decided to only audio record all, and eliminate the video recording option. Audio recording allowed for smooth flow of conversations, uninterrupted by note taking. Following the first interview with each participant, interviews were transcribed using NVivo 9.0, computer software for qualitative data collection and analysis. As life narratives aim to capture the life story in the participants' words, the transcripts were pared to remove my language from the transcripts. These pared documents were entered into NVivo for word frequency queries for each participant. The queries were set to identify the top 50 words used by each participant, allowing for the grouping of word recognition at the synonym level and requiring a six-letter minimum. These parameters would eliminate slang terms in the language e.g. 'like', adjectives, e.g. 'just', and combine words such as 'family', 'mom', and 'uncles'. The results of these queries are then viewed in a visual format of a word tag cloud, with the most frequently used words appearing larger on the page than those less frequently used. These word clouds would be used in the narrative analysis for each participant.

The word tag clouds provided a visual reference for common language used by the participants and served as the basis for coding terms for the transcripts. The word 'people' was the single-most predominate word on all word tag clouds, followed by words such as 'service' and 'school'. Using the pared transcripts, the data was coded for primary themes: family, education, mandatory service, voluntary service, career, and Katrina. I reviewed the transcripts for areas where probing might add depth to a



particular dimension of a life story. For example, one participant mentioned doing benefit concerts in college to raise monies for a homeless veterans project – this was a point that I felt would reveal more about the participant’s sense of agency in helping others – an important aspect of adult life and learning.

**Second interviews: Post-Katrina education, service and careers, and photo elicitation.**

The second interviews focused on the exploration of key points in each participant’s life, probing for discussion specific to their lives as emerging adults – the post-secondary school years relative to their education, career choices and community service. To specifically elicit memories and reflections of the Katrina experience a photo slide show was prepared for each participant using 30 to 40 photos from the trip that I had either taken or collected from other members on the relief trip. These were organized by key points of the journey: the 21-hour ride down in buses; the supply distribution at St. Joseph the Worker Church; the removal of roofing debris at Home A; the dismantling of a shed at Home B; the emptying of all contents at Home C; the supply distribution at Berean Christian Church; meals and fellowship; garbage and dump sites; and neighborhoods we drove and/or walked through during the trip. Participants were asked to reflect on each slide and share their thoughts about the events in the photos.

The second interviews were audio recorded as were the first and transcribed in NVivo. The paring process was repeated to retain only the participant’s language. A word frequency query was conducted that combined the pared text from the first interview and the responses to the probing questions of the second interview for one participant. This was done to see how, if at all, his most frequently used language would

change. As no appreciable differences were discerned, this was not repeated for the remaining two participants. However, the entirety of the second interview – probing questions and responses to photo elicitation – were imported into NVivo and coded for themes.

### **Third interviews: Looking into the future - agency in narrative.**

The third interview with each participant explored their thoughts about participating in a narrative process and how, if in any way, it provided them with an approach to their future plans. Protocol for the third interview asked whether they had reflected on their life as a whole to this point, what was the most interesting aspect of participation in the relief work, and how these interviews might guide future actions.

These interviews were audio recorded, transcribed in NVivo and pared down to participant language. The collective interviews for each participant were analyzed for the presence or absence of narrative quality and efficacy – observing the depth of detail and the organizing principles in their stories, and the potential for learning and action, which may indicate achievement of agency (Goodson et al., 2010). The participants' narratives were explored for evidence of Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) chordal triad of agency – the iterational dimension, which considers the past; the projective dimension that unites the present with the future; and the practical-evaluative dimension, which allows individuals to choose from among options that can shape the future.

### **Data Triangulation**

Triangulation of data for each participant's life story was accomplished in several ways. First, some questions were discussed in at least two interviews. These included topics such as family structure, parental education and careers, educational experiences

and extracurricular involvement. In the case of two participants who attended the same high school, they individually reflected on shared experiences in much the same language even though they had not spoken to each other for a couple of years. For example, they both discussed how they found out about the opportunity to participate in the relief trip.

Triangulation was also confirmed through the use of member checking, the process of returning the transcripts to the participants for validation of content and context of their responses. As the language of the individual is central to the validity of a life story, member checking is a key method of triangulation for this study. All participants responded to the use of the transcripts without any changes. Additionally, I provided each participant with his life story for his review. A single change was suggested by Sean, to change a sentence that his father ‘complained’ about tuition costs to ‘commented’ about it as he felt the former language sounded too harsh.

A third method of triangulation was to use the Internet to confirm and explore the organizations outside of the shared relief trip that the participants identified in their stories as places that they have engaged in relief work. Some aspects of the lives that were triangulated this way were searches on the Wounded Warrior project, the fraternities identified in the stories of two participants, the school identified as a restoration project, the service pages of the websites of the high schools the participants attended, and an activist group identified by one participant.

My own photos and documents of the relief trip served to triangulate the participants’ memories of those dates. In one instance in particular, two of the participants shared a story of one young mother and child that were assisted on the relief trip. Although the photo they spoke of was not in the group selected for discussion, I had

the photo of which they spoke and retrieved it on my computer. Independently, they both told the same story to accompany the photo – a story of which I was not aware of until these interviews.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Life stories.**

The life stories of the participants are central to the study. The participant life stories were gathered using a protocol that lent itself to a chronology of a life story, typical of western storytelling (Goodson, et al, 2010). It delved into the early years of growing up, family structure, education, social and sports events, and volunteer experiences beginning in elementary school and progressing to the current day. All participants at some point, noted that thinking back to the Hurricane Katrina event was a *very long-time ago* [emphasis added], causing me to realize that in the life of a 22 or 23 year-old, five years is almost one-fourth of their entire lifetime. This made me aware to be mindful of the differences in perceptions of time between generations (Bilken, 2007) and the differences in significance of the Katrina relief trip – as it was my hometown and my family directly affected, Katrina will always weigh more heavily in my own memory than theirs.

Within their individual stories, issues of narrative quality and efficacy can be discerned. Their stories shared common sociocultural environments, yet revealed unique plots and “tensions between stability and change, between identity and transformation” (Rossiter, 1999, p. 63). Responses to queries for more depth on specific events in each participant’s life were incorporated into each respective narrative. Responses to the photo elicitation portion of the second interview were analyzed to gauge which events

stood out most for the participants, the meaning they held, and how the participants' memories triangulate with, or are distinguished from, each other.

Following each participant's life narrative is the analysis of the photo elicitation process. Additionally, from the narratives and the photo elicitation, two common themes emerged as a result of considering the participants as a case study. These themes were *mandatory community service* and *the influence of Katrina*. A discussion of these themes follows the photo elicitation analysis. Within the individual life stories are brief discussions of narrative dimensions present in each that will also be explored in greater depth independently from the life stories.

***Sean.***

Situated as the third son in a family of four brothers, Sean's narrative exudes stability and service. Sean describes his childhood as

Pretty standard – we were always involved in track, cross country, basketball...there was not really a sport me or my brothers didn't play...it was just crazy having three brothers, there were always things going on  
(Sean).

Both of his parents were employed, his mom as a high school counselor in a public school system, and his dad as a purchasing manager in the aircraft industry. The brothers shared a common upbringing in Catholic elementary schools although only his mother was Catholic. All four brothers attended St. Ignatius High School, with the youngest brother set to graduate in May 2011. When asked about how his non-Catholic father felt about Catholic education, Sean reflected,

He would comment about the cost of everything, but I mean we all got into really awesome universities, and now that we are all on our own and fairly successful, looking back on it, he's definitely for it, and raising us with good morals...so he's pretty happy with the outcomes of it (Sean).

When talking about the early years of life, Sean's story is chronological; in high school, however, his story takes on a more thematic approach, as the role of service emerges in importance in his daily life.

At St. Ignatius, service – both mandatory and voluntary – became integrated into Sean's life story, thus validating the strong influence of both religion and education on volunteering (Michel, 2007; Oesterle et al., 2004; Penner, 2004; Putnam, 2000, Wilson, 2000). Beyond mandated service, St. Ignatius offers numerous opportunities for community service on a voluntary basis, often led by faculty members outside of the theology department, thereby providing multiple models of the moral competencies, commitment to engagement, reflection and learning that students are expected to develop (Jagers, 2001; Roberts, 2008). Among the volunteer service opportunities for St. Ignatius students are the Arrupe Neighborhood Partnership, which includes after school tutoring, summer camps and events for neighborhood children; the St. Joseph of Arimathea Pallbearer Society that provides pallbearer service especially to the poor; St. Benedict Joseph Labre Homeless Ministry, a weekly ministry of fellowship and food to the homeless of Cleveland; and the Father Gafney Student Mission Program, which provides students with opportunities to “live their faith serving the poor” both inside and outside the United States (Wolfe, 2011, p. 9). Finding ways for students to engage in the community in thoughtful and meaningful ways that allow them to “gain patience and

develop a greater sense of empathy and awareness to the needs of others” is central to planning the service experiences at St. Ignatius (Metro, 2011, p. 10).

Sophomore service was integrated into the St. Ignatius curriculum in the 1970’s (Wolfe, 2011). The program integrates the exploration of the causes and presence of a social justice issue, Catholic social teaching, and hands-on service in the community for one-half day of one semester in sophomore year. This St. Ignatius program fits the service learning model as it addresses social issues, requires reflection for growth and development, and is intended to foster life-long service habits (Cress et al., 2005; Niemi, et al., 2000). Reflection during sophomore service at St. Ignatius meets critical component of Catholic spiritual development and allows young men to understand how to live their faith (Morgan & Kollman, 2009; Wolfe, 2011). Sean speaks of his sophomore service at the Malachi House, an urban hospice house.

It was pretty intense. One week, you’d go and play chess with someone and the next week they had a rose on their bed, so that’s how you would tell they were gone....It was an eye opening experience. I don't know if I would do it again...because it’s hard to build a relationship with someone and they will be gone, even if it’s just a small conversation. It’s just not an easy type of service (Sean).

Yet, later, when Sean talks about his Hurricane Katrina experience, he expresses appreciation for ‘meaningful’ service, stating,

I’ve done service where it was kind of meaningless – you show up and there’s not really much for you to do.... Cleaning up debris, and being at people’s service...I felt like it was pretty well organized...me and Jim

basically having as much impact as we could in a short period of time  
(Sean).

Time is a precious gift that St. Ignatius High School encourages its students to give as a way of living their faith through service. Principal Pete Corrigan notes, “A lot of young people, naturally, aren't into the pomp and circumstance of high liturgy. Most of them take to service work. It gives them a way to approach God and see their faith” (Wolfe, 2011, p. 8). Sean began his volunteer experiences in freshman year, serving as a tutor at the Arrupe House. Sean recalls, “I did after school tutoring, maybe two days a week.” Sean embraced the volunteer service opportunities beyond his sophomore service, continuing to tutor at the Arrupe House, participating in the St. Joseph Arimathea Pallbearer Society, and the St. Benedict Joseph Labre Ministry on a weekly basis. These experiences exposed him to a “pedagogy of discomfort”, where students can confront discourses about truth and experience teachable moments within crisis (Patton, 2008, p. 15). When talking about the St. Joseph of Arimathea Ministry, Sean recalled,

I always assumed that someone knows someone else. Like when somebody dies, you would assume there would be enough people to carry him or her to their grave....but that's not the case...besides us Ignatius kids, there would be five or ten people there...that was a really, really eye opening experience...we would sit up front...to give these people a dignified funeral....I think they were shocked. They weren't expecting it  
(Sean).

This notion of confronting expectations and stereotypes was present in his thoughts about the Labre Ministry as well.



It was just to meet people and see them over and over, and absolutely it changed my view on homeless people in general. Very smart people, some of these people just don't fit well in society....But it's important to know that they need relationships and know people, and have friends, like us that would just come and hang out with them (Sean).

Based on Sean's ongoing and consistent participation in volunteering, especially across multiple venues, he was developing across both prosocial behavior dimensions of helpfulness and other-oriented empathy, internalizing the volunteer identity and engaging in transformative learning (Callero et al., 1987; Kappel & Daley, 2004; Penner, 2004). Of significance to St. Ignatius High School, he was fulfilling the school's motto in becoming a 'man for others'.

Situated in an urban setting, St. Ignatius' environment provides access for its students to engage with social issues on a daily basis as evidenced by the Arrupe House and the ministries where Sean participated. Corrigan states, "one of the big differences in Jesuit spirituality is that it doesn't step away from the world, but ventures into the world and embraces the world" (Wolfe, 2011, p. 8). For Sean, the Hurricane Katrina relief experience provided that opportunity. As a senior in high school, Sean recalled seeing a flyer about the trip and calling a friend, Jim, a life-long neighborhood friend who attended St. Edwards, a suburban Catholic high school. Sean's consideration of expanding his service boundaries supports Omoto and Synder's (1995) volunteer process model in which Sean's prior personal experiencing in volunteering, the current circumstance of need for help, and his consistent motivation to help others would all be strong predictors of his likelihood to respond to the call for Katrina volunteers.

Sean's narrative up to this point provided evidence of agency embedded in his story – he felt it was important to help others by serving. Regarding going to New Orleans to help, Sean's interest in expanding these boundaries through service was consistent with the Jesuit mission opportunities. At this point, Sean also joined the growing ranks of a new breed of volunteers, long distance volunteers who travel at least 120 miles to perform volunteer service, and who tend to be young, Caucasian males between the ages of 16 and 25 (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008). He had internalized the role of helping others through service (Callero et al., 1987; Penner, 2004); the opportunity to go to New Orleans further validated service as a central life plot in these formative years (Goodson et al., 2010).

Narrative efficacy considers both learning and action potential (Goodson et al., 2010). In Sean's story we find both as he reflects on the Katrina experience. The lessons learned from service close to home stayed at the forefront of his mind on the trip to New Orleans.

I realized if we didn't show up and move that debris, no telling when they would see electricity – they were so thrilled and I remember thinking oh my, what did we get into?...It's always important to maintain a level of respect for the people that you are serving and to always treat them how you would treat any other person. And that's what I consider to be the most important thing while you are serving someone, that you always do that (Sean).

Though mindful of how his actions would impact those he was serving, Sean's story also reveals that the experience held for him significant action potential for the future.

I remember how thankful people were. I remember just seeing people smiling constantly when we were serving them...I just remember how appreciative everyone was and I guess that's what I took out of it. And how nice the people in general were down in New Orleans – that was one of the main factors why I wanted to go to school there. It was the hospitality we received while we were down there; it was just how warm people in general were down there...I knew there was a Jesuit college down there and I was looking at Jesuit colleges, I was looking at Loyola of New Orleans, and so when I went down there I was just like, "this is awesome" (Sean).

The social validation that Sean received while volunteering in New Orleans prompted Sean to return to the city, not only to attend college but to continue in the restoration efforts as a volunteer (Amato, 1990; Callero et al., 1987; Stürmer, Snyder & Omoto, 2005).

Sean attended Loyola of New Orleans, where service remained a central aspect of his life. Sean became involved with Phi Kappa Psi fraternity, whose motto is "the great joy of serving others" (Community Service, 2009). Participating in volunteer relief efforts as part of an organization provided further social validation, a social network rooted in service, and an in-group service identity that further enhanced his individual volunteer identity (Amato, 1990; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Michel, 2007).

While at Loyola, I did various activities, including laying down sheet rock for homes devastated in Katrina, and Ka-TREE-na – planting trees in areas

were trees we knocked down from Katrina. One of the kids in my fraternity worked for Teach for America in this one high school that got pretty banged up, I'm not sure of the name – we did painting and landscaping there. Oh, he just texted me back – the Batiste Culture Arts Academy. I think all three service things I was involved in had a direct impact on helping the city get restored after Katrina, so I feel I was a help to the city. It was things that wouldn't have been done so soon, or maybe later, or never. So I kind of felt that I had a big impact on those kinds of things (Sean).

This reflection, four years after his first service to New Orleans supports the importance for service to provide a sense of efficacy to the volunteer. As a member of the Millennial generation, Sean's desire to volunteer outside of his home community is consistent with this generation's global mindset, attraction to outcome-based activities, and high risk volunteer opportunities (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Marx, 2006; Wilson, 2000). Expanding his service boundaries supports Levine and Thompson's (2004) study of the salience of place – initially he went to New Orleans as a site of service. In returning there for college, his identity became more fluid, and as he continued to share in the story of recovery, he experienced a “cultural oneness” with the city and its inhabitants (Levine & Thompson, 2004, p. 230).

Sean returned to Cleveland for the summer of 2009 and interned for a non-profit organization, America Scores Cleveland. His reflection indicates development associated with transformational learning as he concretely imagines himself moving forward on the continuum to adulthood, shifting from college student to working adult (Merriam, 2005).

They are a really small organization....It's an after school program that combines soccer and poetry for underprivileged youth in inner-city Cleveland...I worked directly on their finances and I could definitely see myself doing that if ever I was presented with an opportunity like that (Sean).

Sean graduated from Loyola in May of 2010 in Finance with a minor in Accounting, and accepted a full-time position in Chicago as a client business analyst for an advertising agency. Although he is adjusting to the rigors of full-time work and being self-sufficient, the idea of service remains in his mind. As he considers the next steps in volunteering, the influences of faith, service and brothers again come into play.

One of the things that like, my brother is trying to get involved in – and he went to Ignatius too – he works on his church finance committee, and I thought that was always cool. And another cool opportunity that I would like to do is be on the board of directors of a non-profit if I didn't actually make it my main career (Sean).

Sean's life story to this point has become centralized around the plot of service that is strongly connected to his education, family, and faith. He reflected back on the importance and value of getting involved in service opportunities.

I've seen a lot of things that I don't think a lot of people my age have, whether it be homeless people at their core and not just passing them by, how you wouldn't get to know them as people; serving people that you wouldn't normally be able to serve like in New Orleans. I think it helped me to grow and made me more respectful of people in general (Sean).

Sean's current status as not being engaged in volunteering on a regular basis is consistent with Putnam's (2000) of early adulthood when individuals suspend civic engagement as they establish their careers and families. However, he noted that participating in the life story process has made him aware that he needs to get involved in some volunteer capacity as service is important to him.

***Derek.***

Derek's life story is centralized around themes of people, helping and patriotism. The older of two brothers, Derek has known since a very young age that he wanted to be involved in a public safety profession, a tradition that runs in his family.

Both my parents are involved in either court or fire. My dad's a firefighter; my mom works in the court system. My family is in the military and police – a long stretch back into helping others (Derek).

His brother, who is four years younger than he, continues in the family tradition of safety professions as well, graduating from Cuyahoga Community College's Fire Academy and working on his paramedic training at Lakeland Community College.

Derek's family is close knit and stable; his recollections of growing up talk about attending St. Mary's in Painesville and, throughout his life, playing hockey since about age 4.

My dad played and coached some pee wee bantam teams and just kind of something we weren't forced into but more or less suggested at an early age, just something I caught on with because I have ADHD – and had all kinds of energy. I played hockey, soccer, baseball, football; sometimes I

was playing three different sports at the same time, but I played since I was about four and it's just something I loved, so I stuck with it (Derek).

Derek attended Lake Catholic High School in Mentor and was initially involved in soccer and hockey, but committed solely to hockey due to schedule conflicts – and played on the varsity hockey team all four years. His younger brother followed in his footsteps both in attending Lake Catholic and in playing hockey. Derek's story conveys an aura of privacy; his narrative of his family and early life is not filled with rich descriptions, but he speaks matter-of-factly about the structure and social environment of his early years.

Lake Catholic High School has a mandatory community service requirement for all students – they must complete 60 hours of volunteer service between the end of their 8th grade year and February 1st of their senior year ([www.lakecatholic.org](http://www.lakecatholic.org)). Derek reflected on the mandatory service requirement.

At our school it was required, we had to. To be honest back then, I didn't really want to do it. I don't think anybody wanted to do it at the time because everybody's got more important things to do. Now that I look back on it, I'm happy I did it; I'm really, really happy I did it (Derek).

For his mandatory service Derek helped out at the Red Cross store, cleaning and setting out inventory; he assisted with construction and repainting of a church in downtown Painesville; helped in a soup kitchen; assisted an elderly neighbor on lawn or home maintenance; and participated in the Katrina relief effort. The service model at Lake Catholic High School aligns with the definition and goals of community service – students use skills and knowledge to address a community problem that results in a change of knowledge and attitude (Cress et al., 2005; Niemi et al., 2000). Derek

described helping in the soup kitchen as “an eye opening” experience, but did not speak to any structured discussion of social justice issues or reflection as part of the service program. Except for the Katrina trip, his high school volunteer experiences were relayed without great passion or excitement. When recalling how he became involved in the trip to New Orleans, the social connection between Derek and Alex was apparent, as was the important role of faculty as pipeline navigators in knowing their students to be able to readily identify candidates and in being able to assist them in navigating past barriers (Moje & Martinez, 2007; Putman, 2000; Roberts, 2008).

I went in that morning; it was the day before we left. I went in and talked to one of my teachers, who was a religion teacher, and then she brought it up that Laketran was looking for somebody to go and it just built off of there. She said, “ah, you probably don't want to do it – it's short notice”. She said that myself, and then Alex would be the best candidates to represent Lake Catholic to go. And we said, “Sure, we'll do it” (Derek).

The Katrina experience seemed engage Derek in a sense of agency. His memories of the trip are detailed and vivid. They revealed how he was able to act upon things that held meaning for him. When he spoke to why he initially was interested in going to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina, his response reflected the long-standing tradition of family duty, a desire to see things made right, and a bystander-intervention approach to helping (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Lerner, 1998; Wilson, 2000).

Just the ability to help a mass amount of people and help the country when they needed it. I'm a patriot at heart I guess you could say, I like being



involved in things and helping others. And I figured I'd never have a chance like that again probably (Derek).

Consequently, he felt that he had been able to make a difference in the lives of people who needed help. When he returned home, the social validation of the experience was accompanied by a deepened sense of respect and appreciation for him (Amato, 1990; Callero et al., 1987).

They were proud, very happy for me that I had the chance to do something very worthwhile; help the country in need. Everybody just couldn't believe that I went down there. Everyone wanted to see pictures; and couldn't believe it and wanted to know what I did, where we were and who we helped (Derek).

Going to help in the post-Katrina environment strengthened Derek's sense of identity and agency (Biesta & Teddar, 2007). It strengthened his self-perceptions not only as one who wanted to help others, but also as one who could make decisions that would benefit others.

Derek's descriptions of his memories of the Katrina relief trip are filled with intimacy in detail. He recalls one point where while removing roofing debris from one yard, there was a puppy tied up on the other side of a fence and he jumped over to check on the animal.

We jumped over the fence and gave him food and we found out the owner was home. So we knocked on the door...I think he was only like two years old or something like that. The owner was this little old lady. She said she was looking out back because she was wondering what people

were doing and she was so happy that she got food. We had so much dog food. I remember giving her a case of [dog] food and she was so happy (Derek).

He also reflected on the group that went down together. He knew Alex, one of the other student participants from school, but that was the only person he knew in any way prior to the trip. Derek remembers drawing on aspects of teamwork learned at home, school and hockey during the relief mission (Marx, 2000; Putnam, 2000; Oesterle et al., 2004).

You know everybody has to work together to get something done. And if you work by yourself it's just going to take twice as long sometimes....Maybe, it's that I wanted to help people more, there was so much that needed to be done, so many people that needed help. I was surprised just that a group of strangers that have the same goal in common can work together to get something done was pretty cool – all we had was a 21-hour bus ride. Before that we didn't know each other (Derek).

The personal growth in Derek from this experience can be seen in his subsequent descriptions of volunteering – they are exciting and personally meaningful to him. They allow him to combine compassion and passion, especially related to justice, music and history.

The Katrina trip also helped Derek to solidify his post-secondary and career interests. Looking back on the experience he recognized that not only had he acted from a sense of altruism, but that he had also gained new skills in the process that were likely to have a positive impact on his future career aspirations (Finkelstein et al., 2005).

Law enforcement is always something I've wanted to do. But I can fall back on it [Katrina relief] and look and see what I've done for people and how much it meant to them. So that's kind of a catalyst for me to keep going in law enforcement to see that although there are bad things out there, also there's a lot of good, too, that you can do for people. And having that opportunity to help people who truly had nothing at all, and to see how much they were just so happy about it meant a lot. I think that it shows these fields can be pretty rewarding (Derek).

Derek pursued a major in Social Studies at Lake Erie College with a concentration in Criminal Justice and a four-year minor in Italian Languages and Culture. Eventually, he would like to go into federal law enforcement in areas dealing with human trafficking. He wrote his graduation thesis on the topic and spoke passionately about it; it was an area that addresses a social justice need that is often not discussed, and one that can channel both his compassion for others and passion for a just world (Lerner, 1998).

It was at Lake Erie College where Derek's enthusiasm for helping others found new avenues – through membership in the Kappa Sigma fraternity and through his music. Derek spoke about serving as a founding father of Kappa Sigma on the Lake Erie Campus, the college's first fraternity and one that espouses zero tolerance for drugs and alcohol. The fraternity's four pillars are fellowship, leadership, scholarship and service (Kappa Sigma Fraternity, 2011). As service is part of the fraternal commitment, Derek was involved in music concerts that benefitted others in the community. He reflected on two events in particular.

When I got into college I think I did a bit more. Since I'm a musician, we'd have fundraisers on campus and there was one concert we did, it was for homeless veterans, the Wounded Warrior Project. So all the money raised went toward military benefits. I helped organize a concert that we did for two years, my junior and senior year, and it was a Trans Siberian Orchestra (TSO) type thing. So what we did was, people came and would donate money and it would go toward kids who didn't have toys for Christmas, clothes and stuff like that. Our piano player actually got a hand-written letter from TSO! ... We didn't make a whole lot, but we did still help (Derek).

Derek's music remains a significant part of his identity. He is always learning and expanding upon his repertoire, and finding avenues to engage with others through his music. His family ties to law enforcement/public safety extend beyond his immediate family and he speaks to how his music provides bridges and bonding across those generations when thinking about an upcoming gathering this summer (Putnam, 2000).

We are playing a retirement party for two deputies. We were asked to play because we played for my uncle's retirement party and everybody just loved us. So, we're young and you figure when they see these kids go up on stage, they think "oh great let's get the aspirin out" but then like everybody's jaw dropped and loved us so we're coming back with our piano player – the guy I told you got a letter from Tran Siberian Orchestra – and our saxophone player. We're going to do a whole mess of different genres; it's going to be a lot of fun. We try to play a little bit of

everything. We generally start off with – it's like a mountain – we start with the early rockabilly 50's then work our way up to blues then we get into Hendrix and The Doors, stuff like that. That's one thing that's never going to die is rock-n-roll (Derek).

Outside of his musical pursuits, Derek works as part of campus security and as a part-time officer in Grand River, Ohio. He was recently hired by the Painesville Police Department as a court officer. He reflected on how the Hurricane Katrina experience influences his thinking about helping others in a public safety capacity.

I think it helped me choose the career I wanted to take. I think it showed me that although I may have problems now, there are people that have it a lot worse than I do....that what I have is a blessing....these people had absolutely nothing. They didn't have a family anymore. They didn't know where their family was. I have all that. It showed me that materialistic things are not the most important things in life (Derek).

Volunteerism has helped Derek to understand the other side of a story and question what is provided on the surface as fact, and to sharpen critical thinking skills that will serve him well in public safety (Oesterle et al., 2004).

As he looks to the future, the road ahead is uncertain. Derek is pursuing law enforcement and connections to help him realize his dream of federal service. However, while still in the local area, he hopes to put his other passion to use in a volunteer capacity – his love of military history, especially World War II events. Derek mentioned that he was involved in re-enactments when asked about his Facebook photos in camouflage. He stated that he loves reading books about history and that he had

participated in a local middle school initiative to bring history to life by bringing WWII artifacts into classrooms and talking about them. Deeper conversation about the importance of history in his life created an opportunity for narrative learning – as Derek spoke, his narrative became more flexible and we discussed possible connections to help him fulfill his goal (Goodson et al., 2010). He spoke to only needing a couple of hours each week, making the goal more attainable, once his training schedule for his new position would be known. His volunteer goal is to get involved with the Lake County Historical Society and create a program to capture the events and people of World War II. He speaks to the issue with some of the same urgency as responding to Katrina, noting the passage of time threatens to silence the voices of those involved.

When I have time, if I have time, I'd really like to go up to the historical society and donate my time up there because I know they don't have any World War II events...it's something I'd really like to do. Veterans are dying about 1,000 to 1,500 a day – and the last World War I veterans just died. We talked about the greatest generation and it's amazing to see what those people have been through from the depression to seeing all the wars and from seeing World War I and seeing Vietnam and Korea and our wars now and living through everything. And just the ages that they're in now 90 - 95, pretty soon they'll be gone and the chance to talk to them will be too (Derek).

Derek's story illuminates Emirbayer & Mische's (1998) chordal triad of agency. The iterational dimension considers what has happened in the past; it gives depth to his multiple identities as a young patriot, a musician, a community volunteer, and a young

man dedicated to justice. The projective unites the present with the future as he moves forward into a new area of public safety, taking another step toward his ultimate career goal and continues to play music to benefit others. The practical-evaluative allows him to consider the options open to him, as our interviews resulted in social connections with former federal service agents and the director of the Lake County Historical Society. Derek's narrative is fluid to the extent that he anticipates career changes and advancement, yet his identity as a public servant is firmly rooted in his story as well (Goodson et al., 2010).

*Alex.*

With a glance at the word tag cloud of Alex's life narrative, the words 'people', 'happen', 'realize', and 'school' stand out. These words also reflect the organizing principles of his story – it was in college that Alex's entered into an environment that allowed him to validate his identity and live in congruence with it – his identity as a young gay man. Alex's recent years of life dominate his life story because it is when he feels his life truly began.

Alex grew up in a blended family. He is his mother's only child, but he has a half sister from his father and two stepbrothers from his stepdad. However, most of his youth was as an only child as his half sister was born when he was 13 years old. His mom did not remarry until he was 12, and even then only one of his stepbrothers lived with them. When speaking about his siblings, he seemed to want to get past discussing them, waving his hand and saying, "I have a confusing family", but he did talk about his parents. He noted that in his mom's family he was the eldest grandchild; on his dad's side he was the baby until the birth of his sister. Neither of his parents had attended college right out of

high school. His dad was a machinist in a series of local factories; his mom had recently graduated from Kent State as a nurse practitioner. This made him the first in his family to attend college directly after graduating from high school.

Alex began elementary school at St. Richard's in North Olmstead, Ohio. He then transferred to St. Mary's in Mentor, Ohio for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, the transfer prompted by his mom remarrying. At that point, he describes his extracurricular activities as “football, baseball, track, the usual CYO stuff”.

When asked why he chose to attend Lake Catholic, Alex talks about it being convenient and an expectation of his new family. “It was closest and it's where all of my friends from St. Mary's were going, my friends in the neighborhood who were Catholic, some of them went to St. Gabriel's [elementary school], all of them were going there. That and my stepdad went there and my mom wanted me to carry on that tradition.” At Lake Catholic, he was involved in few extracurricular clubs, stating he was “over sports”. At this point of telling his life story, the concept of time differences surfaced (Bilken, 2007).

I've always been environmentally conscious, wow this was a *long* [emphasis added] time ago. If I had a yearbook I could remember more, so Spanish Club, Ecology club, bowling, ski club, I did play golf. I was on the golf team one year and that's because they wanted me to get them onto Canterbury, I was like “that ain't going to happen guys, I may work there but you're not playing on it”...I wasn't like in student council (Alex).

I was getting a sense of tension existed between Alex and his high school. When asked about grades, he stated “I wasn't a terrible student, you remember how Derek and I acted,



we were kind of the ones that went to detention every other day”. At that point, rather than contest that observation, I decided to allow Alex to continue with his story, shaping his identity in the way he wanted me to see him as opposed to confronting this ‘bad boy’ self-image and telling him that I had, in fact, not viewed him in that same light. The relevance of the word ‘happen’ in his word cloud was making sense to me – much of Alex’s early adolescence was subject to things happening that left him struggling to understand and define who he was. His life story was not embedded in the family stability and closeness as the other participant’s – which was not to say he did not live in a loving and supportive household, only that his parents’ homes were places of change and fluidity in residents and relationships.

In continuing our conversation about high school, the topic of service came up. Again the feeling of tension with the structure and requirements of Lake Catholic surfaced.

I mean I understand it now, but then I was like” really? We have the hardest grading system out of any school in Lake and Geauga counties, we wear these stupid uniforms, and now you're going to make me do something else when I'm not anywhere near the place”? That was my initial thought (Alex).

Although he expressed dislike for the mandatory aspect of community service, he recognized that it had value for him, noting one of Wilson’s (2000) benefits of youth volunteering, the reduction/avoidance of antisocial behaviors.

Most people went above and beyond. I went ridiculously above. I think I had 200 hours or something...I mean my service requirement was well

met before the New Orleans thing became known. I mean it kept me out of trouble (Alex).

Alex's narrative was truly bringing to the surface "the tension between stability and change, between identity and transformation" (Rossiter, 1999, p. 63). His story was filled with detail and self-talk using phrases such as "and I was like..."

Community service was a central plot in his story of his high school years (Goodson et al, 2010). Although he noted that he went above the requirement for service hours, the tension with the school surfaced yet again in clarifying and accepting the hours that he accumulated. When the sites listed by the school did not meet his needs or interests, Alex relied on personal agency and social networks to engage in volunteer projects that met them (Amato, 1990; Finkelstein et al., 2005; Putnam, 2000). His experiences underscore the importance of variety in opportunities for volunteers to identify with and to achieve efficacy in service (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Post, 2005).

There was a board in the building that said sign up for this, sign up for that; the other way was "hey Mom, the options I have right now are really slim and I don't want to do them". I can't even remember what they were; they were like awful, like childcare or something, not my thing. "I need to get these hours in before I don't graduate or move on to the next year" and she's like "I'll see what we can do at the hospital". That and I knew a lot of people. I lived in Concord Township and I knew a lot of people that worked at the township. I knew one of the township trustees, the administrator, so I would go up there and say "What can I do? Can I clean a park? Can I file some things?". Then Lake Catholic fought me on that –

they fought me hard on that - anything for the government not being counted as service. And I fought that and fought that and fought that, then my mother fought it for me because they were really trying to tell me it didn't count as service (Alex).

At this point, I reflected aloud that as one who previously worked for a government agency, I would have welcomed a chance to engage students in understanding the role of transit in providing equity in access to jobs, education and opportunities in a community. Alex's community service included helping move patients in a nursing home from their rooms to the activity center or dining room, and doing the same of patients at the hospital going from their rooms to test areas, and cleaning the local parks, all of which he boiled down to "more or less, manual labor".

When describing how he learned of the Hurricane Katrina volunteer opportunity, Alex's story matches Derek's version of the story – to a point. Indeed, they were both identified by their religion teacher, Mrs. Jarosz to represent Lake Catholic. Yet, Alex's version captured their personalities and their friendship in a way that Derek's story did not.

Both Derek and I probably have had the most interesting one. How I found out; I walked into school, half awake, dragging my rear, and go to my locker and Derek, as usual, is jumping around, and I'm like "What's up man?" And he's like "Let's go to New Orleans, do you want to go to New Orleans?" and I'm like, "Um, what the hell are you talking about?" and he keeps going, and he's like "They're looking for volunteers to go down to help with the hurricane". And I'm like "No they are not, shut up". I'm like

“I’m not even falling for this dude, it’s too early in the morning, and I don’t even want to hear about this right now”. And he’s like “no this is real”. So I said “Fine, I’ll go down to the religious office”. And I walk in and Mrs. Jarosz goes “I figured you two would be the best ones to send to go to New Orleans” (Alex).

Not only was Alex’s story filled with details, but it served to triangulate Derek’s story and provided a sociocultural snapshot of contemporary teenage discourse replete with self talk and the use of ‘like’ and ‘really?’. This sort of triangulation with extended details would not happen once but several times in their stories of the Katrina experience although they had not spoken to each other in a couple of years.

The disaster of Hurricane Katrina captured Alex’s curiosity. As he reflected on why he went, he began with a logical explanation, indicative of Emirbayer & Mische’s (1998) practical-evaluative dimension of narrative, then ends with an “a-ha moment” in the experience that would serve as one of the early moments of learning on the trip.

I heard about it on the news; I actually watched it on CNN as it was happening, and I really wanted to see it – I wanted to see what happened, I’d never seen anything. This is Ohio so we might get a big snow....but that’s the worst that happens. I had never seen anything like that, I really did want to see it and the more and more we thought about it, the more it made sense. I mean it made sense to help these people. I mean we’ve got supplies, and we’re able bodied and these people just got rocked and it’ll be fun. Then as we’re driving along Interstate 10 and crossing that bridge and I’m looking and there’s a piece of road, there’s a piece of road in the water,

there's a piece of concrete, there's water, there's another hole, there's another one [piece of road] in the water, and I'm like "Oh my God, what are we getting ourselves into?" (Alex).

Much of Alex's life story is plotted around the trips to New Orleans in 2005 and 2006. As he reflected on what stood out for him on the first trip, he spoke not so much of the devastation, but of the people, echoing Sean's impressions with the citizens of New Orleans.

The drive, the houses we saw.... It was the driving around when we really saw the harder hit parts and seeing the water lines and then I remember asking "what are the X's"? And you explained them and we start seeing houses where there's a 1 and we shouldn't have a 1, and a 4, and I'm like "Ok, a lot of people died over here, this isn't good" and then the big mounds of garbage and the shredding and burning, I mean it's amazing that those people acted the way they did....I know a lot of people moved out, but the people who were there were like "this is our town and it's not disappearing" – and that was the amazing part....You could tell who the real residents of New Orleans were - the people who really call that place home. They were like "NO this is our town, we're rebuilding it, it's going to be better, it's going to be stronger" – it was just amazing (Alex).

Alex was the only student to participate in both of the Katrina relief trips. His story included some comparisons of the trips – how things had changed, how some had not, and the different type of work that was needed over the ten month time span. His reflections on one site in particular, raised the issue of what happens to mental health

patients following disasters. And of equal importance, following disasters like Katrina, how scarce resources are allocated and how long needs go unmet.

The one that did surprise me and that was on the second time around was Keith [not the victim's real name]. I'll never forget that house....that was the one that I was like "why are we here?". I couldn't quite understand because when I saw the house I thought it doesn't look like it got hit that bad, it look like it just got hit by *him* [emphasis added]. I've watched enough episodes of Hoarders to understand why we did that. Yeah, but then, I was like "we're cleaning out a house? This doesn't make sense to me". I do remember him being a mental health patient, but I was still like "We're cleaning out a house, isn't this what the government is for, doesn't he have county or government agency to do whatever". Then I realized that was just awful. And I'm sure after something like that hits, everybody stockpiles everything (Alex).

As the only student to participate on both trips, Alex's story incorporates observations about the student volunteers and the quick formation of the in-group identity and bonds of the first group (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Michel, 2007).

On that first trip, you took a bunch of kids who had no clue who each other was, barely even recognized each other's school....and we all somehow worked together and if you tried that in any other way, shape or form it probably never would have worked; we all worked together and we were all like, "Ok, we all do get along" (Alex).

Although he felt that everyone worked together on the second trip, he expressed the idea that because more of them attended the same school and at least knew of each other, teamwork would not be as much of an uncertainty.

The first trip was a lot more serious, a lot more serious, had a much different tone to it, the water had just receded a couple of weeks before, and the second trip, there was a lot more sightseeing...more free time (Alex).

As the second trip was planned for several months prior to going back down to New Orleans and it did include some planned 'free time' that included a tour of Loyola University, it would have more closely aligned to the description of 'voluntourism' used by the Corporation for National & Community Service (2008) which is travel for which volunteer work is one of the main purposes and is especially attractive for young, long-distance volunteers.

Beyond bringing Alex face-to-face with disaster environments and victims, the trip held special significance for Alex's future.

I did realize at that point that I liked building things, even if we were taking something apart and slightly making it ship shape for the moment....And I really wanted to go back and just build stuff; I thought this place needs people to build....I never realized I wanted to make something better in that sense. I mean there's making people feel better, but I wanted to, those people we met and helped I know will remember us forever and all we did was help them clean up their yard....I realized I want to help people, I want to help avoid it. I never realized I wanted to help on such a grand scale. I

mean it's one thing to comfort a friend, but I never realized I wanted to go to school for it... We went down there and we started reconstructing and that's – our mark is left in that city... Going down there made me realize what I wanted to do for a living (Alex).

After graduating from Lake Catholic, Alex began the first six months of his college career at Lakeland Community College, then applied and transferred to the University of Akron when a friend told him about the Disaster Mitigation and Emergency Preparedness program there noting, that it's "the only emergency management program in the country". During his program Alex was able to draw on his personal experiences to shed light on the realities of New Orleans in a post-Katrina environment, "I was the only one who had been down there. We studied the Middle East, we studied Asia, we studied 'us' more than anything."

Alex's life experiences scaffold upon each other and open doors to new horizons differently that for Sean or Derek, in that they seem to be a study in chaos theory, where seemingly unrelated events are intricately connected. Going away to school in Akron, also allowed Alex to go away from the social and cultural structures of Lake County – a move that allowed him to become an openly gay man, a move influenced by the Hurricane Katrina relief trips.

New Orleans also opened my eyes... The day you let us loose in the French Quarter, I mean I had friends in high school and some didn't know, and I remember standing there and they are standing there saying "I don't think this is the normal part of town"... And I'm like "Look around – the giant rainbow flag"; and they were like "Wow they don't care here, you'd



never see that in Mentor”. And I'm like “You know there are other cities than Mentor “(Alex).

Akron has become home to Alex. Through a construction agreement, he used his building skills to purchase a share of ownership in a local bar that he terms “an alternative bar, not a gay bar, because anyone is welcome, straight or gay, Black, White, Latino, whatever”. He spent considerable time talking about the quirkiness of Akron neighborhoods and a conversation about eating Popeye’s chicken in New Orleans, led to a related Akron story that validated how he has internalized his identity as an Akron resident.

There was a show on the food network and it was Belgrade Gardens and White House chicken, both of those are in Akron and had this big televised dispute over who had the best chicken. And the guy is like, “Everybody thinks the South is the capital of fried chicken, they're wrong; it's Akron, Ohio”. And it's true; every pizza joint has fried chicken, homemade fried chicken, and every single one except for like the chains. All the local stuff, fried chicken, jojo’s. I live in North Hill, there's a place called Emidio and Sons – blatant Italian restaurant – fried chicken, jojos, red beans and rice, mashed potatoes, corn bread....A jojo? It's a potato wedge, a big chunky potato wedge – that’s definitely an Akron thing (Alex).

Niemi et al., (2000) found that youth who were engaged in volunteering were more likely to engage in political discussion and have higher confidence levels in expressing their own opinions. Alex’s previous experiences in social networking and volunteering support this finding when he speaks about life in Akron and the challenges of the gay

community. Consistent with Omoto and Snyder's (1995) volunteer process model that identifies prior experiences, current circumstances and motives as predictors of volunteerism, Alex's recent and current service activities have taken a new direction – that of an activist. At first he commented that he really didn't have much time for volunteering at this point, then realized that activism and civic engagement are forms of volunteerism, but these rely on his social and cultural capital instead of just the manual labor of earlier experiences (Oesterle et al., 2004; Putnam, 2000).

I'm on the committee for the Akron Pride Initiative – trying to overturn the mayor's problem; so hopefully some people in Akron will have more rights than they do now. The mayor refuses to let any unique group, let's just put it that way, any unique group have any form of function downtown... unless you are his buddy, or you are liked in his eyes or his friends, you're the only ones who get to do any kind of event, fundraising, any kind of awareness, any kind of anything in Akron....The city itself has cut funding to many programs that he doesn't realize helps more than just gay people, helps homeless people, helps teenagers, it helps everybody. In the state of Ohio in general, HIV medication was completely cut off the planet.

The whole idea of Pride, we're having a picnic. It's outside the city limits – in Copley, to raise money for the other charities in the city to buy [HIV medication]. We got them \$10,000 last year, we are aiming for \$50,000 this year to hopefully, part of its going to a charity called Violets Cupboard and the other is the battered women's shelter. It was my idea

because I said you realize they do more than just battered women? Battered men, battered children, if you are hungry you can show up. They help everybody they just call it battered women's shelter. And if you are afraid of your roommate they will take you in – and that's a very big thing in our community, that for everyone it's beneficial. Things like this are what's going to show Summit County and the State of Ohio and the Federal government that we aren't any different than anybody else. But the mayor of Akron refuses to let it go on in downtown Akron (Alex).

As a sponsor of the Pride event, he recognizes that his business may benefit from the exposure, but he states, "I'm not getting paid to be involved, I don't have to do it" . Alex is involved in other volunteer projects as well such as the committee to secure the 2014 Gay Olympics in the Cleveland/Akron area, noting that was a big deal for his community.

The most poignant aspects of Alex's story are those of loss. Growing up in a Catholic education system and therefore having so many friends grounded in those beliefs meant having to let go of friendships when he came out as a gay man. Although he didn't speak to this extensively, he stated that his family was very supportive of him – "my mom never freaked out about anything with me". He talked about being involved in the Akron Auxiliary Police Department, a unit that primarily gets called upon to represent as Color Guards in parades and at special events. Although he and Derek haven't spoken for a couple of years, his reflection about his role in the auxiliary unit has a poignant undertone that speaks to a loss,

It's crazy some of my friends never left home. It's so funny, I'm in the Akron Auxiliary Police Department.... It's just so funny because Derek's

dad is a firefighter and he's a police officer, but ultimately I'm going to end up being a firefighter. I always thought it would be the other way around (Alex).

Throughout his story of high school, there was always a tension relative to Lake Catholic, a feeling like he was always going against the grain of expectations. Perhaps these tensions were rooted in keeping his sexuality under cover in a Catholic education environment. However, now that it is in the open, he wonders about being accepted back, even for a visit. When looking at the photos of artifacts he and Derek put together in a display box for the school, he wonders, “ I want to make sure they still have that brick; I'd like to go in, but they might carry me out.”

#### **Photo elicitation.**

In addition to probing deeper into findings from the initial interviews to fill out the participants' life stories, the second interviews focused specifically on the Hurricane Katrina relief experience using a photo elicitation method. The transcripts from photo elicitation component of the interviews were not added into the participants' language for the word tag cloud queries as the intentional, focused discussion of Katrina related events could potentially skew the word clouds. Although all slide shows contained some shared photos of significance – the stops we made and devastation at certain points such as the levee break – each slide show was personalized with photos of the respective participant working at each site. This was to enhance each participant's recall of being present at that particular site. Among the photos, six stood out in the discussions.

***St. Joseph the Worker church.***

Situated on the west bank of the Mississippi River, our first stop to deliver supplies was St. Joseph the Worker Knights of Columbus Hall. St. Joseph's was a predominately elderly community of mixed ethnicity. As the group arrived, there was a line extending down the block waiting for us. The buses were quickly unloaded and a line set up where a volunteer would assist each person in putting whatever they needed into a large plastic bag and carrying for them.



**Figure 1. St. Joseph the Worker Church.** Distribution of supplies including bleach, pillows, walkers and pet food to community members.

I remember how crazy it was, and they were just waiting for us. It was chaos for a while. We had to get the buses unloaded. Then they would go and pick out what they wanted. People weren't being greedy; people were just taking what they needed, not like they were asking for too much of things. It was a cool thing to see how people at a time like this weren't being greedy when they could have easily taken as much as they wanted (Sean).

However, for Derek and Alex a different memory was discussed, one that was not included in the photo elicitation slides – that of a child and a stuffed dog. I went back and found the photo, realizing I did not include it in their slides because I did not remember the story behind the photo, but they did. Interestingly, when they viewed the photo of the supply distribution at St. Joseph’s, the story of the little boy and his dog came to their minds. This story was triangulated in that they both told the same story, in much the same language, but independently of each other and without the photo being present.



**Figure 2. A Boy and His Dog.** A child selects a stuffed animal with a special story.

All the people lined up outside waiting for us that was pretty cool - getting everything set up. I remember people coming by. I remember this single mother and her son, and they had this, the kid must have been only 4 or 5, and they had this stuffed animal, the husky. I think they said that they had that dog and lost it and think that's why he carried it around with him wherever they went because it looked just like the dog they lost in the hurricane. That was pretty um - that was an eye opener (Derek).

Alex recalled the same story, but was more open about the impact it had on him.

I remember all these people [point to the photo] lined up outside the building waiting for us. I remember the kid that lost a dog and had a big stuffed animal dog....I remember you coming to take picture of us....and I can't believe you didn't know that story. And I was like "Don't take a picture of me" because I was crying – the kid had just lost his dog. People die left and right and I'm like "You know things happen", but animals though. I can't handle it (Alex).

***Roofing debris: The barrier to electricity restoration.***

A second photo that evoked consistent memories was that of the first victims' home that we worked on, removing roofing debris to facilitate the restoration of electricity to their home. All recalled not only the work, but the couple themselves, Mr. & Mrs. R who were in their mid-to-late 70's. Alex grinned as he recalled, "Yeah, I remember her. 'God bless your souls!' I remember her well, hugs for everyone". Sean too smiled as he recalled Mrs. R., "I remember that lady, she was pretty funny. She kept calling Jim and I like 'baby' and 'cutie', but she was so thankful".



**Figure 3. Roofing Debris: Barrier to Electricity Restoration.** An elderly couple was denied electrical hookup until debris was cleared.

As in many of Sean's memories of Katrina, the people of the city stand out.

I remember how thankful those two were. That was crazy [referring to the amount of debris in the yard]. I remember a couple of times the guy got up and was trying to help out, but he was old and not in very good shape. I remember telling him to relax and we'll take care of it – and they were just really, really thankful (Sean).

Upon seeing the photo, Derek instantly pointed to the right side of the photo, pointing to where the home next door would be. He recalled the owner of the home peeking out to see what the volunteers were doing. He knocked on her door to make sure she knew we were just helping her neighbors and to ensure she had enough food for her dog as that was one of the supply items we had with us.

***Trash pile landscapes: Sights and smells of Katrina.***

Images of mountains of debris were emblazoned in all of the participant's memories – and the smell that went with it. At several points in the relief trip, we encountered massive piles of household belongings stacked in piles that seemed to have no end. Sean commented, "Oh yeah, that seemed to go on forever, it was so tall. It covered an entire block; that was really sad to see". Alex made the observation, "It's gotta be at least 25 feet tall...there's a lot of stuff in there that would have been recycled that either got buried or burned."





**Figure 4. Post-Katrina Landscapes.** Mountains of debris, in places a city block wide and over 30 feet high, were piled on neutral grounds that separated traffic and alongside apartment buildings.

Refrigerators dominated the trash pile landscape. Derek commented, “I think it might have been this pile, it was just stacks of refrigerators; and about that high too. I guess that pile is higher than 20 feet – that was huge”. Seeing the trash pile also brought back refrigerator memories for Sean, as he recalled removing one from a condo earlier in the day, “That smell was one of the worst things I remember, everything was rancid, the food. I remember taping it up. I’ll never forget that smell.”

***The Red Cross: Turkey sandwich relief.***

A photo of a Red Cross truck that came by to bring sandwiches to the neighborhood as we distributed supplies at the Berean Christian church was a vivid memory for both Alex and Derek. The volunteers sat on the sidewalk eating with neighborhood kids after an impromptu game of football with a roll of paper towels substituting for a pigskin.

I forgot about the kids, but I remember the Red Cross coming in. It wasn’t much but it made do. I think it was a turkey sandwich and maybe a bag of

potato chips. It wasn't much, but it was more than these people had (Derek).



**Figure 5. Red Cross Relief.** Local residents awaited the arrival of the Red Cross each day. Without electricity, for many it would be the only prepared meal they would get each day.

For Alex, the turkey sandwich became symbolic of the tough times following Katrina.

It was a turkey sandwich, corn, and I think applesauce and a bottle of water. And that turkey sandwich reminds me so much of Robertson's Dining Hall and the University of Akron that the first time I got turkey in that dining hall, I said "I ate this once in my life, I'll never eat it again"....I think that was the reason I couldn't eat that any more – I knew for too many people this *was* [emphasis added] the meal they ate for a while. It was a turkey sandwich with nothing on it....I remember these people were so excited....Thank god the Red Cross was there. Without the Red Cross they wouldn't even have gotten a bad turkey sandwich (Alex).

***Neon X's: Statistics of rescue and loss.***

In each of their stories, Sean, Derek and Alex recounted memories of the neon X's painted on every home in flooded areas of the city. The X's were used by rescue

workers to indicate the date the home was searched, the number of individuals rescued, the number of animals retrieved, and the most chilling statistic, the number of bodies found.



**Figure 6. Neon X's: Statistics of Rescue and Loss.** Rescue workers painted neon X's on the front of every house searched with information about life rescued or lost.

I remember it was like an X that was on the door. I think it was like how many people were found in the house, was part of the X. The top might have been how many people were found in the house, the bottom might have been how many people were found dead, and then animals, and then the date they searched. Those big neon orange X's were on every door. Yep, right here [pointing to the photo], then driving down the street and you're looking at all these different houses and you're kind of curious but you don't really was to know at the same time. The reality when you see it right there – it's like “oh, people were found in that house that didn't make it” (Derek).

*French Quarter business: Economic impact of Katrina.*

Although the banner proudly proclaims, “Beignets are back”, the realities of how Katrina changed the city were apparent in the lack of open businesses in the French Quarter, one of the few sections of the city spared from flooding because it is situated on a natural rise along the river (Campanella, 2008). When looking at the photo of Café du Monde, Derek recalled all the food of the trip, “We had all that great home food, the cooking, I remember the gumbo and dirty rice and going here to Café du Monde for the chicory coffee and beignets”.



**Figure 7. Beignets are Back.** Café du Monde, a hallmark of stability in the city, reopens before many other business owners return to the city.

Café du Monde’s strong blend of coffee with chicory has become a staple in Alex’s life, “Once a month I get a can of coffee sent to my house. It’s the only coffee I will drink – the only coffee.” Sean, however, reflected on the big picture of the impact of Katrina on local businesses.

I was struck by how many businesses were closed. It was hard to relate to because I wasn’t in New Orleans before Katrina. I always thought of New Orleans as a vibrant city, very crazy and fun. But then walking through

and seeing businesses closed and signs saying that no one knows when they will reopen. It was one of the most depressing things I've ever seen – how many lives and businesses were completely shut down by that (Sean).

The photo elicitation process triggered memories of the trip for all of the participants, in some ways triangulating each other's memories, and in some ways standing apart from each other such as the reflection by Sean of the economic impact. As the researcher, it helped me to understand what they hold precious in their memories such as the story of the little boy and his dog. Consistently their memories focused on the humanity of the victims and their circumstances, supporting Rossiter's (1999) assertion that adult development goals are relationally based. Perhaps this is an indicator of the benefit of mandating service in high school – these young men approached their service with humility and remembered that they were there to help people first and foremost, focusing on the person before the task.

### **Common threads.**

The initial interviews with the participants revealed several common experiences. All grew up in Catholic households and attended Catholic elementary and high schools. All were required to do some form of community service, and went above and beyond what was required, integrating volunteerism into their identities. Two themes emerged as they shared their life stories: the role of mandated service and the influence of the Hurricane Katrina experience.

### ***Mandated community service.***

Mandatory community service was integrated into the curriculum at both schools. At Lake Catholic it is part of a larger curricular goal; at St. Ignatius it foundational for

sophomore service, a semester-long service learning experience. The participants all expressed frustration at having to volunteer, an issue often brought up in debates about mandatory volunteering, referring to the term as an oxymoron. They all realized the benefit of mandated service providing them a point of entry into volunteerism, but seemed to believe that more options may have provided them with a better fit to their interests. For the participants, successful mandatory volunteer experiences require variety, support systems, being open to the experience, social validation, and reflection.

Alex's disconnect with the opportunities posted on the board at school for volunteering is an example of the importance of variety. In his case, parental guidance and social capital helped him to find suitable and interesting volunteer opportunities. For Sean, too, family was important in supporting him as he volunteered at Malachi House, a hospice home.

I talked to my family and say someone I hung out with just passed...I know that sounds bad, but I know why they [the patients] were there and so I was a bit more ready for it. Ignatius did a pre-assessment and they told us this was the stuff you may be experiencing, at the same time it was shocking (Sean).

Providing variety and having support systems in place also speaks to the importance of multiple faculty members being responsible for the engagement of students in volunteering. Sean noted that one of his teachers suggested he try the Labre ministry to the homeless and he "became hooked" on it because he felt it was so rewarding.

Being present and open to the experience surfaced with the participant as well. Motives to volunteer may include altruism, skill development, and social connectedness.

However, what the participants went into a service opportunity thinking, and what they thought and gained coming out of them differed and provided evidence of growth and development. Derek commented, “Volunteering, if a person goes into it, they are going to get out of it depending on how much they put in. They are going to see and experience and potentially change”. His Katrina experience was part of his mandated service hours, so he reflected on the outcome of Katrina volunteering as a product of mandatory volunteering, “I think it helped me to choose the career I wanted to take....It went right along with helping others, with helping your neighbors, and clothing those who do not have anything. So it went pretty much hand-in-hand with what we were taught in school.” His reflection provided evidence of developing a cultural oneness with the people served (Lerner, 1998) – his service boundaries have expanded; those in need are part of his community and he has a responsibility to care for them (Levine & Thompson, 2004).

The notion of in-group identity applies not only to identification with those served being part of an individuals’ life community, it also applies among volunteers. High schools requiring service can provide social validation in multiple ways. At Lake Catholic, honor cords were worn by those who exceeded service requirements, thereby providing public recognition for the individual’s contribution to the community. At St. Ignatius, prior to and following meeting with the homeless through the Labre ministry, the group would pray and reflect both collectively and individually on their experiences each week. This provided both social validation and an opportunity for reflection.

Sean’s experiences with reflection as a group also provided him with structure for individual reflection. He reflected on his mandatory service assignment.

When you think about life in general, yeah, it was an experience. It was just like, to not take it for granted, and to make sure I hang around positive people and at any moment it could just be gone. Just to makes sure I live it to the best that I can (Sean).

Derek approaches reflection in a more individual, self-directed way – he attends 12:15 Mass twice each week.

Mass is only half an hour and I can go about the rest of my day....I think I take more things into consideration....I would say I am very open to other religions and things like that. And giving other people chances and opportunities. I listen to what they have to say, knowing that we are all in it together (Derek).

These young men shared a common stepping off point into volunteerism, one that was mandated by their school in some form. However, consistent with other studies on the impact of mandatory volunteering in high school (Metz & Youniss, 2003; Taylor & Pancer, 2007; Yates & Youniss, 1996), through the provision of meaningful and engaging volunteer opportunities above and beyond what was mandated, these young men engaged in higher levels of volunteering than was required while in high school, internalized the volunteer role, sustained that commitment through college, and continue to keep service at the forefront of their minds (Marks & Jones, 2004; Penner, 2004; Planty et al., 2006)

### ***Influence of Katrina.***

All of the participants had participated in regular, planned volunteerism that could lead to the internalization of a volunteer identity (Callero et al., 1987; Penner, 2004).



However, their service pre-Katrina was all local and supervised by parents, community volunteer partners, or faculty. The trip to New Orleans to accompany public service employees was a departure from the normal structure of their volunteering, one that required maturity, agency, and self-direction in behavior and action. The trip to New Orleans was also representative of a crisis volunteer response, predicated on bystander intervention (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). Following their experience, thousands of other young adult volunteers, especially those in college, would flock to New Orleans for alternative spring and summer breaks over the next several years, spawning a new term of ‘voluntourism’ (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2008; Mangan, 2006). These young men spoke about the impact of the media, their initial reactions when they arrived, and the agency that the experience brought to their lives.

The participants reflected on aspects of their experiences that challenged the media stories, indicating development of critical thinking skills essential in addressing social justice issues. Derek and Sean commented on what they perceived to be lack of honesty in media coverage. They acknowledged that the horrors experienced by those rescued from rooftops and the trauma of the occurrences in the shelters of last resort were real. However, the dishonesty lay in not telling the complete story, “the rest of the story” as famed radio personality Paul Harvey would say.

All we saw on the media was flooding, just constantly showing pictures of flooding. But when we went down, debris was all over the place...I think the media focused a lot on the flooding, how massive it was, but they didn't show enough of how much damage it actually did. I remember just seeing refrigerators piled up – a mountain of refrigerators with duct tape

around them...there were a lot of shots from the sky and pictures of what it used to look like. I think they should have shown more street level and the damage. You couldn't walk down some of the streets it was so horrible. I remember seeing, I think it was the first day we were down there, a pack of dogs going down the street, about nine of them (Derek).

First hand sight of the wrath of Katrina served to confirm media stories to Alex.

It changed the way I look at this country number one; you know our country failed and none of us know America to fail. It was the first time I realized that we are like everyone else in the world...bad things can happen here. I remember September 11, but that wasn't failing we got attacked...but we let a major city just get washed off the face of the earth; we literally, just wow – how for America, this just doesn't happen (Alex).

Derek went on to organize fundraisers to benefit veterans and families in need.

Reflecting on the Katrina trip provided him with insight into the role of social and cultural capital needed to realize volunteer success and efficacy, and the role of being accountable to the community.

People should know how much coordination goes into this. How much effort you put into it; it's a lot of hard work, a lot of responsibility. You were in charge of two buses, two busloads full of people and supplies. And having people donate supplies...all these companies giving you stuff and expecting you to deliver it where it was needed. Not only get it there but bring back the volunteers in one piece. That's a big to do, a big responsibility (Derek).

The Hurricane Katrina relief trips were life changing for Alex; they provided a career aspiration that is yet unfulfilled, but provided him with a sense of agency to be prepared to step into a position that would have a different outcome than Katrina did for the citizens of the Gulf Coast.

It made me go to school so I can change that “why did it happen” into “it’s not gonna happen”. It may hit and do some damage, but it’s not going to take a week and a half to get you some water; it’s not going to take a week and a half to get you off your roof; it’s not going to take five years to rebuild a hospital. But that’s the reason I went to school, because of that (Alex).

Sean responded to the experience with immediacy in applying to Loyola University in order not only to study in New Orleans, but to continue volunteering in the recovery efforts. His progression through four years of college parallels with memories of the number of blue FEMA roof tarps.

My freshman year, it was like every other house; by sophomore year, 75 percent didn’t have them; by junior year, maybe only 5 percent and the areas in the 9<sup>th</sup> ward still had them. I saw a lot of progress in the four years (Sean).

And in the five years since I last worked with them, so had I. These interviews made me realize that although our trip was not organized as a service learning trip, they had indeed come away from it with similar outcomes: they look at the news more critically, respond to others in need more compassionately, and take action to be agents of change for a more just society.

### **Narrative: Quality, efficacy, agency and learning.**

Goodson et al., (2010) approach analysis of life stories by looking at two key dimensions in life stories: narrative quality and narrative efficacy. Narrative quality can be analyzed across five areas: intensity of detail, descriptive/analytical, plot/employment, chronology/thematic, and theorized/vernacular, although not all dimensions may be present at clear levels in all stories. Narrative efficacy questions the presence of action potential and/or learning potential in a life story: what people learn through their stories and how that learning is or can be translated into action (Goodson et al., 2010). When narrative learning results in an individual taking action in the next step of her/his live, the learning is connected to agency (Biesta & Teddar, 2007).

#### ***Sean.***

Sean's narrative was moderate in detail and descriptive of his life events to date. His story contains organizing principles of service, career and family told in a vernacular method. Although primarily a chronological account of his life, his life experiences are steeped in themes of service, faith and family. In discussing the narrative process and what he's learned or enjoyed about it, he commented that he liked talking about what he's done, but the interviews made his realize that "Service is always going to be a part of my life and I'm going to make it a part of my life. Talking has made me realize I haven't done enough service lately and I need to do more". This response provides evidence of learning and action potential, which may lead to agency as Sean acts upon that revelation.

Sean also mentioned he shared his slide show with his mom as it was sent to him electronically prior to his interview via Skype. He said, "My mom commented on the Mary statue; she prays to Mary every day, so she was definitely touched by it". This

response confirmed my sense of closeness and religiosity of Sean's family. Allowing the conversation to snowball, I asked what his parents thought of his participation in the study. He replied, "My mom thinks it's a cool experience." Sean's closeness to his family was reflected in his response to why he feels he has made certain decisions in his life to date.

I guess my family has always been pretty religious. So much of what I do is because I don't want to disappoint them. Some things I do because it feels *right* [emphasis added] to do them. I remember that with Labre, I started to do it because the teacher told me to try it, but I continued because it felt right (Sean).

Talking about Labre was important in Sean's life story. Although he participated in other service projects, including several post-Katrina, it was Labre that challenged his beliefs about social justice most of all. Earlier in our conversations, he spoke about how many homeless people were smart, but didn't fit within society's structure. He had also recounted one story in particular that provided evidence of efficacy and agency relative to the role of service in his life.

This one guy John, he lived next to the railroad tracks, I forget the exact location. He was a really, really smart person, really religious. Most of the time he came, before we left he would have a group prayer. I never saw a homeless person so intelligent and so religious...he ended up getting help from St. Ignatius. We moved him into an apartment and found him a part-time job. So that was one awesome success story – he was the staple of why I would keep going every Sunday night (Sean).

That story touched me in that as a young man, Sean realized without the Labre opportunity, he would have never known how to engage with the marginalized where they are, and how to challenge his thoughts about who are the homeless and why are they homeless.

The prominence of service in Sean's story supports Emirbayer & Mische's (1998) chordal triad of agency; that he considers past influences in considering action, but he is not constrained by them as he remains open and flexible to new and different opportunities that will provide him with efficacy and agency for future actions. For Sean, the narrative process has been one of learning with action potential.

*Derek.*

Derek's narrative bore many of the same narrative qualities as Sean's. His life story was moderate in detail, and largely descriptive, chronological and vernacular. Similarly his life story was organized around principles of family and career, with themes of service, public safety, and music emerging. For Derek too, this was a first experience in telling his life story. He found the photo elicitation especially helpful, noting, "I'd forgotten a lot of stuff. All the little details are coming back now. Seeing those pictures now I remember what I did. I had an idea about a lot of things, but now I remember details". This response validated the value of the photo elicitation method and its influence in enhancing the intensity of Derek's narrative. In particular, it brought to the forefront a self-reflection that indicated a renewed level of self-efficacy.

At the time, it was you wanted to be involved in everything. I don't want to say have war stories, but now looking back at it, it hits you and what you were actually in and how bad it really was. I don't think at that age

you have any idea of what's dangerous. You know it's not like we were driving to Pennsylvania or anything – we went all the way across the country (Derek).

It was in Derek's final interview that he expressed the idea of getting involved with the historical society, indicating that the process had provided him with both learning and action potential. His love of history and participating in World War II re-enactments had taken the conversation down a path of thinking about how he could both contribute to the dissemination of knowledge about World War II, and how he could pay homage to those who had served by engaging them in the process.

Shortly following our interview, I forwarded him the contact information for the executive director of the society and emailed her about his interest. For Derek, the social capital in our connection from five years prior may provide entry into an exciting new volunteer opportunity for him.

Derek's passion for lived experiences was also evident when he relayed how he and Alex had prepared a presentation for Lake Catholic upon our return from New Orleans in 2005. His response is filled with evidence of the value of experiential learning. It was clear, that he had learned much serving in New Orleans and he wanted his fellow student to understand the complexity of the situation – it was his opportunity to teach. He reflected on a photo of the three of us standing before the student body.

I remember working on that for a long time to put together a presentation with music and pictures and we stayed after school for so long, we put a lot of work into it. The whole thing we were trying to do was get people,

because you can put pictures in it, but we were trying to get people to actually *experience* [emphasis added] it instead of just doing a presentation. We were trying to put the emotion into as well with the music; we wanted to do something a little different but we didn't have either time or the opportunity. We wanted to bring the lights down and bring in hurricane sound, then have the news come on with a broadcast of hurricane Katrina and let that play for a little bit, then after that was over with, then go into our pictures. That was what we originally wanted to do, but we didn't have the time and I think everyone was pretty impressed with what we did.

This as another moment when I felt that Derek sense a renewal of self-efficacy in participating in the narrative process. His story too, remains flexible, filled with a sense of agency and action in the future.

*Alex.*

In telling his life story, Alex focused most on the most recent five years of his life; perhaps because that is when he felt the freedom to exist in the world as gay man. Therefore, his story of his life up until senior year in high school when he went to New Orleans is very low in intensity of detail. School is the primary organizing principle in the story of his early years, with a theme of defiance and conflict central in his story, especially in high school. Once Alex transitioned to college and to a new city, his narrative became highly detailed, and he was excited to share details of the community that has allowed him the freedom to be himself; however, there remains a central theme of contestation, evident when he speaks about the local politics and there is an undertone



of having to prove his worth to others. When he spoke of the Akron Pride Initiative to raise money to cover the cost of HIV medication and contribute to the battered women's shelter, it was to demonstrate that gay men are not the only population at risk for AIDS. He comments, "Things like this are what's going to show Summit County and the State of Ohio and the Federal government that we aren't any different than anybody else".

Interestingly, Derek's version of the Lake Catholic student body presentation was rich with detail, whereas in other instances of their stories triangulating each other, it was usually Alex's version that had greater detail. In this portion of his story too, the tension of proving himself surfaces.

To know what I know now, and do it back then, I could make it so amazing. I really could have...I mean I designed the sound system in my bar, so I could have really done some awesome things. I'll tell you what, whether he said it or not, we were both just scared to death - in front of the entire student body, not just our class, the entire student body....They couldn't believe it- that's what you guys saw? Wow. Everybody was like "we cannot believe you guys actually went through with it - none of us would have gone down there" (Alex).

In Alex's narrative, the iterational aspect of the chordal triad of agency, lies rooted in rebelling against all that is traditional and valued in a Catholic, suburban environment. The learning potential of his narrative is limited by his struggle for acceptance. However, the projective and practical-evaluative dimensions are enhanced by his understanding of how to use his social and cultural capital to challenge conservative stereotyping, and increase awareness for issue facing marginalized populations. In his narrative when he

speaks of Derek and Derek's father, there is a tone of loss. This rejection surfaces from between the lines of his response to the question about what is the take away that that people should realize about Katrina.

Get over people being different; get over it's not going to happen to us; get over I'm safe in, I'm going to my safe Cuyahoga County where nothing bad ever happens aside from a bad politician who steals everybody's money, or Summit County where the same thing happens, or Lake County where the worst thing is it snows four feet in one day; and realize that you should go help someone in need because the day may come when you're gonna need it.

And I would hope to God, that if something did ever happen to Cleveland or Akron or Columbus, that maybe the people from New Orleans would go "you know what we remember people coming from up north to help us, we'll go help them. That's what it's all about. And it's not so much the government, it's everybody being united because that's what we are. This country isn't what it is without *us* [emphasis added] – that's what everybody needs to understand. You may need someone else's help at some point in time so don't just give them \$20, and call it a day. If you can get in your car and go, be very physically present (Alex).

This powerful comment speaks to the lessons Alex has learned in helping others, and how much he does not want to be judged by others as well.

## Summary

The narrative process in gathering life stories of young adults revealed that they tend to gloss over the early years of their lives, especially if they had strong family structure and led healthy, comfortable lives. For the participants in this study, all had stable homes, unscarred by poverty or violence. Although the stability of their early childhood resulted in low intensity of detail of those years, the opportunity to act with agency and self-direction through community service opportunities enhanced the descriptions of life in high school and beyond.

From the participants' narratives about service, their stories support Metz and Youniss' (2003) findings that mandating service does not deter, but actually enhances volunteerism in high school and beyond. The role of faculty modeling social cause behaviors in Sean's case supported McClellan, Yates and Youniss' (2003) finding that the presence of adults working alongside youth in social issue situations provides the space for emergent discussions of social justice. This further supports the notion that the responsibility for creating engaging opportunities and modeling moral and civic competencies and behaviors need to extend beyond the religious faculty in Catholic schools (Roberts, 2008).

From an adult learning perspective, although at the early end of the continuum of adult life, engaging in the narrative process, revealed the presence of strong organizing principles in their lives, that provide them with open, flexible narratives with strong potential for agency and action. The process helped them to make meaning of their lives and decisions up to this point in time (Clark, 2010). Encouraging participation in the narrative process with young adults holds promise for engaging them at the onset to

adulthood in reflective thinking, a life-long learning practice that can enhance their self-knowledge and critical thinking skills in a dynamic global environment.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Following the attacks of September 11 and the devastation left by Hurricane Katrina, the increase in interest to volunteer to alleviate suffering in our homeland prompted some to see these two incidents as watershed moments with potential for civic renewal in our country (Penner, 2004; Walton, 2008; Wilhelm, 2006). Studies on volunteerism following these crises have focused on data of hours served, motivation, and demographics of adult volunteers (Akin-Little and Little, 2008; Michel, 2007; Penner, 2004; Villagran et al., 2006). Following Hurricane Katrina, a limited number of studies emerged which focused on the responses to the disaster by college students, and tended to be specific to academic fields such as social work or law (Mangan, 2007; Plummer et al., 2008).

Lacking in the literature are the rich contextual studies of the experiences of both victims and the volunteers of all ages to add depth to the human aspect of this tragedy (Michel, 2007; Villagran et al., 2006; Wilson, 2000). Absent from the literature are studies on young adults in high schools who volunteered following Hurricane Katrina in formal and informal groups. We should seek to understand the meaning they made of

these experiences and how they foreground the future of these young adults, who are, in fact, our future.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the meanings made by young adult volunteers from Northeast Ohio of their Hurricane Katrina volunteer experiences using a narrative case study. The study is bounded by service participation in a specific relief trip to New Orleans in October 2005 when participants were seniors in high school. The narrative process gives voice to young adults as they reflect upon their life stories and how the crisis volunteer experience fits within them. Through their narratives, we can begin to understand more about the members of the Millennial generation - their perceptions of a just world, the educational and social opportunities they value in preparing them to engage as members in a democratic society, and their visions of future leadership potential as they step into adult roles.

The study of the experience of young adults engaged in post-Katrina relief work can help us to understand the value of developing human and social capital, and mandating volunteer and/or service learning experiences as secondary education goals. Furthermore, studying young adults five years after the Katrina experience allows for reflection on the role that this and other volunteer and service experiences played in their emergence into adulthood.

This study engaged three volunteers from northeast Ohio who shared a volunteer relief experience in reflective inquiry to develop an understanding of the meaning the events held for these young adults and how that may have shaped their post-secondary education, volunteer and career choices.

## **Research Questions**

This study examined the following research questions:

1. What meaning did the Hurricane Katrina volunteer experience have for young adults?
2. How do they include the experience in telling their life stories?
3. How did that experience shape their worldviews and choices for post-secondary education?
4. How did participating in a life-storying narrative process inform their learning and sense of agency as young adults?

## **Discussion**

The mandatory and voluntary community service that all participants in this current study engaged in during their early high school years was consistent with the concept of planned volunteerism that could lead to the internalization of a volunteer identity (Callero et al., 1987; Penner, 2004). As described in each participant's narrative, their service pre-Katrina was contextually situated in local sites, with low safety risks, supervised by parents, school-approved community volunteer partners, or faculty. The New Orleans relief trip that was the impetus for the current study was representative of a crisis volunteer response, predicated on bystander intervention (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005) as it occurred in the immediate weeks following the storm and, according to media reports, held the possibility of exposure to health hazards and civic unrest. The relief trip to New Orleans to accompany public service employees was a departure from the normal structure of their volunteering. Although the respective high schools approved of the students participation, the schools did not initiate it. The Katrina relief trip required

additional maturity, agency, and self-direction in behavior and action than their service experiences up to that point.

Following their experience helping the victims of Katrina, thousands of other young adult volunteers, especially those in college, would flock to New Orleans for alternative spring and summer breaks over the next several years (Dote et al., 2006; Mangan, 2006). The participant's trip, however, did not occur during a school break; instead, it happened during the fall semester in late October. This caused the participants to miss classes and required them to catch-up on missed assignments upon their return home. Sean noted that because of the trip he missed his school homecoming football game in his senior year – a celebration steeped in tradition at St. Ignatius. Given these unique circumstances, it is not completely accurate to compare the first relief trip examined in this study to other opportunities in the months and years that followed where students volunteered under the categories of long-distance volunteering or alternative spring breaks. However, the lessons learned, relayed in the participant's own words, support the argument for schools, agencies, and individuals in communities to tend to the human, social and cultural capital development of students, which can prepare them to respond in numerous ways to civic needs as they emerge into adulthood.

**The meaning of the hurricane Katrina relief trip: Opening windows to the world.**

'People' was a predominate word in all of the participants' narratives. The humanity associated with the work they did in New Orleans was one that resonated powerfully in their memories. The appreciation they received from those they served touched each of them. From the story of the little boy and his new stuffed husky dog to



the joyful Mrs. R showering them with hugs and thank-you's for clearing the extensive roofing debris in her yard, the people of New Orleans were the catalyst for the participants to internalize this trip as a special moment in their lives. Sean noted that the graciousness and hospitality of the people were one of the main reasons he chose to attend college in New Orleans. Whether serving seniors or children, the participants worked alongside volunteers their own age, those old enough to be their parents, and some old enough to be their grandparents. The multi-generational makeup of both those served and the volunteer team supports Putnam's (2000) assertion that civic engagement serves to unify generations and cultures by providing bridges between diverse groups and bonding to strengthen in-group relations.

Levine and Thompson (2004) propose the Self-Categorization Theory (SCT), suggesting that in response to crisis, the place as well as the people must be considered as a component of in-group identity for a responder. Responding to the call for service in New Orleans, the study participants effectively expanded their boundaries of meaning. Derek commented, "You know it's not like we were driving to Pennsylvania or anything, we went all the way across the country". In accordance with this theory, participants viewed the victims as fellow citizens as evidenced by Derek's response of "being a patriot at heart" and "being able to serve his country when needed". Coming from a long family tradition in public safety, Derek's comments reflect his family's values for justice, safety and stability. Katrina allowed him to extend these values to apply to citizens of New Orleans, echoing the premise of Lerner's (1998) Just World Theory, wherein, we believe the world is a good and just place, therefore in response to a disaster we seek to find ways to stabilize our environment.

Piazza (2005) described Katrina relief volunteers as “idealistic and tough people from around the country, mostly young but not exclusively so, who see a chance to make a difference” (p. 171). The participants in the study met this description. When considered in conjunction with Levine and Thompson’s (2004) Self-Categorization Theory, they experienced fluidity in identity that shifted across known boundaries, allowing for the creation of a “cultural oneness” (p. 230) with the citizens of New Orleans. For Sean, this oneness was realized in his attendance at Loyola University, initiated by the trip in October 2005. Further service during college scaffolded on this experience, enhancing his feelings of having a meaningful role in the recovery of the city (Dewey, 1938; Merriam, 2005; Metz & Youniss, 2003).

Sean spoke of “having an impact in the few days that we had” and “doing meaningful service”; while Derek and Alex both remembered being chosen to “represent Lake Catholic”. These thoughts attend to the importance of personal and social validation in performing volunteer service (Amato, 1990; Stürmer, Snyder & Omoto, 2005; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). Following the trip to New Orleans, Derek and Alex provided their student body with a presentation of the trip, providing further validation of their service at the social and the institutional levels. For Alex, the Katrina service brought with it a revelation that would impact his transitions to post-secondary education (Merriam, 2005). While serving in New Orleans, he realized that he wanted to be involved in a career that would address future issues differently, “It made me go to school so I can change that 'why did it happen' to 'it's not gonna happen”.

Each participant responded to the call for action for altruistic motives – to help others in need. Based in ongoing actions of helpfulness and other-oriented empathy, each

had a developing history of prosocial behaviors, and each had begun to internalize the role-identity of a volunteer (Penner, 2004; Callero et al., 1987). However, the response to the call for help was heard in a unique voice by each – one a call to service, one a call to duty, and one a call for meaning.

### **120 hours in a life story.**

Although the participants were only 17 or 18 at the time of the relief trip, the 120 hours they spent with mostly strangers figured significantly into each one's life story. All recalled at some point knowing only one other person as they boarded the buses for New Orleans; Derek and Alex had been friends at Lake Catholic; Sean and Jim, who was in U.S. Army Ranger training at the time of this study, had been neighborhood buddies. Knowing only one person, each participant was willing to step on board with complete strangers who shared a common goal of helping victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. The 21-hour bus ride down to New Orleans was spent alternating between sleeping, engaging in curious and excited conversation about what they would see and do, and getting to know the other students on the trip. It was upon crossing the makeshift Interstate 10 Bridge into Louisiana that they began to feel the reality of disaster. As Alex recounted seeing sections of the original bridge broken or missing, he recalled thinking, "What have we gotten ourselves into"?

These young men had stepped into a new realm of meaning, a new way of looking at their futures. Sean integrates the Katrina experience into his life story as an extension of education, faith, family and service. He describes his family as "pretty religious" and considered service as a way to live his faith, a reflection consistent with the Ignatian view of service being a form of prayer. Of the three participants, Sean was the only one to

volunteer in his freshman year in non-mandated service. Beyond the mandates of sophomore service, he engaged in both the homeless and pallbearer ministries weekly for at least two years. Sean's experiences fit what Marks and Jones (2004) describes as service that is most likely to be transformative for young adults, service that was "powerful, profoundly human, ongoing, and intellectually and emotionally compelling" (p. 335). Sean would be most likely to have internalized the volunteer role-identity and become a "core" volunteer, which in turn, makes him more likely to sustain volunteering in his post high school years (Callero et al., 1987; Marks & Jones, 2004; Metz & Youniss, 2003; Penner, 2004; Planty et al., 2006). Sean then returned to New Orleans as a result of his post-Katrina service in October 2005. His ongoing service to the victims of Katrina and the City of New Orleans simply became logical steps in ways to live his faith through service.

Derek's life story centers on justice and balance; so too is the way his Katrina experience worked into his life story. He saw the experience as a way to help people restore balance in their lives (Lerner, 1998). Most of his community service up to that point, with the exception of helping his elderly neighbor, was more task focused, such as cleaning and painting. His Katrina service did not include extensive reflection on his personal engagement with the victims of the hurricane. His memories, especially during the photo elicitation interview, illuminated the issue of pet care following disasters. He recalled seeing a pack of dogs on the first day; then recounted the story of the little boy and the dog he lost in the hurricane; and the story of playing with the dog next to one worksite and bringing the owner a case of food for her dog. Much of Derek's description of his Katrina experience revolves around self-efficacy derived from helping others

through actions that sought to restore normalcy and balance in their lives (Lerner, 1998; Michel, 2007).

The Hurricane Katrina experience was incorporated into Alex's life story differently from the other participants, as he was the only participant who went on both the trips, in October 2005 and June 2006. His story sheds light on Wilson's (2000) findings regarding the attraction of high-risk volunteering. Alex described the first trip as more serious, and more inspirational to him as it provided him with a career path. The second relief trip he termed "the Lake Catholic trip" because almost half of the students from that trip were from Lake Catholic High School. He viewed this later trip more of a social event (Amato, 1990; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Stürmer, Snyder & Omoto, 2005). He felt the second trip provided more free time and less focus on the critical work that was still needed ten months following Hurricane Katrina. On the October trip, Alex's reflections included "making a mark" and "realizing what he wanted to do" for a career, reflecting the motives of altruism and skill acquisition as motivators for volunteering (Finkelstein et al., 2005). His presence on the second trip supports findings of the role of self-efficacy and prior experiences in predicting volunteerism (Michel, 2007; Omoto & Snyder, 1995). As the only student to participate in both trips, he reflected on others coming to him during the second relief trip in June of 2006 with questions about how to approach some aspects of the work they were doing, providing him with some measure of expert power and social validation (Amato, 1990; Callero et al., 1987; Michel, 2007).

All of the participants in this study expressed a sense of efficacy from the work they did in New Orleans, making it a meaningful life experience for them. Schools, as sites of human, social and cultural capital development, were critical for each of them as

they provided the foundational opportunities for engagement in community service (Michel, 2007; Oesterle et al., 2004; Putnam, 2000; Wilson, 2000). In particular, because the participants all attended Catholic schools, the educational institutions served doubly as a sites for the development of all forms of capital, as well as religious and moral development.

### **Connecting Post-Katrina Service to Post-Secondary Lives: Changes in Worldviews and Choices.**

Providing physical labor and supplies to the residents of New Orleans helped to shape the worldview of the participants. Both Sean and Derek noted the need to challenge the media, commenting on skewed representation on both areas hit and people harmed. Sean reflected on spending a couple of hours in the French Quarter and realizing the economic impact as one business after another posted signage indicating that they had no idea when they would return to re-open. Derek challenged the lack of ‘street level’ coverage, citing too much footage of the water and what used to be – and not enough of the impact to homes and neighborhoods. Their critical reflections based on first hand experiences validate the need to challenge media reporting of disasters, to look beyond what is dramatized and search for the stories left untold – the stories of the real lives of average people.

Derek’s career choice was not changed but strengthened as a result of the Katrina experience. Seeing the authentic side of the story and serving individuals who did not match the image of the looters and vandals proffered by the media. The trip provided him with culturally relevant education in an experiential setting as he began to recognize the importance of challenging preconceived notions, and the role of empathy and

listening in law enforcement (Guy, 1999a). The experience helped Derek to witness the role of social and cultural capital in serving others; a lesson he kept in mind as he went on to organize music concerts to benefit veterans and young families in need of clothing and toys for children. For Sean, the city and her residents called to him to continue serving and learning, which he did when attending Loyola University. Both Sean and Derek became involved in fraternities committed to service, providing them with ongoing opportunities, social networks, and social validation (Amato, 1990; Callero et al., 1987; Michel, 2007).

Alex expressed a sense of disappointment, anger and resentment that the government had failed the city of New Orleans and her inhabitants. His Katrina experiences shaped his career decision as it inspired him to major in Disaster Mitigation and Emergency Preparedness at the University of Akron, the only such program in the nation. Beyond his career choice, his Katrina experiences provided him with self-efficacy as a leader and as a speaker for those marginalized by society's decisions. He has become an activist for gay rights and for others harmed by budget cuts to funding for HIV medications. Volunteering not once, but twice in New Orleans, then going on to major in Disaster Mitigation, Alex's sense of altruism was heightened; he acquired work skills and experience; and he has internalized the volunteer identity, emerging as a "core" activist volunteer (Callero et al., 1987; Marks & Jones, 2004; Penner, 2004).

Hurricane Katrina shaped the opinion of the nation as citizens witnessed the results of poor planning, failed leadership, and failed infrastructure. Responding to the need for labor and supplies, volunteers witnessed the untold stories – stories of individuals falling through the cracks such as seniors with no help to clear debris; stories

of the importance of the Red Cross trucks providing the basic necessities such as a meal each day; and stories of resilience and appreciation that shed light on the true souls of the citizens of New Orleans. The Katrina relief trip provided the participants with authentic experience in which to ground their worldviews and post-secondary choices.

**Narrative learning and agency: How young adults learn from narrative.**

Narrative is both a tool for understanding and a site of learning (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Engaging in narrative connects us to knowledge about our sense of agency; it helps us to understand who we are and why we take certain actions (Biesta & Teddar, 2007; Bruner, 1990). The participants in this study were new to this approach to adult learning. As young men in their early 20's, life storytelling came with its challenges. Overall, they recalled little detail about their early years prior to high school other than the presence of siblings and the sports they played. However, their narratives, even at this point, gave clues about the things that would remain constant in their life stories. Sean's life is grounded in family, faith, education and service; Derek's in public safety, justice and patriotism; and Alex's in responsiveness and challenge.

Each participant's narrative gained greater intensity of detail when talking about high school years and the Hurricane Katrina trip. Of particular interest in gathering their stories was the shared notion that five years was a long time ago (Bilken, 2007), illuminating one reason why their recall of early childhood years lacked detail. The second reason is that others – parents, siblings, and teachers, directed the early years of their lives. The narrative depth of the participants' stories increased when speaking about the time between the Katrina experience in 2005 and the present day, as it is within this time frame that they became responsible for their lives. Rossiter and Garcia (2010) note,



“in the telling of our own stories...we affirm our own experience *to* [emphasis original] ourselves and we claim it *for* [emphasis original] ourselves” (p. 90). As each participant experienced heightened agency in his life, the life story being told became *his* [emphasis added] life story, not one directed by others. In taking ownership of their individual life stories, the participants experienced narrative learning.

Oesterle et al. (2004) note that levels of civic engagement tend to be come established during the transition to adulthood. The participants in the study fit the classification of a young adult as someone between the ages of 16 and 24, both at the time of the service and the time of the study. The Hurricane Katrina relief trip and the volunteering that participants engaged in both prior to and following that trip, provided them with opportunities rich in adult learning potential; their volunteering was experiential, required agency, and resulted in feelings of self-efficacy (Biesta et al., 2010; Kappel & Daley, 1994; Rossiter & Clark, 2010). Their continued volunteer experiences, while indicators of sustained civic engagement for the future, also served to engage the participant’s in the world around them and defined each one’s emerging sense of self as an adult.

As participants recounted their life stories, family and religion emerged for Sean and Derek, providing justification of why they made decisions about service and career from a moral, social and psychological standpoint (Bruner, 1990). Derek speaks to following family traditions of patriotism and public safety careers, Sean to also following family traditions that combine education, faith and service. In their narratives, the “sense of continuity needed for identity formation” (Rossiter, 2005, p. 62) is apparent. Alex’s narrative lacks this continuity, perhaps in part because it is only in recent years that he

can sense stability and acceptance in his life. He has developed a strong social ties and residential identity in the Akron area, making this environment one in which he is likely to continue in volunteer actions (Amato, 1990).

One of the most important considerations for life storying is the “creation of space for emergent stories” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). In each participant’s process, thoughtful conversation opened the doors for new stories to emerge in the future. Sean reflected that the process made him realize how important service is to him and that he needs to become engaged in the Chicago community, although he has lived there for less than a year. Derek’s narrative revealed long term goals of federal public service as a career, and a more immediate goal of getting involved with the Lake County Historical Society to establish a World War II program to teach about history. I shared with him contacts for both of those goals and initiated emails introducing him. This emergent story supports Rossiter’s (1999) stance that relationships and affiliation should be considered as adult development goals; and I hope that for Derek, I modeled effective use of social and cultural capital. Alex’s emergent story is very much his present life. He has been actively advocating for gay rights and feels accepted in the Akron community. He is, however, reticent to return to Lake County and to connect to friends from Lake Catholic, unsure of how accepting they may be of his life as a gay man.

### **Limitations**

The study was conducted with a sample of three participants from a single Hurricane Katrina relief trip. Although this represented fifty percent of the potential for this case study, expanding the boundaries of the case to include participants from the

June 2006 sample could potentially enhance the findings by increasing the diversity of the sample to include females.

At the time of the service, all participants attended Catholic high schools and all are Caucasian males. Expanding the case boundaries to include other students, who served with different relief trips in the immediate weeks following Katrina, or those who participated in the second trip with Alex, could have increased the diversity of the sample. However, expanding the sample to other groups would mean the loss of shared experiences and the relief trip experiences may have been structured differently. To expand it to include members of the second relief trip that accompanied Alex would have also represented different experiences and a different time frame, as the second trip occurred ten months after Hurricane Katrina.

One of the challenges in conducting narrative life history studies with young adults is the difference in perceptions of time (Bilken, 2007). As a mature adult, five years ago is a relatively short time span in my memory, for the participants in this study, five years was a “long time ago”. This perception is important to consider in life history studies – this difference in perception means that we should engage with young adults more readily following what we might perceive to be critical moments in their lives, such as national disasters or wars. Doing so would capture memories and impressions closer to the “lived moment”, but with sufficient time for critical reflection to take place. Living in a rapidly changing society requires faster response time for researchers to capture critical thoughts.

In approaching this study from a constructivist perspective, I was not prepared to engage in the issues best approached using a critical theorist’s lens. Specifically, Alex’s

story brought to light the issues of loss when transitioning to an openly gay lifestyle. His childhood and youth were grounded in social and cultural networks predominated by a Catholic, heterosexual community. The study could have been enhanced by additional time and experience in critical inquiry to probe more deeply into how these losses were and continue to be reconciled as he continues in adulthood.

### **Implications for Urban Education and Life Long Learning**

#### **Schools as primary sites for volunteer opportunities and culturally relevant education.**

The participants in this study described the decision to participate in the relief mission as an extension of what they had already been doing, providing needed service in their respective communities through school based initiatives. Although all of the participants attended religious services at local churches, they did not seek out opportunities for service through their local church parishes, but at their high schools. For the participants in this study, their respective high schools were the sociocultural sites to which they gravitated when searching for volunteer opportunities.

The participant's sought volunteer experiences through their schools, in part, because some level of community service was mandated as a requirement by the schools they attended. However, by volunteering above and beyond what was mandated, the participant's engaged in opportunities that extended their social networks and knowledge of cultural norms and social issues. Wilson and Musick (1997) note, "Your decision to volunteer is affected as much by what other people are thinking and doing as by what you are thinking and doing" (p. 695), supporting the sociocultural nature of volunteering. In both their mandated and non-mandated activities, the role of social participation and

validation from peers was significant. Volunteering alongside of other students provided the participants with social settings in which to learn as well as to lead, as in the case of Alex becoming the ‘go-to’ guy for the other students on the second relief trip (Stürmer, Snyder & Omoto, 2005). High school was the site for sociocultural development as well as acquisition of knowledge for the participants in this study. This validates the critical role of educational institutions, public and private, in the development of engaged citizens and life-long learners through the provision of volunteer programs that are experiential and meaningful.

Faculty members at the high schools involved were responsible for providing culturally relevant learning opportunities to the participants. As part of the Catholic social teachings center around service to others, it is imperative that young adults engaged in service come to understand their role as both learner and teacher at sites of community service. For young adults to effectively do this, they must “see themselves as part of a larger community” (Guy, 1999a, p. 97). Faculty must challenge perspectives that are separatist or exclusionary – they too must be invested in the community in which they teach and serve.

Taking on the role of facilitators of learning (Kappel & Daley, 1994), faculty members affected the choices participants made for volunteer sites. At one high school, the responsibility for volunteer choices was centered in the Theology Department, with only a single point person identified by two of the participants in the study. With the responsibility solely in the hands of the religious studies department, community service was directly tied to faith-based actions.

At the other high school, numerous faculty members were involved in community service initiatives. They modeled volunteerism and social justice actions, providing the participant who attended that school with multiple role models and expanded opportunities to engage in his community. This latter model supported findings that the entire faculty is responsible for the moral growth and development of students (Morgan & Kollman, 2008). Importantly, while community service was considered to be a way to “live in faith”, discussion of experiences were not restricted to theology classes. In English, history and social studies classes, volunteer experiences provided authentic frameworks for the discussion of social issues and moral values of society. With multiple faculty members involved, the participant experienced discussion and debate from varied perspectives, which enhanced his critical thinking skills.

**Service learning: Reification of social issues.**

In both public and private educational institutions, faculty who are charged with establishing sites for community service and service learning serve as mentors, models and social informants. Students need to learn skills such as empathy and listening, as well as information that will aid in their understanding of life situations where they may be serving (Guy, 1999b). Service should raise moral-political awareness and provide space for challenging student’s perceptions of their place in the social framework (Kappel & Daley, 1994; Roberts, 2008; Yates & Youniss, 1996). The importance of this background preparedness is underscored in Alex’s comments regarding one citizen served on the second trip. Although much of the work was done to assist an elderly man with mental health issues, he did not view him so much as a victim of Katrina as a victim of his own doing. This perception underscores the argument for moving beyond

community service, to service learning for its inclusion of social issue investigation and critical reflection.

Service learning as a volunteer model provides faculty with a format for teaching students critical thinking skills, providing experiential learning, and engaging in meaningful reflection as they transition into early adulthood. Service learning incorporates exploration of an issue on the front end, such as the causes of homelessness and its current status within a given community and on a national basis. For such authentic learning to occur, a “teacher must become intimately acquainted with the conditions of the local community, physical, historical, economic, occupational, etc., in order to utilize them as educational resources” (Dewey, 1938, p. 40). Students are challenged to discover facts relative to a topic and discuss current perceptions of the issue, requiring faculty to facilitate culturally relevant learning (Guy, 1999a). This creates space for learning as students become aware of their own beliefs and levels of knowledge. It is in this first component that issues of power and privilege, compassion and dignity must be discussed. Failure to do so may contribute to the development of a “culture of benevolence” (Wilson & Musick, 1997, p. 696) and may result in volunteers going to sites seeking to confirm “othering” instead of searching for the in-group identity shared by all humans.

The second component of service learning is the provision of service following the intellectual discussion. This provides the student with an authentic platform to confirm her/his existing beliefs or experience dissonance with them. Providing a learning experience in a community setting creates what Dewey termed “one permanent frame of reference: namely, the organic connection between education and personal experience”

(1938, p. 25). As Sean noted through his experiences in serving the homeless, his preconceived notions of the condition of homelessness being a result of lazy or drug induced lifestyles was replaced with an authentic understanding that many were very intelligent people who by choice or other circumstances did not conform to societal norms, which resulted in homelessness. This shift in understanding that many social ills can be traced back to social structure and practices is a powerful revelation for young adults. It links the responsibility of being an educated individual to being an actively engaged citizen – it provides students with a reason to become change agents.

The powerful disconnect between theory and reality that confronts volunteers in the community-based experience of service learning mandates the third the component of this model – reflection to critique the dissonance between policy and practice regarding social issues (Roberts, 2008). It is within this component that Dewey’s (1938) concern for *quality* [emphasis original] in educational experiences is addressed. Quality has two aspects: agreeableness/disagreeableness and effect (Dewey, 1938). The quality of educational experience is the responsibility of the educator – to arrange for learning encounters that will have an influence on later experiences. Students in service learning must engage in critical reflection to understand what makes the experience agreeable or disagreeable, and further to understand its effect on future actions and experiences.

The teasing out of the human conditions that result from social policies and structures aligns with narrative learning because of the stories that must be told and heard within each component. Telling stories is how we make sense of our lives and the world we live in. Clark (2010) states narrative learning occurs at three levels: from hearing stories, from telling stories, and from “recognizing where we are situated in the



narratives” (p. 6). Being cognizant of our position and power within the narratives of the individuals being served is critical to authentic service. Roberts’ (2008) study in service ethnography documents the importance of asking how volunteers can be of assistance noting, “Service learning will always run the risk of reinforcing hierarchy if we assume our own ideas about service are the correct ones” (p. 113). Service learning allows students to engage in experiential learning that creates space for them to understand the sociocultural forces at work in their communities; it challenges them to become change agents; and it provides them with experiential learning, preparing them for continuous learning in adulthood.

**Service learning benefits: Equity and access.**

At issue for many when service is discussed are issues of resources and access. Interestingly, those schools with the greatest resources may have the least amount of ready access to authentic sites of service learning for social justice issues. In this study, Lake Catholic, situated in an affluent suburb, could provide resources, yet access to sites of social justice issues were beyond the school community, requiring the use of either personal vehicles or public transit, of which the latter is very limited in the suburban environment. Of equal issue was that of access to the weekend volunteer sites for students from St. Ignatius; as most live in suburban areas, personal transportation was needed to participate in weekend ministries.

Service learning, as it occurs during the school day, offers greater equity in access for participation by all students. As a semester course, students learn and serve together in a community; they reach destinations by walking or utilizing public transit, providing authentic experiences for navigating in the community they serve as well. Further,

service learning can serve to bridge knowledge across disciplines and bring meaning to learning as students understand the applicability of knowledge to daily life. A service learning experience can provide lessons in history, language and social justice as students learn the history of an issue through stories, research and writing; experience the reality of the issue as they volunteer in the community; and then reflect upon the issue in their own stories or journals.

Service learning has a place in an urban school environment as much as it does in a suburban or rural one. Urban schools have the most ready access to issues as urban students may encounter them daily, such as homelessness, drugs, crime, housing, and transportation (Guy, 1999a). Many urban students may have first hand experience with one of these issues but have little to no knowledge regarding the policies that frame it. For these students in particular, service learning may be emancipatory as their narratives become restoried, based in new knowledge and situating them among those with the power of education – the power to take action based on an informed opinion (Guy, 1999b). For all students, service learning has the potential to be transformative as “individuals use critical reflection and other rational processes to engage in meaning making” (Johnson-Bailey, 2010, p. 83) that changes her/his personal narrative as a result of the experiential condition of this approach to learning.

#### **Institutional challenges: Walking the talk.**

The greater challenge to service learning is that the educational institution must take ownership of it as a learning strategy and commit resources of both time and faculty for it to be successful. Although Dewey (1938) stressed the role of teachers becoming thoroughly invested in the community in which they were teaching, educational

institutions must do so as well or run the risk of being outsiders in the communities in which they were built to serve. Schools must invest in their communities by promoting the development of faculty who will model critical thinking skills and community engagement for their students and who will engage in cooperative teaching across disciplines.

As with many other innovative educational practices, incorporating service learning into the curriculum requires a paradigm shift on two fronts. First educational institutions must commit to the challenge of teaching students to engage as critical thinkers. Morgan & Kollman's (2008) findings on the outcomes of service learning states, "Faculty reported enhanced academic learning and more dynamic classrooms as theory faces testing from multiple perspectives and real-life situations" (p. 33). As students in service learning course spend less time in a conventional classroom setting and in front of faculty, academic rigor is difficult to measure and the ability to apply critical thinking skills may not be immediately apparent. A return to Dewey's (1938) writings brings up again the issue of quality and effect and the notion that "every experience lives on in future experience" (p. 27). As service learning experience increases, the knowledge gained scaffolds a student's understanding of issues and her/his ability to evaluate and synthesize knowledge.

The second paradigm shift that must occur in tandem with the commitment to develop critical thinking skills in students is that educational institutions will need to challenge what is rewarded. If creating engaged citizens is a goal, then that must be factored into faculty evaluations and rewards (Morgan & Kollman, 2008). Faculty should be expected to model the behaviors and actions that demonstrate civic engagement. A

class that requires the level of cross disciplinary planning and teaching to engage students in service learning is complex and should be rewarded as such. It is not only the lesson plans regarding issue that is the focus of the service learning that must be developed, but the community connections, the service site relationships and the reflective exercises on both individual and classroom levels. Service learning, based in authentic community issues, will be dynamic as community needs change over time. Therefore, faculty engaged in service learning will need to be motivated both intrinsically to be an engaged teacher, and extrinsically, with a reward system that supports their ongoing desire to teach students to be active citizens and change agents in their own communities.

**Spirituality and volunteerism: Public education applicability.**

Numerous studies indicate that involvement in education and religious institutions are the most significant predictors of volunteerism (Gibson, 2008; Michel, 2007; Putnam, 2000; Metz & Youniss, 2003). Schools can also serve as sites for spiritual and wellness development as outcomes of community service and service learning. Post (2005) found in adult volunteers improved physical health and psychological wellbeing. Though many would contest the notion of public schools teaching spirituality, this is not the same as teaching religion. Parallel to physical wellness, there is an emerging interest in the notion of spiritual wellness as a contributing factor to the health of school climate (Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004). Common dimensions to spiritual wellness include the following beliefs that are the result of direct experiences: “hope, meaning, purpose in life, connectedness, honesty, compassion, forgiveness, rituals, recognition of what is held to be sacred, and transcendent beliefs/experiences that may include a sense of a higher power” (Ingersoll & Bauer, 2004, p. 302). Many of these beliefs emerged in the participants’ stories of their

Hurricane Katrina and other volunteer experiences. Consistent with Dewey's (1938) assertion that education is intended to develop engaged citizens, learning service – and specifically service learning – in public schools can enhance moral and cognitive development, positioning students to effectively engage in social justice issues.

**Life long learning: Expanding notions of adulthood.**

Participating in narrative is foundational to adult learning; it is how we make sense of our thought and actions (Polkinghorne, 2005). Engaging young adults in narrative may provide them with a critical tool that can be readily accessed to evaluate and make decisions in a dynamic society. For the participants in this study, it shed light on why they have made some decisions to date and validated what has occurred in their lives thus far. Engaging young adults in the life story process and development of narrative skills may enhance not only their own understanding of themselves, but inspire them to extend their own personal life story into earlier generations, creating a greater understanding across generational cultures. One example of this potential is Derek's aspiration for a World War II program that would provide a forum for veterans of that era to talk about their life experiences to inform current generations; it would become part of his own life history, as well as provide him with a way to honor those who fought for our freedom – a freedom which allows us to tell our own stories with our own voices.

Life story research with young adults may be enhanced by the use of technology and photos. Participants in this study were members of the Millennial generation. Rather than travel several hours to engage in a face-to-face interview in person, Skype, was used to conduct interviews with one participant living in a different state at the time of the study. His interviews were in real time, just as they would be in person, via an Internet

connection using webcams. This mitigated the need for travel and allowed greater flexibility in timing of interviews. For example, he had to work late on one night of a planned interview; using Skype allowed us to move it to the next night without incurring costs for travel and lodging. In this study, the photo elicitation method was effective in assisting participants in the recall of details. For example, when Derek spoke of the little boy and his dog, or the kitten stranded on a rooftop during the relief trip, I realized these photos were not included in those selected for the photo elicitation slide show. As all of the digital photos from the trip were on my laptop, I was able to immediately access these photos of importance to the participant and validate the memory.

One of a culture's most enduring ways to capture their societal nuances and lives is through storytelling, especially life stories. Capturing the life stories of young adults may be critical to understanding human development in the accelerated pace of change in contemporary society. As world events occur, we are made aware of them instantaneously through digital media. For these participants, world events will be updated and replaced constantly in their knowledge bank. This rapid churning of knowledge compels us to gather their reflections on events that could be considered "generational shocks" (Davis, 2004) such as the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Hurricane Katrina of 2005, the Haitian earthquakes of 2010, or the Japanese tsunami of 2011, more readily to capture their emotional states and cognitive understanding at those moments as well as their reflections of them at intervals in subsequent years.

The life narratives of young adults not only assist the individual in understanding his/her own personal agency, but also provide societal snapshots for sharing across generations and cultures. Technology can enhance life story acquisition and sharing

through digital media technology. Rossiter and Garcia (2010) note three unique contributions of digital storytelling to adult learning: it captures the real voice of the participant, allowing an individual to hear or see her/himself from an outsider's perspective; it highlights the creative, constructive and contextual aspect of meaning making as each choice of words, music, and/or symbols in a digital story is "an act of meaning" (Brunner, 1990); and it enhances self-direction by allowing the participant to take autobiographical ownership of her/his story and the sociocultural details she/he decides to include in the storying process. Combining the power and agency that can be derived when technology and life stories are united can heighten the social consciousness and self-direction of the Millennial generation as they emerge into adulthood.

### **Future Studies**

This study represents an early step in capturing the quality and efficacy of volunteering in young adults in response to crisis situations. An identified gap in the literature regarding young adults is that little is documented about the quality and type of service performed by young adults volunteering in community service settings. This study provided knowledge on the type and quality of volunteer services the participants engaged in leading up to and during a crisis volunteer experience. Additional studies are needed that continue to address the type and quality of service provided by young adults in both traditional and crisis volunteer settings, as well as focusing on identifying the type of work that results in feelings of self-efficacy, drawing upon Sean's comment regarding the importance of "meaningful service". These studies could also take into account the social and cultural networks required to facilitate the service opportunities,

such as personal contacts, organizational affiliations and methods for organizing the work for volunteers.

Each participant described mandatory service as undesirable, yet valuable, and then went on to volunteer regularly above and beyond what was mandated. This indicates a shift in motivation from being extrinsic to intrinsic consistent with Ryan & Deci's (2000) work on expanded dimensions of motivation. Future studies in volunteerism among young adults should explore understanding and identifying the factors that serve to shift motivation along this continuum, especially the role of mandated service.

All of the participants were engaged in volunteering via a group initiative. Whether through a class assignment, fraternity, or other group cause, what did not emerge in this study is the independent, individual adoption of a cause that spurred internalization of the volunteer role identity (Callero et al., 1987; Penner, 2004). As the Millennial generation is expected to be a team-based, project-oriented cohort, future studies may investigate levels of individual versus group volunteering among the members of this cohort (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Stürmer et al., 2005; Marx, 2006).

Although the participants in this study were aware of the place of privilege they had as volunteers bringing supplies and labor, the study did not explore the role of service in challenging the development of a "culture of benevolence" (Wilson & Musick, 1997, p. 696). Wilson and Musick (1997) note that internalizing the role identity of a volunteer brings with it a class designation as an elite citizen. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) describe a "reconceptualized critical theory that is intensely concerned with the need to understand the various and complex ways that power operates to dominate and shape



consciousness” (p. 309). Future studies among young adults should consider how volunteerism might potentially foster the development of perception of “othering” - and the role of critical reflection to mitigate such developments.

A particular challenge to the study was defining “young adult” as descriptions vary across age-graded, developmental, and psychological models. Future studies in volunteerism among the age range of 16 to 24 year olds, should consider the types of service experiences of these individuals in youth and early adolescence, as well as determinants in their K-12 environments that may provide a proclivity toward volunteerism – and the resulting impact on this age group to develop prosocial behaviors and think in a global capacity in concern for humanity.

## **Conclusion**

This study sought to explore the meaning a crisis volunteer experience held for young adults and how that meaning became situated into their life stories. The findings underscore the impact that a trip of only 120 hours can have on shaping societal perceptions and future life choices during the years of transitioning to adulthood. For the participants in this study, the role of educational institutions, family and mandated volunteer service played significant roles in future decisions to volunteer. This supports previous findings that place schools at the center for development of human, social and cultural capital that lead to civic engagement. Furthermore, for these participants, religion – the other primary indicator of volunteerism – was integrated into their educational settings, joining the two leading predictors of volunteerism under a single roof.

Through discussion of service engagement experiences of the participants, this study may inform existing and future school-based service programs at both the high school and college level. Young adults want to be engaged in meaningful service and look to multiple members of faculty to provide mentorship and modeling of volunteer behaviors. Equally as important, is the ability of faculty to guide students in critical reflection to challenge the structures that create social injustice and to understand their individual and collective roles in becoming change agents. Of particular applicability to public institutions is the notion that service is not dependent upon religious beliefs, but spiritual ones that guide us in valuing each other and all of humanity.

Participating in the narration of one's life story provides an individual with opportunity to reflect on life choices and actions that expose tensions and stabilities, and lead us to self-understanding. As stories are a tool for making sense of our lives, it is important that an individual's story is captured in her/his own voice. In a society where images and voices can easily be distorted, the dedication to retaining authentic voice in narrative rises in importance to build trust and relationships between individuals and across cultures.

It is my hope that through examination of the narratives of these young adults the common threads that join us as members of the human race have surfaced; and that for each story, a unique mark has been stamped into memory. Across time and generations, individuals exist who stand out because they fit in to so many lives, in so many ways. The stories of those who stepped into the shoes of volunteers to give selflessly of their time and talent following Hurricane Katrina, deserve to have their stories included in the

historical accounts of our nation's worst natural disaster in recognition of the lives they kept from being – shattered.

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## **APPENDICES**

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPLICATION

Trans #:

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Cleveland State University

Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects in Research
Application for Project Review

I. Title Page

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 01/12/2011 Transaction Number (office use only):
Project Title: The Hurricane Katrina Volunteer Experience: Inclusion into a Life Narrative

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR OR ADVISOR

Name (Last, First): Rogers, Elice Title: Professor
Department: COHES Campus Address: Julka Hall 346
Electronic Mail Address: e.e.rogers@csuohio.edu
Office Phone: (216) 687-4587 Home Phone: ( ) -
Has the investigator completed the CITI course in the protection of human subjects? [ ] Yes [X] No

CO-PRINCIPAL OR STUDENT INVESTIGATOR

Name (Last, First): Baginski, Jessie Title: Student
Department: COHES
Electronic Mail Address: nolagr1@me.com
Office Phone: (216) 548-0259 Home Phone: (216) 548-259
Has the investigator completed the CITI course in the protection of human subjects? [X] Yes [ ] No

If this is a student investigator, please indicate status:
[ ] Undergraduate [ ] Master level student [X] Doctoral level student
and level of involvement in the research:
[ ] Assisting Faculty Research [ ] Thesis [X] Dissertation [ ] Classroom project: Class name/number

ADDITIONAL INVESTIGATORS? [ ] Yes [X] No (If yes, please complete the "Additional CSU Investigators" form.)

PROPOSED PROJECT DURATION (research may not begin prior to IRB approval):
From (mm/dd/yyyy): 02/07/2011 To (mm/dd/yyyy): 05/07/2011 (date following anticipated approval; maximum one year later)

Please be aware that data collected prior to approval or outside of authorized dates may not be used. If your study (i.e. collection of data) will extend beyond the one year authorization, it is your responsibility to notify the IRB prior to expiration and request an extension.

\*\*\*Type of funding or support: None

FOR IRB USE ONLY

Form with two columns: Initial Evaluation and Final IRB Action. Includes checkboxes for 'Approve as is', 'Requires Revision', 'Full IRB review', 'Exempt Status', 'Expedited Review', 'Regular IRB approval', and 'Other'. Includes fields for Reviewer, Signature, and Approval Date.

## II. Participant Information

Total number of participants: **4-6**

Age range (lower limit – upper limit): **21-25**

Gender: **Both**

Ethnic Minority: **None/Not applicable**

Inclusionary criteria: **Must be one of fifteen Northeast Ohio High School student volunteers who participated in Hurricane Katrina Relief trip in October 2005 and/or June 2006 with Laketran (15 males/5 females).**

Exclusionary criteria: **Anyone not participating in the above relief trips**

Source of participants: **At the time of the relief trip, participants were juniors or seniors in high schools**

Is the data going to be extracted from records that already exist on these participants (e.g. school records, grade transcripts, medical records, etc.)?

Yes  No

If yes, will the data be recorded in a way that prevents subjects from being identified?

Yes  No

Length of participation (x time/session, y sessions, over z months): **Participant will be asked to participate in an two one-hour interviews. An additional, individual one-hour interview may be requested to expand upon thoughts or clarify information.**

**Participants in Special Consideration Categories:** (Check all that apply.)

None

Military personnel

Children (age range: \_\_\_\_\_)

Wards of the State

Cognitively impaired persons

Institutionalized individuals

Prisoners

Non-English speaking individuals

Pregnant or lactating women

Students

Blind individuals

Other subjects whose life circumstances may interfere with their ability to make free choice in consenting to take part in research (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Site(s) of data collection: **Cleveland State University; on-line via email or by phone**

Letters of approval from project site officials: **are not needed (research on-campus at CSU).**

\*You **MUST** include letters of approval from appropriate administrative officials at the facility where you will be collecting data.

## III. Project Description

- a. Give a concise statement of the area of research and briefly describe the purpose and objectives of your proposed research:

**This project will use a case study approach to gather reflective data on the life experiences of four to six high school students providing relief work to Katrina victims in the greater New Orleans area in October 2005 and/or June 2006. Twenty students from several Cuyahoga and/or Lake County high schools participated in these trips. The study seeks to understand the meaning of the crisis volunteer experience from the lens of a young adult high school student. The pre-interview protocol will gather data regarding the participant's early high school community and volunteer experiences. Two semi-structured interviews will explore how those experiences fit within the participant's life narrative and contributed to his/her sense of agency in responding to the call for volunteers and in preparing them to perform volunteer duties such as debris clearing and restoration of living space. A third interview may be needed for expanding upon data from the first two interviews. The study will explore how the participant has integrated the post-Katrina volunteer experience into his/her life story five years following this national disaster. The study aims to inform the**

Cleveland State University Office of Sponsored Programs and Research IRB

Form updated 11/30/2007

All other forms are obsolete

dpo

theories of adult learning through narrative and narration using young adults, a population not often found in life-history studies.

- b. Provide a detailed description of how participants will be recruited and used in the project. Please include a description of the tasks subjects will be performing, the circumstances of testing, and/or the nature of the subjects' involvement.

Eligible participants are young adults who accompanied the researcher on relief mission to New Orleans in October 2005 and/or June 2006. Participants will be invited to participate via a personal request either face-to-face or by telephone. The participants for the study are being invited based on meeting the criterion of having participated in one of the relief missions; the selection will also be based on convenience of access to a participant who is willing and accessible during the research time frame. The participant will be asked to set up a dates and times for two one-on-one interviews to take place on campus at CSU.

Prior to the interviews, the participant will be asked to complete a brief survey to capture his/her employment history, education and community volunteerism as these are often related to individuals' level of social and human capital, and civic engagement. Interviews will be video recorded. Interviews will be semi-structured to allow the participant to share information at levels of individual comfort and to ensure meaningful dialog for the participant. The initial interview will serve to review the participants' information from the pre-interview protocol instrument and provide a basis for conversation. The participant's memories of the relief trip will be discussed, photos of the trip will be used to triangulate data between the participant's memories and factual occurrences. Data will be analyzed for richness of description, plot and evidence of efficacy of the narrative process.

Second interviews will be used to expand upon information or clarify data. The third interview, if needed, will expand upon themes that emerge from the initial interviews or to clarify data collected. The participants will be asked to review his/her transcripts for accuracy. The final report will be a narrative case study of the participant. Study presentations may include the use of photos of the relief mission and video segments of the interviews.

The participant will also be asked to review the video of his/her interviews for purposes of consent to use in audio/visual reporting. Data will be coded and analyzed for depth of narrative and efficacy of storytelling as a learning experience and motivation for action.

- c. Make an explicit statement concerning the possible risks and benefits associated with participating in the research. Describe the nature and likelihood of possible risks (e.g., physical, psychological, social) as a result of participation in the research. Risks include even mild discomforts or inconveniences, as well as potential for disclosure of sensitive information. If a risk exists, how does it compare to those of daily living? What are your safeguards for avoiding risks, for protecting subjects' privacy, etc.?

The risks associated with this study include discomfort in experiencing and/or sharing personal reflections and personal dissonance from revisiting the experience. Participant's exposure to sites of devastation was limited to seeing exteriors of homes that remained uninhabited. The homes where work was being done as part of the missions had suffered primarily wind damage from Hurricane Katrina or mild flooding.

There is also the risk of discomfort associated with personal disclosure. The researchers will ensure that participant will not be pressed to responding to any question or comment. If the participant indicates feeling a need for counseling during or following the interviews, the researcher will refer him/her to a local counseling center.

- d. Describe measures to be taken to protect subjects from possible risks or discomforts.

The participant may choose to have his/her real name used in the study, to be assigned a pseudonym or to self-select a pseudonym for the interviews. Interviews will take place on the CSU campus or at a location deemed most comfortable and convenient by the individual participant to minimize risk and discomfort with being the focus of the study.

- e. Describe precautions to ensure the privacy of subjects and confidentiality of information. Be explicit if data are sensitive. Describe coding procedures for subject identification. Include the method, location and duration of data retention. (Federal regulations require data to be maintained for at least 3 years)

**Data are sensitive to the extent that they are composed of personal feelings and reflections of the participant. Interviews will be transcribed using the participant's pseudonyms unless he/she has given permission for his/her name to be used. Video recordings will be reviewed by the participant and separately approved for use in the reports and presentations. In the event that a participant does not consent to the use of his/her photo image to be included in the presentations, the individual's image will be electronically distorted or removed. In the event that a participant does not wish to be identified on a video segment, his/her face and voice will be electronically distorted. The transcripts/video files will be stored on a portable drive which will be stored in the lead researcher's office on CSU campus in a locked file for at least three years.**

#### IV. Informed Consent Form

Yes	No	N/A
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Does the Informed Consent Statement?**

1. Introduce you and your research (including names and phone numbers).
2. Provide the subject with a brief, understandable explanation of the research.
3. Explain the risks and benefits.
4. Explain the details of the time commitment for participation.
5. Explain how your protocol either protects confidentiality or is anonymous.\*
6. Mention that participation is voluntary, and that the subject may withdraw at any time without penalty.
7. Include the exact statement about contacting the IRB.\*\*
8. Provide a phone number where the subject may contact you for further information (students should include a phone number for themselves and also for their supervising faculty member).
9. Have a signature/date block for the subject to complete.\*\*\*

\* Confidentiality and anonymity are not the same. Confidentiality means that the researcher will know the identity of specific subjects and their data. Anonymity means individuals' responses cannot be associated with the data they generate.

\*\* "I understand that if I have any questions about my rights as a research subject I can contact the CSU Institutional Review Board at (216) 687-3630," or if a minor, "I understand that if I have any questions about my child's rights as a research subject I can contact the CSU Institutional Review Board at (216) 687-3630."

\*\*\* If you wish to dispense with a signed consent form, for either procedural or substantive reasons, be sure to include a clear statement of your reasons and your alternate procedure for obtaining consent.

## V. Copies of Instruments and Questionnaires

**To complete this application**, attach a copy of all questionnaires or other instruments. This application **MUST** include copies of instrumentation before approval can be granted.

**VI. CERTIFICATION/SIGNATURE**

I certify that the information contained in this protocol application and all attachments is true and correct. I certify that I have received approval to conduct this research from all persons named as collaborators and from officials of the project site(s). If this protocol is approved by the Cleveland State Institutional Review Board, I agree to conduct the research according to the approved protocol. I agree not to implement any changes in the protocol until such changes have been approved by The Cleveland State Institutional Review Board. If, during the course of the research, unanticipated risks or harm to subjects are discovered, I will cease collecting data and report them to IRB immediately.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sign Name → Principal Investigator/Faculty Advisor      Date      Print Name → Principal Investigator/Faculty Advisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sign Name → Co-Principal or Student Investigator      Date      Print Name → Co-Principal or Student Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sign Name → Co-Principal or Student Investigator      Date      Print Name → Co-Principal or Student Investigator

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Sign Name → Co-Principal or Student Investigator      Date      Print Name → Co-Principal or Student Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sign Name → Co-Principal or Student Investigator      Date      Print Name → Co-Principal or Student Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sign Name → Co-Principal or Student Investigator      Date      Print Name → Co-Principal or Student Investigator

**Forward this completed form to:**  
Cleveland State University  
Institutional Review Board  
Office of Sponsored Programs and Research  
2258 Euclid Avenue  
Hannifin Hall  
Cleveland, OH 44115-2405

Cleveland State University Office of Sponsored Programs and Research IRB  
Form updated 11/30/2007  
All other forms are obsolete  
dpo

## APPENDIX B

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Hi, Our names are Elice Rogers and Jessie Baginski from Cleveland State University, College of Education and Human Services. We are researchers for a study called, The Hurricane Katrina Volunteer Experience: Inclusion into a Life Narrative. This project involves the use of photos, videos and interviews to conduct research on the unique journey of a student from the greater Cleveland area who responded to the need for volunteer labor to help rehabilitate homes damaged by Hurricane Katrina on relief missions in either October 2005 or June 2006. The purpose of this study is to explore how the reflections of a student volunteer regarding his/her relief mission experience becomes part of his/her life narrative.

We would like your permission to videotape an interview with you as part of the project. This interview would take place at CSU from the hours of \_\_\_\_\_ on the following dates \_\_\_\_\_.

Excerpts of the interviews, as well as photos of the journey will be used in reports and presentations. Should we use excerpts from your interview, we may include your name and indicate you are graduate of \_\_\_\_\_ (high school), if you give us permission to do so. In addition, we may produce other creative products (brochures, posters, video clips) to distribute the research findings.

At the onset of the study, you will be given a brief survey to gather information on your past volunteer experience, employment history and education. This background information is being gathered solely for this study to develop a profile of the volunteer's community engagement prior to the Katrina experience.

We are preparing a narrative case study and presentation that may include video clips of the reflections of the participant. You may choose to be identified by a pseudonym in the documentary and narrative or give us permission to use your real name. You will be assigned a pseudonym in the study transcripts and findings to ensure confidentiality unless you prefer your real name to be used. Photos from the relief trip, if used, will use pseudonyms and your face will be distorted to enhance confidentiality, unless you give us permission to use your photo.

You will be interviewed privately and asked to reflect on a relief mission to New Orleans in October 2005 and/or June 2006 and the related service, leadership, mentoring and cultural experiences. You will be asked to narrate your thoughts about the cultural interchanges of the mission, your thoughts about the role of education in your decisions and perceptions, and your feelings of social worth and satisfaction regarding the work performed to assist victims of Hurricane Katrina. You may, at any time, turn off the audiotape and/or videotape recorder and decline to answer any question. You will be asked to complete two to three interviews, each requiring approximately one hour of your time. The first interview will be to review past volunteer experiences and talk about your life prior to and including the Katrina experience. The second and third interview, if needed, will be one-hour interviews to expand upon thoughts or clarify information.

Interview data will be supplemented with photos from the mission. Since your interviews will be video recorded, we will provide you with a DVD of your interviews shortly after they have taken place. Please let us know within two weeks of the receipt of the DVD if there are any segments



involving you that you prefer we not use in reports and/or presentations. At the end of three years, data from this study will be destroyed.

You should always feel free to ask questions about the study before participating or during the study. We would be happy to share the research findings with you after the research is completed.

The risks associated with this study include discomfort in experiencing and/or sharing personal reflections and personal dissonance from revisiting the experience. Should you feel uncomfortable at any time during your interviews, you can simply stop participating. If you feel the need for counseling following the interviews, the researcher will refer you to a local counseling center. The possible benefits of this study are the contribution of your experiences to expand the understanding of the role of high school volunteering in the development of young adult life narratives and the use of narratives and narration as tools in adult learning.

Your consent and your participation in this study are completely voluntary, and you are absolutely free to decline to answer a question or to leave the interview.

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact Dr. Elice Rogers; e.e.rogers@csuohio.edu; 2216-687-4587).

There is no reward for participating or consequence for not participating.

There are two copies of this letter. After signing them, keep one copy for your records and please bring the other one to the interview. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

If you agree to participate, please sign below.

“I agree to be interviewed. I understand that if I have any questions about my rights as a research subject I can contact the Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board at (216) 687-3630.”

Name of the Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ (please print)

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I give my permission to be video recorded. (Circle one) Yes No

I give my permission to have my name used in the video presentation segments/video documentary should you need to do so. (Circle one) Yes No

I give my permission for images of me taken during the relief mission to be used during the study and in subsequent reports and presentations. (Circle one) Yes No

I give my permission for images/recorded segments of me to be used in the study and subsequent reports and presentations. (Circle one) Yes No

Contact Information:

Principal Investigator  
Jessie Guidry Baginski  
nolagrl@me.com  
216-548-0259

Faculty Advisor  
Dr. Elice Rogers  
e.e.rogers@csuohio.edu  
216-687-4587

CSU Institutional Review Board  
216-687-3630

**APPENDIX C**

**PRE-INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

**Pre-Interview Survey: The Hurricane Katrina Volunteer Experience: Inclusion into a Life Narrative**

The purpose of this survey is to compile an overview of social and cultural capital of a student volunteer who participated in your relief mission to New Orleans in October 2005 or June 2006.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Education:

High School- highest level completed \_\_\_\_grade

College – number of years completed \_\_\_\_\_

Major area of study: \_\_\_\_\_

Minor area of study: \_\_\_\_\_

Special coursework related to your profession:

Employment:

Employer	Position	Years of Service

Community Involvement:

Please tell me about your involvement in organizations outside of your job prior to the relief mission. This could include school organizations, religious organizations, charitable organizations, community and social organizations.

Organization	Role in Organization	Years Involved

## APPENDIX D

### LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### **Interview Protocol: The Hurricane Katrina Volunteer Experience: Inclusion into a Life Narrative**

Date:

Time of Interview:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Project overview: To obtain reflective data from young adults who participated in a volunteer relief mission following Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in October 2005.

This study seeks to explore reflections on the unique journey of three students from the greater Cleveland area who responded to the need for volunteer labor to help rehabilitate homes damaged by Hurricane Katrina. The purpose of this study is to explore how the reflections of a student volunteer regarding his/her relief mission experience becomes part of his/her life narrative.

Questions:

Growing Up

Tell me about your life growing up.

Do you have other siblings? Where are you in the age group of siblings?

What did your parents do as you were growing up? What types of work, activities did they participate in with you or on their own?

What level of education do they have?

What were your family relationships like within the immediate family? Extended?

#### Education

Tell me about your education.

Where did you attend grade school? Why did your family choose that school? Tell me about your teachers and classmates – what types of activities were you involved in?

(Probe for things such as sports, scouts, etc.)

Where did you go to high school? Why did you choose that school? What clubs/activities were you involved in?

#### Volunteer Beginnings

Tell me about the school's approach to volunteering and community service? Was it required? What type of service were you involved in?

Did you volunteer or participate in community service outside of school? If so, tell me about it?

Tell me about the groups and organizations you were involved with as a volunteer during high school both at school and at home.

What was most important to you about being involved in these organizations?

How did you learn about volunteering and choosing where to be involved?

#### The Katrina Experience

How did you learn about the opportunity to go to New Orleans?

What interested you in this volunteer opportunity?

What concerns did you have about going down to New Orleans? How did you overcome those concerns?

What expectations did you have about the work you would be doing? Did the reality match your expectations? In what ways?

Describe for me how were you able to apply things you learned from other volunteer experiences to this situation.

Tell me about what stood out most for you – people, homes, details, and interactions

Describe for me your feelings while you were working on the home and when it was done.

What surprised you most about yourself while we were working? What did you learn about others?

Describe for me what you feel you accomplished as an individual on that trip. As a group?

Do you feel this experience shaped your decisions about your education and career? In what ways?

Did helping in New Orleans prompt you to rethink your volunteer goals? How are they the same or different?

Others and Katrina

Tell me about the other volunteers you worked with in New Orleans? Did you know them before the trip? How did you connect to work together? Did you become friends?

Tell me about your family's initial reaction to you participating in this trip? Did that change after the trip?

How do you describe the Katrina experience to others? Would you do it again? Would you encourage others to do it?

## Personal Transformations

Do you feel that the Katrina experience changed you as a person? In what ways?

What experiences along the way changed how you approach others in need? If so, how?

## Other Thoughts

Is there some aspect of your journey you would really want others to understand? Tell me about it.

Is there anything else about the experience that has shaped you as a person that you want to tell me about?

(Thank them for participating in this interview. Assure of confidentiality of responses and identity through the use of pseudonyms and electronic image/voice distortion unless otherwise agreed upon in the IFC. )

## APPENDIX E

### LIFE STORY TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT

(Tell me about growing up? siblings?)

I have three other brothers; I'm the third out of 4. My oldest brother is in Chicago, he's 27 working for Ernst & Young; my other brother just got married, he's living in Columbus working for Deloitte; both accountants. Then my little brother is actually as senior at Ignatius, graduating in May and going to Vanderbilt next year.

(Is going into accounting too?) No he's not, he's doing engineering.

(What did your parents do?) Mom was a guidance counselor at Mid-Park High School, so my dad was a buying manager for aircraft braking systems, it's a company that buys and sells brakes for airplanes. Other than that, just pretty crazy having three brothers, there was always things going on.

(What kind of activities when young?) A lot of sports, we were always involved in track, cross country, basketball, football, baseball; there's not really a sport that me or my brothers didn't play, swimming, just hanging out with neighborhood kids. You know a pretty standard childhood - Strongsville.

(Did both parents go to college?) Yes, they went to Kent together- they met in high school; they met their junior year of high school at Brooklyn High School.



## APPENDIX F

### PHOTO ELICITATION TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT

(What are you thinking when you see these?)

I remember that [cleaning bus windows at gas station] - the cleaning the bus windows and how expensive fuel was. I think Alex and I just picked those up and started trying to help keep up the bus. I remember sitting on the bus, what was it 24 hours or something. I had to get out and do something

That was Rusty [pointing to another person in the photo] - no I don't have any of these pictures. (I'll get them to you on disc)

Oh yea, I remember that first stop - I remember how crammed the bus was too.

[Pulling into 1<sup>st</sup> supply stop] All the people lined up outside waiting for us that was pretty cool - getting everything set up. I remember people coming by, I remember this single mother and her son, and they had this, the kid must have been only 4 or 5, and they had this stuffed animal, the husky. I think they said that they had that dog and lost it and think that's why he carried it around with him wherever they went because it looked just like the dog they lost in the hurricane. That was pretty um - that was an eye opener.

## APPENDIX G

### NARRATIVE PROCESS TRANSCRIPT EXCERPT

(First time participating in life story?) - yea, I have to say so - I've forgotten a lot of stuff; all the little details that are lull coming back now. Seeing those pictures now I remember what I did; I had an idea about a lot of things, but now I remember details. It was at the time, it was you want to be involved in everything, and I don't want to say have war stories, but now looking back at it, it hits you and what you were actually in and how bad it really was. I don't think at that age you have any idea of what's dangerous.

You know it's not like we were driving to Pennsylvania or anything, we went all the way across the country.

(Has participating changed how you approach decisions in your life?) I've always been one to help people; so I think they reflect off of each other; I don't know, I definitely think I earned a lot down there, but I think the reason I continue to help people falls back on my school, Lake Catholic and what we were taught and family values and stuff. Of course what I learned and saw - how I may think I have it bad now but there are people out there who have it so much worse.

(You talked about doing WWII history programs in schools, would you do more of that?) When I have time, if I have time, I'd really like to go up to the historical society and donate my time up there because I know they don't have any World War II events, I know they have heritage day or weekend or something like that. I think they are trying to get Civil War up there, even if I can just go up for a couple hours in a month, it's something I'd really like to do, to have opportunities to do that.

## APPENDIX H

### WORD TAG CLOUD SAMPLE

Word Tag Clouds were generated in NVivo software by creating a document of the participant's responses to the first interview. All of the researcher's language was parsed from the transcript. Once imported into NVivo a word frequency query was run, limiting the report to the top 50 words, aligned at the synonym level. The resulting word tag cloud provides a visual image of the participant's discourse, with word most frequently used appearing in larger font size relative to the frequency of the other words.

This is Alex's word tag cloud.

amazing anything around **because**  
building called canton **catholic** classes cleveland  
coming country county didn't downtown driving  
**everybody** family friends getting government  
**happen** initial interesting involved looking  
making nothing orleans **people**  
pretty **realize really** remember  
saying **school** seeing service  
**something** studied taking talked things thought  
together understand **volunteering wanted worked**  
you're

## APPENDIX I

### PHOTO ELICITATION SLIDE SAMPLE

This is a sample slide taken from the photo elicitation interviews.

