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## Hurricane Katrina families: Social class and the family in trauma recovery

Emilie E. Godwin

*College of William & Mary - School of Education*

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**HURRICANE KATRINA FAMILIES:  
SOCIAL CLASS AND THE FAMILY  
IN TRAUMA RECOVERY**

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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by:

Emilie E. Godwin

Spring 2009

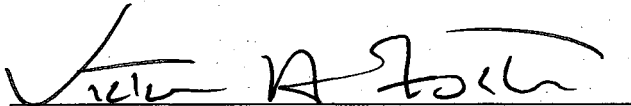
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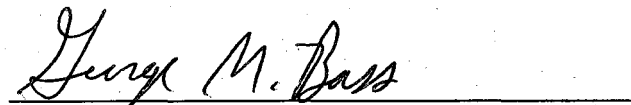
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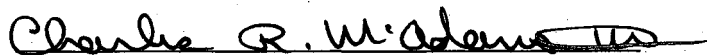


Victoria Ann Foster, Ph.D.

Chairperson of Doctoral Committee



George M. Bass, Ph.D.



Charles R. McAdams, Ph.D.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	13
ABSTRACT .....	14
CHAPTER ONE	
Introduction .....	16
Hurricane Katrina .....	16
Problem Statement .....	19
<i>Natural Disaster Trauma</i> .....	19
<i>Family Systems and Trauma</i> .....	20
<i>Social Class and Trauma</i> .....	21
Critical Research .....	23
Intended Audience .....	24
Research Questions .....	24
CHAPTER TWO	
Literature Review .....	26
Introduction .....	26
Social Class and Trauma Recovery .....	30
Families and Trauma .....	33
Family Systems and Social Class .....	37
Gaps in the Literature .....	38
Theoretical Foundation .....	44
<i>Critical Humanism</i> .....	44
<i>Social Constructionism</i> .....	45
<i>Social Class Worldview Model</i> .....	47
<i>Theoretical Integration</i> .....	49
Conclusion: A New Approach .....	50
CHAPTER THREE	
Methodology .....	52
Introduction .....	52
Qualitative Research .....	54
<i>Ontological Assumptions</i> .....	55
<i>Epistemological Assumptions</i> .....	56
<i>Methodological Assumptions</i> .....	57
<i>Rational for a Qualitative Design</i> .....	58
Paradigm: Critical Humanism .....	58
Perspective: Social Constructionism .....	60
Strategy: Multiple Critical Case Studies .....	61
Methods .....	63



Trustworthiness & Authenticity.....	63
<i>Site and Sample Selection</i> .....	65
<i>Role of Researcher</i> .....	66
<i>Data Collection</i> .....	69
<i>Data Analysis</i> .....	73
Limitations.....	75
Ethical Considerations.....	76
CHAPTER FOUR	
Within Case Themes.....	78
Introduction.....	78
Claude & Monique.....	79
<i>"Everything Was Destroyed"</i> .....	81
<i>"Wanted to Come Back to Where I was Born"</i> .....	84
<i>"Someone Who is Undesirable"</i> .....	87
<i>"I Feel Kind of Connected Now"</i> .....	92
<i>"Now I Can Understand"</i> .....	95
SCWM Analysis.....	98
Danielle & Greg.....	99
<i>"It Was a Whole New Beginning"</i> .....	101
<i>"The Good Thing is We All Still Together"</i> .....	107
<i>"Devastating to Have to Up and Leave"</i> .....	114
<i>"The Blessed Class"</i> .....	119
SCWM Analysis.....	122
Edgar and Susan.....	124
<i>"Running From the Hurricane"</i> .....	125
<i>"Money is Useless in a City Under Water"</i> .....	129
<i>"Living in New Orleans"</i> .....	133
<i>"We Don't Have Money"</i> .....	136
<i>"What I Am Now"</i> .....	140
SCWM Analysis.....	144
Elvis and Ann Margaret.....	146
<i>"It Was All Consuming"</i> .....	147
<i>"We All Spent Our Hurricane Experience Together"</i> .....	153
<i>"Working Our Tails Off to Get What We Need"</i> .....	158
<i>"Part of the Acceptance and Moving On"</i> .....	162
SCWM Analysis.....	165
James and Helen.....	167
<i>"You Still Like the Pie"</i> .....	168
<i>"Lucky to Have That Kind of Support"</i> .....	172

<i>"It's Pretty Middle Class – Having a Hard Work Ethic"</i> .....	175
<i>"Take Responsibility"</i> .....	179
<i>"Suffering From Post-Traumatic-Stress"</i> .....	182
SCWM Analysis .....	188
Nelly and Yvonne .....	189
<i>"I Was a Mess"</i> .....	191
<i>"What I Had to Go Through"</i> .....	195
<i>"Get to Know Me as a Person"</i> .....	198
<i>"You Know What to Do When You Don't Have Money"</i> .....	205
<i>"Trying to Rebuild My Life"</i> .....	211
SCWM Analysis .....	216
Reuben and Cherise .....	218
<i>"And the People"</i> .....	219
<i>"What we Get in a Month, It's Not Much"</i> .....	224
<i>"You've Gotta Go On"</i> .....	226
<i>"It Made us Realize"</i> .....	231
SCWM Analysis .....	235
<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b>	
Cross Case Analysis .....	237
Introduction .....	237
Cross Case Themes .....	237
Relationship to Community .....	241
<i>A Changing Hometown</i> .....	241
<i>A Foreign Community</i> .....	250
Family Structure .....	257
<i>Immediate Family</i> .....	257
<i>Extended Family</i> .....	263
Constructions of Class .....	267
<i>Family Class Status</i> .....	267
<i>Employment and Class</i> .....	274
People Outside of the Family System .....	279
<i>Volunteers, Helpers and Relief Workers</i> .....	279
<i>Other Hurricane Katrina Evacuees</i> .....	288
Growing and Changing .....	294
<i>The Strength to Grow</i> .....	297
<i>Personal Changes</i> .....	303
<i>Relational Changes</i> .....	310
Emancipatory Experiences .....	314
<b>CHAPTER SIX</b>	

Conclusions and Implications .....	323
Introduction.....	323
A Return to the Research Agenda.....	324
Study Purpose .....	325
Research Question One.....	327
<i>Comparison to Literature</i> .....	336
Research Question Two.....	346
<i>Comparison to Literature</i> .....	352
Additional Findings .....	358
<i>Comparison to Literature</i> .....	360
Emancipatory Outcomes.....	362
<i>Comparison to Literature</i> .....	364
Study Limitations.....	366
Suggestions for Future Inquiry .....	372
Implications for Intended Audience.....	375
<i>Trauma Counselors</i> .....	375
<i>Family Counselors</i> .....	377
<i>Counselor Educators</i> .....	379
REFERENCES.....	381
APPENDICES .....	389
Appendix A	
Initial Telephone Interview Screening Guide.....	389
Appendix B	
Participant Flyer.....	390
Appendix C	
Researcher as Instrument Statement .....	391
Appendix D	
Samples from Reflexive Journal.....	395
Appendix E	
Interview Guide	
First Interview – Family Processes .....	399
Appendix F	
Interview Guide	
Second Interview – Social Class.....	401
Appendix G	
Interview Guide	
Third Interview – Family Artifacts .....	403
Appendix H	
Sample Family Observation Notes .....	404

Appendix I	
Observation Field Notes .....	405
Appendix J	
Sample Artifact Notes.....	406
Appendix K	
Coding Samples .....	407
Appendix L	
Informed Consent Form.....	412

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:	Claude and Monique Within Case Themes.....	80
Table 2:	Danielle and Greg Within Case Themes.....	101
Table 3:	Edgar and Susan Within Case Themes.....	125
Table 4:	Elvis and Ann Margaret Within Case Themes.....	147
Table 5:	James and Helen Within Case Themes.....	168
Table 6:	Nelly and Yvonne Within Case Themes.....	190
Table 7:	Reuben and Cherise Within Case Themes.....	219
Table 8:	Cross Case Theme Development.....	238
Table 9:	Cross Case Themes and Subthemes.....	240

ABSTRACT

Hurricane Katrina has profoundly altered the lives of New Orleans residents as they continue three years following the storm to attempt to rebuild their community and their lives. Natural disaster literature has historically focused on the impacts on individuals and correlating variables. Significant literature gaps exist regarding family systems and disaster and analysis of the relationship of social class to recovery. This qualitative investigation situated in an emancipatory paradigm investigated the relationship between social class and family changes for seven Katrina families self-identified as members of marginalized social classes. Study conclusions reveal significant shifts in family identities and a strong relationship between social class perceptions and family recovery experiences. Additionally, data indicates participation was an emancipatory experience for study families.

EMILIE ELIZABETH GODWIN

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELOR EDUCATION

COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY IN VIRGINIA

**HURRICANE KATRINA FAMILIES:  
SOCIAL CLASS AND THE FAMILY  
IN TRAUMA RECOVERY**

## CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

*Hurricane Katrina*

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast of the United States, forever altering the families and communities that resided in its path. Hurricane Katrina proved to be the deadliest storm to hit the United States in seven decades and remains the largest-scale natural disaster in the country's history (Hurricane Katrina Community Advisory Group [HKCAG], 2006). The recovery period for communities suffering the effects of natural disasters can vary extensively given the nature of the event and the preparedness of the community. However, Hurricane Katrina has proved to challenge residents in the New Orleans Metropolitan area more pervasively and for a much longer time than any other US hurricane on record (Claritas 2006 as cited in HKCAG, 2006). In the three years following this explosive storm, the residents of New Orleans have faced unique contextual and emotional challenges as families work to recover in a manner consistent with the demands of their forever-changed community and the needs of their familial unit.

Given the demographic variables present in New Orleans prior to the catastrophic storm and the need for significant long-term recovery in its wake, the impact of Katrina created a uniquely challenged residential population. The socio-economic status of residents prior to Hurricane Katrina varied greatly relative to the potential vulnerability of the land on which they resided. Historically, New Orleanians with the greatest resources have occupied the highest-lying land leaving the most significantly compromised neighborhoods that lie below sea-level to the poorest populations (Elliot & Pais, 2006). As a result, the failure of the levees and pumping stations following the category-four storm upon which these communities relied to protect their



homes left the least financially stable areas the most significantly damaged. While 80% of the city was inundated with flood waters, 20.9% of households in this deluged area had been living below the poverty line prior to the storm, as compared with only 15.3% in areas that avoided significant damage (Logan, 2006). Additionally, minorities were substantially over-represented in flood-damaged neighborhoods with a 45.8% African-American population living in areas in peril as opposed to a 26.4% African American population in the non-damaged portions of the city. Further, the storm-ravaged portions of the city such as the Lower Ninth Ward included areas historically known for poor employment opportunities, high levels of unemployment, and large numbers of families renting their homes.

The recovery process for the New Orleans community has been shaped extensively by the aforementioned pre-existing socio-economic factors. Although many of the city's poor residents initially resisted evacuation (HKCAG, 2006), the mandatory city-wide evacuation that followed the levee failure forced residents to temporarily evacuate. Yet, as return to the city became feasible in the early months following the storm, those individuals who first lacked the resources to leave also later lacked the financial resources to enable their successful return. For those who were able to return, the financial burden associated with rebuilding correlated directly with access to flood insurance – carried only by those whose financial means prior to the storm had enabled them to be homeowners eligible to obtain insurance – as opposed to those who could afford only to rent – and primarily in areas deemed insurable by virtue of their elevations (Logan, 2006). Further, community resources necessary for rebuilding infrastructure such as public water and electricity were not restored in the hardest hit communities in some cases for as long as one year as opposed to in wealthier communities where utilities were available within four months following the storm (Robinette, 2006). Thus, the heaviest recovery burdens were in

many cases placed on the communities in which families had access to the fewest public or private resources for support.

In addition to the physical and financial challenges for the post-Katrina New Orleans community, significant emotional and mental health-related stressors have been identified in the literature. In the most comprehensive individual mental health survey conducted following a natural disaster, one-third of respondents reported experiencing five or more significant stressors during the year following the hurricane (HKCAG, 2006). While the majority of those experiencing multiple stressors had been economically disadvantaged even prior to Hurricane Katrina, respondents in all socio-economic categories were affected. Further, researchers investigating medical student mental health following Hurricane Katrina found that the uncertainty that has pervaded the recovery process in the New Orleans area has resulted in substantial emotional stress in that population (Kahn, Markert, Johnson, Owens, & Krane, 2007). The assessment of pre and post-Katrina levels of mental illness and suicidality show a nearly doubled rate of mental illness for individuals within the affected population although suicidality did not significantly increase (Kessler, Galea, Jones, & Parker, 2006). Additionally, an assessment of the psychological functioning of children in the New Orleans area found initial responses of resiliency followed by significant post-traumatic symptoms developing weeks and months after the hurricane (Madrid, Grant, Reilly, & Redlener, 2006). Furthermore, although numerous studies on disaster trauma have found mental health services to be an integral component of the recovery process (Lantz & Gymerah, 2002; Shaw, 2000; Watanabe, Okumura, Chiu & Wakai, 2004), such services following Hurricane Katrina were overshadowed by practical-help organizations such as the Red Cross (HKCAG, 2006) and under-utilized due to the

poor consideration of cultural and socio-economic factors by mental health organizations (Madrid, et. al., 2006).

### *Problem Statement*

While the substantial influence of Hurricane Katrina on the overall emotional health of individuals in the New Orleans metropolitan area has been extensively documented in the literature, virtually no investigation into the corresponding impact on family systems has been published. Further, although social class has been considered as a factor in the impact on and recovery of individual New Orleanians, it has not been investigated as a significant factor contributing to overall family functioning in recovery. While studies cite implied influences on families, these notations are typically limited to very brief and generalized assumptions. Madrid, et. al. (2006) remark, "many families were deeply affected," and HKCAG (2006) asked respondents questions about family needs, although neither study published any related conclusions. The jump in the literature from community affectedness to expressed individual challenges fails to identify the interlocking nature of family systems, individuals and communities. Without further investigation into the ways in which family units were restructured in their functioning and the ways in which their class status influenced their overall recovery, the conceptualization of the overall impact of this trauma is certainly incomplete.

### *Natural Disaster Trauma*

Conceptualization of the total impact of Hurricane Katrina on family systems must first delineate the effect of community-wide non-normative trauma from other types of traumatic occurrences. Natural disasters create a unique category of trauma in that they include the processing of both event and process trauma. Event trauma is classified as an unexpected

occurrence limited in time and space whereas process trauma is defined as continual and unremitting exposure to trauma (Shaw, 2000). A hurricane of Katrina's magnitude is both unexpected and limited in time and space, while recovery from a substantial storm in an obliterated community constitutes exposure to process trauma. Further, natural disasters are often investigated within the literature as unique in that they impact entire communities, thereby limiting social support and resources (Morrow, 1999).

Community-wide traumatic events such as hurricanes are further demarcated from one another by both the pre-event community vulnerability and post-event community recovery (Shaw, 2000). The New Orleans community is at high-risk in both vulnerability and recovery. Community socio-economic factors limited resource availability prior to the storm and created an already stressed and under-privileged population. Thus, when Hurricane Katrina made landfall, creating the most economically damaging natural disaster in history (HKCAG, 2006), the already susceptible community experienced the voluminous impact of the most threatening intersection of variables for a community-wide trauma.

### *Family Systems and Trauma*

The study of trauma is differentiated not only by the type of trauma being investigated, but also by the way in which effects are conceptualized. The study of individual traumatic reactions shares some overlap with the study of families and trauma in that individual responses to trauma influence the systemic interactions within a family system. However, there remain specific differences in the ways in which trauma recovery is interpreted depending upon whether it is family or individual recovery being studied. While studies investigating the community effects of a trauma tend to use individual responses pooled into large generalized findings (HKCAG, 2006; Kessler, et. al., 2006; Sattler, Glower de Alvarado, Blandon de Castro, Van

Male, Zetino & Vega, 2006), literature that examines familial trauma effects looks beyond individual contributions to the ways in which systemic interactions and group-based norms and expectations shift overall family functioning (Figley & Barnes, 2005; Shaw, 2000).

Family trauma study is inclusive of a number of factors that influence overall impact upon a family system. The four primary factors influencing the severity of a traumatic event on a family system include the significance of the stressor event, the amount of change a family is required to make in order to continue functioning, the amount of crisis in the family's external social system, and the family's overall vulnerability to stress (McCubbin, Joy, Cauble, Comeau, Patterson & Needle, 1980). Further, traumatic events that directly impact each family member are differentiated from events that primarily impact one individual and systemically influence the other family members (Figley & Barnes, 2005). Families recovering from Hurricane Katrina were vulnerable in all of the outlined areas. Unquestionably, the hurricane has been categorized on all fronts as a significant stressor and unexpected event. Required changes were substantial and included but were not limited to finding new shelter, moving multiple times in short periods, reorganizing around the loss of family members, finding new methods for financial support, and constructing new avenues for receiving support (Logan, 2006). The destruction of the New Orleans community and surrounding areas disrupted all significant social systems previously established. Families affected were primarily socially disadvantaged and had limited access to resources. Finally, all family members residing in the New Orleans community experienced individual and direct trauma that confounded their familial interactions.

### *Social Class and Trauma*

Consideration of the impact of Hurricane Katrina on family systems must investigate not only the unique components of these familial trauma experiences, but also the influence of social

class on family constructions of meaning and subsequent trauma recovery. Multiple studies have identified social class as a significant variable in the trauma recovery process (Green, 1998; Morrow, 1999; Fothergill, Maestas & Darlington, 1999). However, in a review of the literature, Morrow, et. al. state that literature reviewing psychological impacts of a disaster and the correlation with race, ethnicity and social class is limited. Despite the sparse investigation into this correlation, studies have demonstrated class can influence feelings of helplessness, struggles with loss of control, methods of meaning-making, and levels of post-disaster stress (Morrow, 1999; Norris, Friedman, Watson, Byrne, Diaz & Kaniasty, 2002).

Class as a factor in recovery is predominant in the discourse that surrounds individual recovery from Hurricane Katrina. All aspects of marginalization have been debated in the literature as to which factors have had the most profound impact on Hurricane Katrina victim recovery. However, class stands out as a primary variable. Reed (2005) states:

Class ... was certainly a better predictor than race of who evacuated before the hurricane, who was able to survive the storm itself, who was warehoused in the Superdome or convention center or stuck without food and water on the parched overpasses, who is marooned in Houston or elsewhere, and whose interests will be factored into the reconstruction of the city (p.31).

Given the focus on class as a substantial component in the experience of the hurricane itself and the process of recovery from the storm for individuals as well as the unique constitution of the city of New Orleans and the likely impact on resulting constructions of class, it follows that an investigation into the post-Katrina experience of families must consider class as a mediating factor in recovery.

*Critical Research*

The study of the interrelated constructs of social class and family systems engaged in the process of recovery from Hurricane Katrina calls for a research paradigm employed not only in an effort to understand broad and relative themes, but also one that engages in the process of liberating the marginalized individuals participating in the study. As such, a critical paradigm in which the research, “analyzes competing power interests between groups and individuals within a society – identifying who gains and who loses in specific situations” (Kinchloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 281) is appropriate to this call for action. The unique context in which the New Orleanian residents struggling to recover from the decimation of their pre-Katrina lives are situated pointedly illuminates the way in which social class is interwoven into the process of family recovery from trauma. The critical research tradition which allows for explicit researcher participation (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) serves as legitimization for the dual-engagement in the processes of discovery and empowerment.

Critical research, “attempts to expose the forces that prevent individuals and groups from shaping the decisions that crucially affect their lives” (Kinchloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 282). Within the critical tradition, critical humanism most intentionally belies the social structures that serve to suppress human agency by enacting emancipatory principals to guide research methodology. In order to engage research participants in a process of role re-conceptualization in an effort to achieve a resistance to the interlocking oppressive forces of social class and traumatic occurrence within the context of a familial system, this study operates within the paradigm of critical humanism. Further, the critical design has been filtered by a perspective based on the concept of socially constructed realities in which language and interaction exist in multiplicity. The notion of the co-construction of reality within families and, further, between

participants and researcher, informs the critically humanistic paradigm in that efforts towards de-marginalization must occur within the shared space between individuals (Gergen, 1991). Finally, this study integrates Social Class Worldview Model as a guiding theory informing the research agenda. Through the use of this model, class has been illuminated as a confining construct intimately connected to the ways in which families participate in their systemic creation of intertwined independent realities.

### *Intended Audience*

While the tradition of family therapy has been extensively engaged in the process of understanding the systemic functioning within family units, the relative newness of the field as compared to the broader discipline of individual counseling necessarily results in inadequate conceptualization of the ways in which various indices studied within individual psychological contexts are examined from a systemic perspective. As a result, there are many events – natural disaster trauma being one – in which the appropriate counseling frameworks for family systems have not been adequately developed. Further, the inclusion of social class in traditional theoretical models for counseling has not been sufficiently conceptualized (Liu, et. al, 2004). Thus, this study contributes to the existing literature by framing the problem of natural disaster trauma within a familial context while simultaneously considering the impact of social class. Although generalization of results from this study are applicable to theory rather than to populations (Yin, 1994), this addition to family systems literature broadens the scope from which counselors can begin to conceptualize family systems in various scenarios and interjects the concept of class into literature investigating context-specific family counseling.

### *Research Questions*



In qualitative methodology, research questions are deliberately constructed in a broad fashion in order to elicit emerging themes that are representative of participant lived experiences (Creswell, 2003). In keeping with the critical paradigm framing this study, these research questions draw from existing literature but are inductive in nature. Their purpose was to elicit broad themes salient for participants and relevant to the influence of class on family system recovery from Hurricane Katrina.

- 1) How has the recovery from Hurricane Katrina impacted lower-class family systems in the New Orleans area?
- 2) How has social class status influenced this family recovery process?

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### *Introduction*

This review of the literature is designed to illuminate the existing body of research surrounding natural disaster-related trauma, family systems, and the influence of social class. The vast body of quantitative literature that exists surrounding the investigation of natural disaster-related trauma will be reviewed, with attention to the almost exclusive focus on the impact of this form of trauma on the individual. Following this introduction to the natural disaster trauma literature base, an overview of the representation of the influence of social class on disaster trauma will be presented. Family systems and the impact of generalized trauma will then be discussed. This focus will underscore the primary systemic factors that have been identified in traumatized family systems and will examine maladaptive responses to trauma within family units. Following an investigation of families and trauma, review will focus on the interlocked constructs of family and social class. Next, an investigation of the current relevant literature gaps in the aforementioned areas will be presented. Justification for the theoretical framework that guided this study will be discussed and will include an analysis of the literature explaining critical humanism, social constructionism, Social Class Worldview Model, and theoretical integration. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an analysis of the ways in which the literature review constitutes the need for this new approach to this topic.

#### *Natural Disaster-Related Trauma*

Literature examining the impact of natural disasters on mental health investigates the effect of acute, unexpected events such as hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes, and brush fires on individuals. There is consistent evidence indicating a significant amount of traumatic stress immediately following such disasters and less-substantial—although frequently significant—evidence of individuals suffering from PTSD symptoms as long as five years after the disaster (Norris, Perilla, Riad, Kaniasty & Lavizzo, 1999). The literature exploring this phenomenon is primarily quantitative in nature and evaluates PTSD symptomology as a method for identifying short- and long-term stress. While results vary significantly from study to study as a result of widely varied methodology within the field (Basoglu, Salcioglu & Livanou, 2002), all investigations yield findings that indicate the significant impact of natural disasters on individual mental health and functioning.

Natural disaster is defined as a naturally occurring event trauma that suddenly and surprisingly disrupts individual and community functioning (Shaw, 2000). In addition, individuals living in communities that suffer significant upheaval following the event can experience process trauma in that they are continually exposed to the long-term stress of individual and community recovery. Empirical investigation into the numbers of individuals suffering from PTSD symptoms has shown significant results from both the event trauma in the immediate aftermath and the process trauma of recovery. Evaluation of the functioning of earthquake survivors in a study following victims of a Turkish earthquake found 47% of the population suffering from immediate PTSD symptoms (Basoglu, Salcioglu & Livanou, 2002). Further, investigators examining the impact of hurricanes on an adult population found that one-third of victims still evidenced significant levels of post-disaster stress five years following the storm (Shaw, 2000).

Trauma study has attempted to determine the factors that correlate with development of PTSD symptoms for individuals exposed to natural disaster. Literature focuses on three primary categories for evaluative criteria: pre-event variables, the impact of the event, and post-event trauma (Green, 1998). Variables existing pre-trauma are considered to be predictive in nature and often include investigations of gender, race, class, previous exposure to trauma, and existing social supports (Sattler, et. al., 2006; Green, 1998). While an examination of correlation between these factors and El Salvador earthquake survivors showed these variables contribute to 58% of PTSD variance (Sattler, et. al., 2006), many studies have shown gender and class to be primary predictive variables (Shaw, 2000; Morrow, 1999). Investigation into the severity of the trauma itself has centered on variables such as property loss, object loss, and level of damage to the community (Sattler, et. al., 2006; Norris et. al., 2002). The majority of studies investigating factors influencing trauma have focused on these factors (Green, 1998) and have found significant correlation between the intensity of the event and levels of acute symptomology (Freedy & Smith, 2000). Finally, literature focusing on post-disaster conditions has considered economic power, social resources, and political power as factors influencing level of recovery (Morrow, 1999). Multiple studies have found perceived post-disaster social support, hope, and optimism to be protective factors for many disaster victims (Norris, et. al., 2002; Kessler, et. al., 2006). Additionally, investigation into the flood in Buffalo Creek, West Virginia found that the more quickly families were able to join in the process of rebuilding their homes and the community, the less likely they were to suffer significant impairment (Gleser, Green & Winget, 1981).

Hurricane Katrina survivors have consistently shown significant symptomology following the storm as well as in the recovery process. In an analysis of symptoms of distress and

anxiety four to seven months following the hurricane, New Orleans residents demonstrated the highest number of affected individuals when compared to surrounding communities also hit by Hurricane Katrina (HKCAG, 2006). Among those interviewed, one half reported feeling more angry and irritable than prior to the storm as well as having significant nightmares related to the event – both DSM IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) indicators for PTSD. Further, evaluation of post-Katrina mental health disorders is significantly elevated when compared to study evaluations done of the same geographic location prior to the storm (Kessler, et. al., 2006). Kessler, et. al. compared a mental health survey of 826 adults in the New Orleans metropolitan area prior to Hurricane Katrina to a post-Katrina survey of 1043 adults in the same area. Researchers used the K6 screening scale of serious and mild-moderate mental illness to evaluate mental health. Findings indicated that following the storm 11.3 percent of respondents evidenced serious mental illness and 19.9 percent displayed mild-moderate mental illness compared to 6.1 percent of severe and 9.7 percent of mild-moderate symptom bearers prior to the storm. Both sets of comparison show statistically significant increases in the levels of mental illness present in the New Orleans area following Hurricane Katrina.

Multiple factors have been examined as contributing variables to the levels of stress and anxiety evidenced post-Katrina. An examination of pre-hurricane predictor variables showed significant correlations between gender, marital status, and employment status with mental health (Kessler, et. al., 2006). This study showed significantly higher numbers of females, non-married individuals, and the unemployed to suffer from disorders such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Further, an investigation into demographic variables including race and class showed anxiety to correlate with multiple predictive variables such as employment status, home ownership, religiosity, and social supports (Elliot & Pais, 2006).

Despite the significant findings of depressed and anxious mental states for many Hurricane Katrina survivors, there is also indication in the literature that many residents have embraced a sense of personal growth as a result of the storm and their process in the recovery (HKCAG, 2006; Kessler, et. al., 2006). In an evaluation of mental disorders and suicidality, over 80% of subjects reported developing a closer connection to their loved ones as a result of the storm (Kessler, et. al., 2006). In addition, the Community Advisory Group reports that all of the following forms of personal growth or enrichment were reported by more than 40 % of survey respondents: faith in personal abilities, a belief in being able to better cope with future stress, a feeling of having a deeper purpose in life, having discovered inner strengths, and feeling more spiritual or religious (HKCAG, 2006). Moreover, in a study investigating the resiliency of teens that had been relocated following Katrina, Nelson (2008) found that despite overall below-average resiliency resources, the teens studied showed strength in many areas. Included among these positive resources were maintenance of positive attitudes, ability to ask for and receive help, problem solving abilities, and a sense of calm and comfort around other people. Thus, studies that have failed to include the ways in which growth occurs in concordance with negative symptoms may have failed to fully present a holistic view of natural disaster recovery.

### *Social Class and Trauma Recovery*

In a review of natural disaster trauma recovery literature, thirteen out of fourteen studies found significant correlations between indicators of socio-economic status and post-disaster stress levels (Norris, et. al., 2002). In addition, world-wide studies on the development of post-disaster stress disorders have consistently shown individuals in poorer countries to be at greater risk to higher levels of hazardous exposure and resulting increased levels of stress and anxiety (Green, 1998). While not all variables associated with increased risk are attributed to social class,

often identified predictors such as income, education, and race are closely aligned with class status.

Families identified as being in lower class status in the United States have increased risk for community trauma in that they frequently reside in the least physically protected areas of the country (Logan & Molotch as cited in Elliot & Pais, 2006). The relationship between poverty and overall vulnerability has been substantially established and is frequently attributed to less access to resources (Morrow, 1999). Limited finances for individuals and families in lower classes contribute to both the inability to adequately prepare for and evacuate from impending natural disasters and incapacity in dealing with the economic demands of rebuilding. Further, housing in lower class neighborhoods is frequently poorly maintained and situated on the most vulnerable land, increasing the likelihood of complete destruction of property.

Personal and social resources are an additional scarcity in lower class communities, which increases vulnerability throughout the recovery process (Morrow, 1999). Individuals who are poorly educated, struggle with health concerns, and have limited work experience often struggle when attempting to secure post-disaster resources including employment and agency support. Additionally, although extended kinship networks can provide some aspects of emotional support, when entire family systems are engaged in the recovery process, individuals within the system are unable to depend on the others in their network for assistance. Access to larger support networks such as local and national government is also limited for the disenfranchised. This directly relates to the speed with which a community is able to rebuild itself following a hurricane and the subsequent amount of time individuals and families within the community must suffer exposure to the stresses of recovery.

In addition to socio-economically based components of social class, meaning-making systems differ relative to class status and can have a substantial impact on the constructions families use to make sense of disaster and trauma. Both race and class statuses have been shown to correlate with ways of making sense of natural disasters. Goltz, Russel and Bourque (1992) demonstrated that those most fearful of impending disasters were individuals in lower classes. Lower class has been associated with feelings of indebtedness and lack of control which can stymie the self-stimulated component in overall recovery (Fothergill, Maestas & Darlington, 1999). Moreover, Garrison (1985) found a direct relationship between class and stress reactions wherein lower classes demonstrated the greatest difficulty in coping with high stress. The high levels of stress associated with natural disasters and disaster recovery may thereby diminish the ability of individuals to effectively function in a post-trauma environment.

Numerous studies investigating predictive variables specific to Hurricane Katrina have indicated class as one of many variables contributing to post-disaster stress (Elliot & Pais, 2006; HKCAG, 2006; Kessler, et. al., 2006; Madrid, et. al., 2006). However, while considerations of class influence on disaster recovery may be particularly salient in areas such as New Orleans where a majority of individuals impacted by Hurricane Katrina are of lower class status, there has been only one study thus far explicitly investigating the link between class and disaster recovery in New Orleans. Elliot and Pais examined the link between race and class and the response to Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf South. Drawing from a Gallup Poll conducted two months following the storm, the authors looked for correlations between outcome responses, including post-disaster coping, and demographic variables such as home-ownership, income level, and race. While results showed a stronger link between race and post-disaster stress than class and stress, the authors assert that findings support Kessler's (as cited in Elliot & Pais, 2006)



statement, "Socially disadvantaged persons will be both more highly exposed to stressful experiences and also more highly influenced by stressful experiences than socially advantaged persons" (p.312).

### *Families and Trauma*

Literature focused on illuminating the systemic impacts of trauma within a familial unit, while present, is a markedly underdeveloped area of research. Figley and Barnes (2005) have conducted an extensive amount of the research in this subdivision of trauma literature and conclude, "To date there has been little overlap between the study of families and the study of trauma" (381). However, the studies that have been conducted reveal significant differences between non-normative and normative trauma recovery processes. Drawing from individual trauma literature, family trauma researchers have identified predictive variables that correlate with levels of family functioning throughout recovery (McCubbin, et. al., 1980). Additionally, adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies have been recognized that are specific to families who have experienced significant trauma (Figley & Barnes, 2005).

Literature identifying specific types of family trauma is not unified with respect to terminology but consistently identifies two categories of traumatic occurrences: anticipated traumatic stressors versus non-anticipated traumatic stressors. While family trauma literature does not delineate natural disasters as a specific sub-category within non-normative trauma, Figley and Barnes (2005) have illustrated several ways in which non-normative traumatic experiences present specific challenges for family systems. The nature of an unanticipated traumatic event results in a family's inability to adequately prepare for the challenges that will arise as a result of the trauma (Figley & Barnes, 2005). Additionally, the lack of anticipation often results in feelings of inadequacy and a lasting sense of impending doom. Families are also

unlikely to be experienced in handling catastrophic events and thus have no internalized knowledge system from which to draw information or resources. Further, access to effective social support is often limited. When traumatic events affect only immediate family members, the family often feels isolated from others who have not experienced the trauma and frequently feel as though no one else understands their struggle. In widespread trauma, communities may form cohesive bonds after having jointly experienced trauma, but because all community members are affected they are unable to provide effective support to one another. Outsiders coming in to help in these situations are again felt to have a lack of understanding surrounding the trauma and the resulting experiences. Further, the lack of anticipation and support can lead to prolonged exposure to the crisis situation, resulting in exponential stress and anxiety for family members. Finally, the lack of a sense of control over the situation often leads to obsession with memories of the event, a hypervigilance surrounding family preparedness, or family denial regarding the severity of the experience.

Although literature surrounding the identified predictive and concurrent variables associated with trauma recovery is much more limited in the family trauma field than in the study of individual trauma, there has been some investigation into whether factors influencing family recovery are derived from those influencing individual recovery. In 1980, McCubbin, et. al., conducted an extensive and exhaustive review of literature examining family stress and coping. Although the literature spanned all types of stress, trauma was included in the analysis. The review detailed the "Burr modification of Hill ABCX Model" which was the first systemic model designed to understand the multiple layers impacting family recovery. This model illustrates that a family's vulnerability to stress is a significant factor in recovery and is influenced by the family's adaptability and regenerative powers as well as the family's definition

of the severity of changes that have occurred. This vulnerability acts in concordance with the severity of the stressor event, the amount of change required of the family to continue functioning during and following the event, and the amount of crisis experienced by the social system surrounding the family. Although the literature included in the review did not investigate specific variables that contributed to these factors, it does provide a template from which a fuller understanding of overall family functioning can be garnered.

More recent literature has looked at the particular variables that are associated with greater struggles in the recovery process. The existing literature does not look systemically at the impact of these variables, but does consider the ways in which family factors influence individual recovery. In a recent review of disaster literature, Norris, et. al. (2002) identified nineteen studies that considered family factors as a variable impacting disaster recovery. While some literature has identified being single as a risk factor for post-disaster stress (Kessler, et. al., 2006), Norris, et. al. found that the majority of studies showed marriage to be correlated with higher levels of stress. Within these findings, gender was shown to have an effect on the amount of stress associated with marriage when recovering from trauma in that married women's stress levels were higher than those of married men, although for both genders marriage resulted in more difficulty coping than did being single. Further, women who reported having strong marriages also reported higher levels of stress following disaster than did women who indicated they had weak ties to their spouses. This finding suggests that for women in a family system, close kinship ties may result in feelings of obligation to care for loved ones thereby increasing disaster-associated stress and anxiety.

The overall impact of disaster on family functioning post-trauma is significant (Figley & Barnes, 2005). Figley and Barnes have outlined common significant maladaptive coping

strategies that families frequently employ following non-normative trauma, including hypervigilance, overorganization, attention-seeking interactions and patterns of triangulation and blaming. Further, Lantz and Gyamerah (2002) state that families often seek to obscure their awareness following a trauma which can result in shifts in structural functioning and the development of unhealthy family behaviors such as the establishment of family secrets.

Literature consistently states that the manner in which the family understands the trauma and the words and corresponding definitions that constitute their family language surrounding the trauma contribute to the level to which these maladaptive coping strategies are employed (Figley & Barnes, 2005; McCubbin, et. al., 1980; Lantz & Gyamerah, 2002).

Family approaches to trauma recovery are shaped by the frame of reference they employ prior to the traumatic event. Shaw and Halliday (as cited in Figley & Barnes, 2005) report that families operate in either a mastery or fatalistic frame of reference. While a fatalistic frame of reference, “promotes behavior that enables the family to live passively with or be controlled by the crisis situation” (Figley & Barnes, 2005, p.391), a mastery frame of reference may enable a family to access resources, maintain appropriate control, and make meaning from the trauma. In an analysis of the impact of disaster on familial relationships, Drabek, Key, Erickson and Crowe (1975) found that three years following a disaster, families had more extensive and connected relationships with their family than families not exposed to a disaster. In addition, families who had experienced disaster were more likely to look to family for help and support than to friends. Another study investigating extended family networks and the impact of disaster found social class to be a moderating variable on how intensely family units relied on one another, with families in lower classes exhibiting more frequent contact with their families (Drabek & Boggs, 1968). Although literature investigating the growth of families as a result of a trauma is dated,

the revealed potential for increased connection can be paralleled to more modern literature that looks at growth as an outcome of individual disaster experiences (HKCAG, 2006).

### *Family Systems and Social Class*

Family meaning making systems are inevitably shaped by the social class stratum that frames their experiences. Shared values, decision making strategies, and language patterns (Bernstein, 2002) are among the many components of family life that spring from a family's understanding of the societal messages about appropriate behavior for individuals within their identified social class. Bernstein states, "The class structure influences work and educational roles and brings families into a special relationship with each other and deeply penetrates the structure of life experiences within the family" (p. 95). While the influence of social class on family functioning was widely studied in the 1960s and 70s, recent literature on current constructs of class and families has been scarce. However, an examination of foundational literature along with a review of current studies examining class and family patterns illuminates the still relevant connection between family class status and functioning.

In a now historic examination of the links between family values and social class status, Kohn (1963) established a strong empirical connection and constructed a platform from which other researchers established a body of literature supporting the existence of this relationship. In a survey of values indices and through the assignment of class status to 400 families in the Washington, D.C. area, Kohn established correlations between social class and particular value sets. While Kohn discovered that families seem to value traits that they believe will lead to achievement and success for their children, his analysis revealed that middle class and lower class families attributed very different constructs as being relative to personal accomplishment. Although this study is now significantly dated and thus the particulars of the values identified

may be less relevant to given class populations today, it was this broad study demonstrating the connection between family ways of functioning and class that began the discussion on the importance of class in families' manner of being.

In a more recent investigation into this link of family constructions and their relationship to social class status, Lareau (2002) proposes that the failure of many current studies to validate a correlation is due to the failure to consider the totality of systemic interaction by narrowly focusing on one aspect of family behavior. In a qualitative study of the link between childrearing styles and class, Lareau conducted an ethnographic analysis of ten White and ten Black families. Results showed significant links between parenting practices and class, irrespective of racial identity. Further, Lareau identified stark contrasts in meaning-making between social classes; specifically, the ways in which families understood familial roles, constructed the essence of childhood, and the importance and nature of language-based interactions. This identification of both family behavior patterns and family consciousness related to class status demonstrates the foundational nature of class in family response to life events and suggests that traumatic occurrences would be conceptualized and responded to differently based on these divergent value systems.

#### *Gaps in the Literature*

Literature investigating recovery from trauma has an impressive body of theoretical and empirical research, significant enough to constitute a specialization within the counseling field. Further, the study of natural disasters as a specific form of trauma with unique components of recovery is similarly researched enough to have resulted in the construction of a topic-specific scholarly journal (Disasters). However, investigation in this field has fallen short in using the substantive body of knowledge as a foundation into the study of the way in which trauma

impacts familial units. Although there has been a modest amount of research in family system trauma, there remain multiple areas that have been explored within the trauma literature that have not been considered from a systemic perspective.

Current investigations into family recovery from trauma recognize a division between normative and non-normative types of trauma (Figley & Barnes, 2005). Further, Figley distinguishes simultaneous effects trauma in which all family members are impacted directly from other forms of trauma. However, although individual trauma study recognizes natural disasters as a unique form of trauma (Shaw, 2000), family trauma literature has not yet investigated natural disaster trauma as a specific type of simultaneous effects trauma. Literature surrounding the impact of non-normative trauma on family systems primarily focuses on war and illness (Figley & Barnes, 2005). Study of systemic trauma reactions within a family originated with the work of Reuben Hill and was focused on the study of World War II veterans and their families (1949). Although Hill suggested in his seminal work that traumatic events including natural disasters had significant influence on family systems, the research that grew out of his work centered on war and soldiers suffering from PTSD within the family system. As an outgrowth from this work, researchers began to investigate the impact of illness – specifically, children’s illness – on a family system (Koch, 1985; Madan-Swain, Sexson, Brown, & Ragab, 1993).

However, this literature does not adequately translate to an understanding of families impacted by natural disaster. A primary systemic difference for natural disaster victims is that all family members as well as surrounding social support networks are significantly impacted by the traumatic event. In order to empirically investigate the difference between the systemic functioning of Figley’s (1988) “chiasmal effects trauma” in which an individual experiences

trauma subsequently infecting other family members and “simultaneous effects trauma” in which all family members are traumatized directly, further research must be conducted on simultaneous effects trauma and natural disasters specifically. In addition, the current literature considers social support as an assumed component to recovery. Natural disaster victims are further traumatized by the victimization of their community and their recovery cannot be accurately assessed through this existing frame.

In addition to a lack of consideration into the specific nature of natural disaster trauma on families, there is little qualitative research into the long-term impact of any form of trauma on family functioning. The majority of research that has been conducted has been quantitative in nature and has investigated correlations between levels of PTSD symptoms in primary victims and the subsequent level of functioning of family members (Figley, 1978; Figley, 1998). However, primary investigators in family trauma symptomology, Figley and Barnes (2005), reiterate a theme that is present throughout the literature, stating that family meaning-making systems shift as the result of trauma. A thorough investigation into new family worldviews and methods for meaning-making requires a qualitative inquiry that would illuminate the themes that define these shifts. Further, these shifts have the potential for long-term familial consequences. While individual trauma study has conducted longitudinal studies to examine the lasting consequences of natural disaster (Norris, et. al., 1999), family literature has not significantly investigated the ways in which the identified changes in family functioning such as hypervigilance and over organization impact the family in the years following the traumatic event.

While social class has been repeatedly established as a substantial variable in individual recovery from trauma (Morrow, 1999), literature fails to examine this correlation as a primary



factor in either individual or family trauma study. Studies that examine the pre-trauma variables that correlate with post-disaster trauma recovery examine a multitude of demographic variables including race, gender, ethnicity, and social class (Morrow, 1999; Norris, et. al., 2002; Sattler, et. al., 2006). However, while correlations have been repeatedly established, there has been no explicit investigation into the ways in which social class contributes to this increased struggle with trauma recovery. Empirical studies currently in existence fail to further the investigation of this relationship by conducting qualitative investigation into the themes which highlight the struggles associated with lower class status and the ways in which those themes contribute to the trauma recovery process. The reliance on quantitative measures to evaluate social class is in itself inherently flawed in that social class is limited to defining variables such as income level, employment status, and home ownership, rather than by encompassing the broad social constructions that define social class (Liu, Soleck, Hopps, Dunston & Picket, 2004). Further, the link between socio-economic status and increased trauma variables cannot be further explored without an understanding of the ways in which limited resources directly relate to personal efforts at recovery. This heavily quantitative approach also leaves little room for the systemic implications within a family that are derived from social class status, resulting implications for meaning-making, and the ways in which these frameworks are integrated into familial attempts to recover from trauma.

While the study of Hurricane Katrina survivors is a new endeavor, researchers have yet to publish findings on the way in which this hurricane has impacted family systems, the long-term impact for those families, or the way in which social class has shaped family meaning-making in recovery. Current literature on Hurricane Katrina impact and recovery is geared primarily toward individual mental health indices (HKCAG, 2005; Kessler, et. al., 2006). Various familial

components have been evaluated such as investigation into PTSD symptoms in children (Shaw, 2000) and the correlation between marital status and stress and anxiety levels (Norris, et. al., 2002), but these studies have not considered the overall impact on systemic family functioning. Additionally, recent investigation into the resiliency of survivors (Nelson, 2008) considers individual traits only and, while recognizing a limitation of the study to be the inability to determine whether traits were present prior to the storm, still fails to consider how social class may contribute to resiliency – in fact, failing to disclose any indicator of participant subject social class at all. Further, while there was a significant surge of interest immediately following the hurricane in the mental health of survivors, the majority of studies rely on information gathered within the first six months following the storm (Elliot & Pais, 2006; Kessler, et. al., 2006; Kahn, et. al., 2007; Madrid, et. al., 2006). While these studies may accurately reflect the immediate impact of the event trauma, an investigation into the process trauma of individual, family and community recovery is not reflected through these measures.

The significance of Logan's (2006) findings related to the over-representation of lower class citizens in the hurricane affected communities has not been substantially integrated into the literature. While SES correlations have again been demonstrated (HKCAG, 2006; Kessler, et. al., 2006; Madrid, et. al., 2006), only Elliot and Pais (2006) specifically address the primacy of the impact of class. However, while the study compares the correlations between class and recovery and race and recovery, it is limited to SES indicators of class status. Moreover, the data used to investigate these correlations draws solely from a Gallup Pole conducted by telephone within two months of the storm. Sampling does not adequately represent individuals who were without telephone services, thereby failing to be fully representational of economically deprived

individuals. These substantial gaps in the literature surrounding Hurricane Katrina indicate a significant need for a family-focused, class-based, qualitative investigation.

Inclusive in all of the literature surrounding natural disaster trauma, family trauma recovery, and the impact of Hurricane Katrina, is the significant gap of a substantial theoretical base that sufficiently frames the understanding of these interrelated topics. The majority of studies conducting empirical investigation into responses to trauma are not situated within a theory but rather rely only on previous studies to provide support to the conclusions (Drabek, et. al., 1975; Watanabe, et. al., 2004; Basoglu, Salcioglu & Livanou, 2002; Shaw, Applegate & Schorr, 1996; Kahn, et. al., 2007; Kessler, et. al., 2006). Studies grounded in theory range broadly. In an investigation into the long-term effects of natural disaster on individuals, Norris, et. al. (1999) utilize the “Multivariate Risk Factor Model” which asserts that pre-trauma variables, trauma variables, and post-trauma variables are the primary components contributing to trauma recovery. Sattler, et. al. (2006) guide their findings with the “Conservation of Resources Stress Theory” which is founded on the assumption that sustaining earned resources promotes interest in life. Elliott & Pais (2006) situate their study in juxtaposing theories addressing whether race or class is a more salient factor in recovery. Finally, Shaw (2000) addresses child and adolescent trauma through a developmental lens. While this delineation of theories is not all-encompassing of theoretical foundations evident in disaster literature, it demonstrates the limited focus of most studies. While theory addressing the factors most influencing recovery is essential, without a companion model to conceptualize the way in which families establish meaning-making, or vice-versa as in Shaw’s study, understanding of the intersection of determining variables and the recovery process is incomplete.

### *Theoretical Foundation*

In an attempt to most completely conceptualize the struggles particular to the lower class families of Hurricane Katrina, an integrated theoretical foundation situated within a qualitative paradigm was called for. Qualitative research requires a multi-layered frame that includes a research paradigm and a theoretical perspective, and allows for the incorporation of a guiding theory to elucidate findings. While current literature is sporadically situated in theory, there has to date been an incomplete consideration of the multiple ways in which participant meanings can be illuminated through an encompassing theoretical frame. As such, the situation of this problem within the paradigm of critical humanism while using a social constructionist perspective and Social Class Worldview Model (SCWM) as a guiding theory allows for a broad and complex investigation into the impact of Hurricane Katrina on lower class families in New Orleans.

#### *Critical Humanism*

The demonstrated relationship between social class and disaster recovery informs the way in which research must approach participants who have struggled to overcome the oppressive nature of their lower class status while engaging in the process of family recovery. As such, an action research position was called for in the investigation of this trauma process. Participatory knowledge claims frame research as an opportunity to address the marginalization of certain groups by domineering societal forces. Research objectives include addressing social issues related to, “empowerment, inequality, oppression, domination, suppression, and alienation” (Creswell, 2003, p.10).

Within the action research paradigm, critical humanism specifically aims to, “create a space for marginalized voices” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Research is designed to explicitly enlist the involvement of participants in the investigatory process in an effort to raise individual

consciousness. Participants are encouraged through the supportive stance of the researcher to engage in the process of shifting socially constructed notions of power. The emancipatory agenda inherent in a critically humanistic study is understood to be a tool through which researcher and participant work together in an attempt to recognize these dominant forces and begin the process of overcoming confining superstructures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Further, critical humanism specifically acknowledges the humanistic components inherent in oppression and aims to, “[empower] human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender” (Faye as cited in Creswell, 2003, p.10).

Families involved in the process of recovery from natural disaster are intricately tied to their environment and the shifting social discourse that contributes to the construction of their daily struggle. The foundational elements of critical humanism which argue, “people are primarily socially embodied and culturally situated beings” (Halliwell & Mousley, 2003, p.9) underscore the complex webs of influences that constrain a family morphing into a post-disaster unit. Through the involvement of the family in the research process, these interrelated forces become illuminated not only for the researchers but for the participants, creating a template for the way in which families redefine their methods for making-meaning within their relational context.

### *Social Constructionism*

In an effort to gain a full understanding of the ways in which families navigate the recovery from natural disaster, study must be framed not only by a research paradigm, but by a perspective that informs the way in which participants come to understand their position and negotiate the changes in their family’s ways of knowing. Social constructionism provides a scaffold from which researchers may investigate how participants arrive at understanding, how

those understandings translate into behavior, and the recursive nature of those actions within a socially constructed world. While social constructionism is only tangentially connected to the paradigm of critical humanism, the overlap that establishes this connection argues that society is a co-constructed and participatory construct and that challenge to this construct is analogous to social action (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Burr, 2003).

Social constructionism contends that reality is a negotiable concept defined by the context within which individual lives are situated and shaped by the interactive discourses that surround those contexts. Rather than existing as a singular entity, reality exists continually in multiplicity and is as prolific as the cultures, contexts, and methods of communicating which define it (Gergen, 1991). While quantitative research situated in a positivistic paradigm attempts to measure the ways in which individuals interact with reality, social constructionism argues that reality is unique to each individual and therefore may only be evaluated by an investigation into the construction of that reality and the ways in which subjective realities contribute to generalized themes.

Language is a defining component in the shaping of realities. Individual lives are created around and within the narratives they develop to elucidate their worldview. However, words are also socially constructed, making language an ever-evolving process of new and negotiated definitions that translate within each narrative in a unique way. The shared evolution of language defines each situation distinctly and words are continually recreated within the context of each interchange (Gergen, 1999). Raskin (2002) states, "How people talk about themselves and their world determines the nature of their experiences" (p.10). Further, the contexts in which individuals exist contribute to the broad definitions of words which are interpreted collectively and individually through widely varied realities. This amorphous understanding of language is

essential in understanding the constructionist conception that reality evolves in the gaps between individuals (Raskin, 2002).

When situated within an emancipatory paradigm, social constructionism serves as a way to translate an understanding of human action into a catalyst for change. Rossman and Rallis (2003) assert, "Radical change occurs at the individual level, transforming social relations at the local level" (p.46). The local and interpersonal construction of reality is therefore altered as individuals begin to rethink their own frames for meaning-making and the dialogue that they use to construct those frames. Further, Raskin (2002) asserts that social constructionism is a vehicle for collaboration among individuals that can lead to the questioning and eventual alteration of oppressive cultural practices.

### *Social Class Worldview Model*

The use of social constructionism within a critically humanistic paradigm allows for a broad understanding of the ways in which individuals construct knowledge and make sense of their environment. However, in order to address specific components within these realities such as social class, research must be guided by a prescriptive model. In order to fully conceptualize the differences between social class and socio-economic status, Social Class Worldview Model serves as a framework from which the pervasive components of social class can be understood. SCWM is defined as, "a schema that people use to make sense of their social class perceptions, feelings, economic environments, and cultures" (Liu, et. al., 2004, p.103). Further, the incorporation of the term "worldview" into the model reflects, "the general pattern of beliefs, behaviors, and perceptions that is shared by a population based on similar socialization and life experiences" (p.103). This investigation into the profoundly encompassing systems that shape

human existence allows for a rich understanding of the ways in which economics intersect with socially constructed value systems to mitigate experiences.

Primary underlying assumptions of SCWM include the idea that social class is an individual experience garnered from subjective interpretations of societal messages (Liu, et. al., 2004). Additionally, it is situated within a socially constructed paradigm in that class is believed to be developed within the interchange between individuals in a society and interpreted through the subjective lens of each person. Moreover, SCWM asserts that individuals are continually working toward a homeostatic worldview relative to their class status in which they attempt to integrate all of the varying components in their life as dictated by their interpretation of their class demands. The significant domains identified as relative to class are referent group of origin, referent peer group, referent group of aspiration, consciousness and saliency, lifestyle, behaviors, and property relationships. These domains are fluidly connected and work to create individual expectations for personal behavior, attitudes, and objectives.

Class and classism are conceptualized as interrelated and indistinguishable components of the social class experience (Liu & Ali, 2008). The subjective interpretation of the expectations of a particular class are derived from both the functions and behaviors associated with that class as well as from the classist messages integrated into that understanding from those within and outside the given class. Classism is described within four categories (Liu, et. al., 2004): upward, downward, lateral, and internalized. Upward and downward classism occurs when individuals outside of a specific class confer messages about expectations for that class upon individuals within the class. Lateral classism is a tool by which individuals seek to constrain members of their own class from deviating from class expectations. Internalized classism results from the incorporation of classist messages into a personal schema that is used to mediate behavior.



The subjective foundation of SCWM is incompatible with the objective classification systems of other theories of class such as Marxism (Liu & Ali, 2008). However, research has demonstrated that an individual's subjective assessment of their class status is more predictive of overall class-linked indicators such as health and well-being than are objective measures of the individual's class. In addition, when individuals in low SES communities rate themselves as being in a higher class, they have evidenced better overall health than those who accurately judge their socio-economic status (Ostrove, Addler, Kuppermann & Washington, 2000). Historically, measures that have attempted to identify class status based on combined indicators like education and income have failed to overcome hurdles such as gender-based differences related to the predictability of education and inaccurate income assessments (Liu, et. al., 2004). Therefore, an assessment of class and class status must be derived from subjective measures that aim to uncover an individual's independent reality rather than objective stratification.

### *Theoretical Integration*

An integration of theory is a necessary component of qualitative research in that no single approach is appropriate for all situations (Goddard, Lehr, & Lapadat, 2000). Further, the situation of perspective within a paradigm requires a continual evolution of theoretical frames through the merging of complimentary theories. A critical component to qualitative research is that the researcher is an explicit participant in the investigation. Through theoretical integration, researchers are able to work within a theory that most appropriately mirrors their worldview while simultaneously using theory to address the specific needs of varied populations.

Critical humanism as an emancipatory paradigm is derived from "critical theory and postmodern perspectives" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 46). Thus, the epistemological use of social constructionism is congruent with the postmodern attempt to critically evaluate human

oppression. Further, the constructionist foundation for SCWM provides a theoretically consistent manner for evaluating social class. Research using this multi-faceted foundation has generated themes related not only to the struggles, but also the hopes of lower class families recovering from natural disaster trauma. The use of interviews and language analysis to identify relevant participant themes will be guided by the social constructionist emphasis on the importance of language as a tool through which reality is constructed. As this language is identified and deconstructed within the assumption that class pervades each individual reality, a critically humanistic research agenda will construct an avenue for participants to raise their historically marginalized voices.

*Conclusion: A New Approach*

Literature to date has constructed a substantial argument for the relevance of understanding the specific impact of natural disaster trauma. Further, family systems theorists have begun the process of illuminating the way in which trauma directly impacts overall family functioning. Research demonstrates that social class correlates with the ways in which individuals experience trauma and that class status has a powerful influence on family values and behaviors. However, prior to this study scholarly enterprise has failed to integrate these necessarily interwoven constructs of natural disaster trauma recovery, family systems and social class.

Exploration of the guiding principles of research situated in a paradigm of critical humanism reveals that the emancipatory nature of this action-oriented approach to scientific study is ideally situated to address the question of the ways in which lower-class families recovering from the trauma of Hurricane Katrina have experienced this process. Further, literature focused on an explanation of the guiding principles of social constructionism

demonstrates the ways in which an understanding of socially constructed reality with an emphasis on language is suitable to exploration and emancipation of traumatized families marginalized by their class status. Finally, SCWM is an appropriate model for integrating class-based theory into this action research paradigm in order to understand the socially constructed realities of class-driven messages and their impact on family systems in the wake of trauma.

Through the integration of these theoretical perspectives, a template for an investigation of social class and family systems recovery from Hurricane Katrina has emerged.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### *Introduction*

As the city of New Orleans moves forward in its recovery process, the households that constitute the populace forge a new path toward what it means to be a post-Katrina family. While research has enthusiastically constructed a framework around the process of this recovery, the significant gaps related to family functioning and social class status have wholeheartedly been overlooked. As such, a comprehensive base for understanding and attending to this unique journey is incomplete.

This investigation into the family recovery process for Hurricane Katrina victims draws from a solid literature base that examines family functioning relative to social class status in the wake of a natural disaster. However, existing research does not provide a sufficient foundation. In order to begin the scholarly discussion around what it means for lower class families to function throughout the long-term process of natural disaster recovery, this study initiates a research agenda focused on post-Katrina New Orleans families.

The primary focus on quantitative methodology in existing disaster literature (Norris, et. al., 2002) has created an incomplete picture of this recovery process. In order to begin the process of full understanding, this investigation is constructed in a qualitative paradigm appropriate to the challenges which literature currently fails to address. Through the integration of a paradigm situated in critical humanism with a perspective of social constructionism and using Social Class Worldview Model to guide interpretation, the systemic family processes currently underdeveloped in scholarly literature have been illuminated while families conjointly engaged in an emancipatory process designed to address their unique challenges.

Through this action research, scholarly enterprise has the opportunity to serve as an empowering agent for a historically marginalized community. The intersection of Hurricane Katrina and the large number of economically disadvantaged lower-class families in New Orleans has provided a unique framework for understanding the impact of social class in the post-trauma family recovery process. Further, the use of social constructionism as an epistemological foundation frames the integration of the socially constructed construct of class into the discussion surrounding family trauma.

Critical research investigating the long-term family functioning of lower class Hurricane Katrina survivors addresses both the content gaps in disaster literature and the research process vacuum created by an over-reliance on quantitative methodology. Through a fresh approach to qualitative study that integrates constructionism and the burgeoning Social Class Worldview Model with an emancipatory agenda structured in critical humanism, the specific challenges that have been identified through empirical investigation as potentially crucial for this population are illuminated through this study with thick description. Thus, this magnification of marginalized narratives begins the scholarly investigation of this thread within natural disaster literature, while assisting an understanding of the specific struggles of Hurricane Katrina survivors.

This study is situated in a qualitative paradigm and used the following questions to guide the research:

- 1) How has the recovery from Hurricane Katrina impacted lower-class family systems in the New Orleans area?
- 2) How has social class status influenced this family recovery process?

In this chapter, the methodological framework guiding this process of exploration will be revealed. Initially, an introduction to qualitative research and the underlying assumptions will be

presented along with an explanation of the ways in which the aforementioned research questions were best investigated through a qualitative design. Further, this chapter will detail the ways in which the paradigm of critical humanism was applied within the context of this study. The perspective of social constructionism and the implications of the integrated influence of SCWM as they have been applied will also be outlined. Next, the strategic design of multiple case study analysis will be explained, accompanied by a demonstration of how this study specifically applies these principles as they relate to the role of the researcher, site and sample selection, and data collection. A description of the methods for data analysis will then be presented. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an exploration of the limitations and ethical considerations of the study.

### *Qualitative Research*

Qualitative research has evolved as a method of investigating and evaluating the lived experiences of individual lives in an attempt to better understand meaning-making structures. The emergence of this research design comes out of a rejection of the positivist paradigm that assumes causal reality which exists independent of the observer (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). Rather, qualitative research understands reality to be socially constructed and existing in multiplicity (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). As such, researchers are assumed to be a participatory component of the co-constructed reality that emerges from investigation.

The components of qualitative study that simultaneously define the purpose of the research and are decisive rejections of historic quantitative schools of methodology are the descriptive and interpretive nature of the research, the emancipatory factors inherent in design and application, and the evaluative and explanatory nature of analysis (Patton, 2002). Researchers engaging in qualitative research are the instrument through which the research is

conducted and therefore utilize their own perceptions and interpretations to generate expressive language that conveys findings (Maxwell, 2005). The personal engagement of the researcher in the research process is explicitly conducted to result in deliberate emancipation of research subjects through study participation (Patton, 2002). Additionally, findings are ascertained by researcher immersion in the data and are explained through the rich description of salient themes that represent the participant lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This deliberate use of evaluative language to explain social phenomenon is grounded in the guiding assumptions of qualitative research.

### *Ontological Assumptions*

All research grows out of the ontological assumptions that frame the study. Qualitative research is grounded in a belief that the nature of existence and being arises from independently created realities that exist only in subjective form (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Inherent in this understanding are two assumptions: that an independent reality ultimately able to be discovered and existing as separate from observer does not exist and thus the converse position in which reality is seen to be a construct of human interpretation and experience evolving out of human interaction and existing in unfathomable diversity is what is true. Thus, these independent realities are unattainable as each new interaction creates a new reality within the spaces between individuals (Gergen, 1997).

Hermeneutic tradition is a foundational component of qualitative methodology and arises from the belief that it is impossible to ascertain the truth about an objective reality because there is no such entity (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). Rather, the process of interpreting and explaining that is hermeneutic inquiry is grounded in the premise that the essence of being is an interpretive experience. As interpretation begins, an interactive process develops to create infinitely evolving

truths. The interplay between discovery and explanation is dependent upon the subjective experiences of the interacting individuals. Thus, reality within the qualitative tradition is an ever-changing independent construct impossible to replicate although findings remain generalizable to thematic theory (Yin, 1994). Moreover, the process of research itself results in new truths and realities as researcher and participants co-construct their research experience.

### *Epistemological Assumptions*

The assumptions about how knowledge is gathered and translated into individual referent bases guide the way in which research is conducted. Moreover, an understanding of knowledge arises out of the grounding ontological assumptions. Therefore, qualitative research is founded in the assumption that knowledge comes from the human interactions that constitute multiple realities (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Knowledge is therefore necessarily context dependent. Researchers engaged in qualitative research must undertake the process of recognizing and illuminating the contextual parameters of any studied processes. In addition, the evidence that constitutes the skeleton of learned knowledge is subjective in nature. Researchers filter all data through their own socially constructed reality and the emerging knowledge that results is necessarily co-constructed and subjectively delivered.

Knowledge is assumed to be based primarily on the giving and receiving of language. Spoken and written words are the primary tool through which experience is received, interpreted, and conveyed (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). The evolving narratives that then shape and define individual lives must be interpreted by the qualitative researcher and explained. However, because of the ontological assumptions guiding the qualitative tradition, it is impossible to convey the story of a participant without hearing the voice of the researcher. Thus, as the researcher receives knowledge and constructs understanding, his or her own lens shapes the



resulting truths. Knowledge then is defined as a shared construct and analysis is revealed with the understanding that interpretation is not only necessary, but inevitable.

### *Methodological Assumptions*

Methodology must be consistent with the epistemological and ontological assumptions of the researcher. In order to achieve the objective of illuminating participant lives through the explicit involvement of the researcher and the presentation of richly described narratives, Rossman and Rallis (2003) outline eight characteristics of qualitative research that guide the methodology:

- 1) Research occurs in a natural setting
- 2) Multiple methods are used to gather data
- 3) There is an explicit focus on context
- 4) The researcher reflects systemically on the co-construction of the research
- 5) The personal biography of the researcher is intentionally revealed
- 6) Research is emergent and grounded in open questions and flexibility
- 7) Logic is inductive rather than deductive
- 8) Research is fundamentally interpretive

These methodological principles are intentionally designed to highlight the involvement of the researcher in the results of the study. Rather than attempting to achieve an objective stance and reproducible conditions through a controlled environment as is the historical tradition of positivistic inquiry (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003), qualitative methodology embraces the subjective stance of the researcher and the messiness of the natural world. In order to maintain consistency with the guiding principles of qualitative research, methods must refute techniques traditionally designed to discover an objective reality. In that reality does not exist independent of individuals,

qualitative researchers dutifully recognize the influences that shape and guide the stories they attempt to reveal.

### *Rational for a Qualitative Design*

The process of determining the appropriate research design to best understand the question being investigated involved both ascertaining the assumptions of the researcher and identifying the paradigm that most explicitly illuminates the answer. Creswell (2003) identifies three essential questions that aid in the selection of a research paradigm:

- 1) What knowledge claims are being made by the researcher (including a theoretical perspective)?
- 2) What strategies of inquiry will inform the procedures?
- 3) What methods of data collection and analysis will be used?

These questions are not independent of one another, but rather each builds on the preceding answer. Therefore, it is first and foremost the knowledge claims that guided the selection of paradigm and subsequently compelled me to select strategies and methods that were consistent with those claims. The questions that guided this study assume independent realities for families in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The assumptions are that subjective experiences defined by individual interpretations of social class status translate into familial interactions that constitute both independent and family-constructed realities. As such, the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions of qualitative research parallel the knowledge claims that frame the constructed research questions. Further, the design and implemented methodology of this study emerged from the grounding knowledge to elucidate the findings.

### *Paradigm: Critical Humanism*

In an effort to empower the marginalized groups in society, critical humanism takes an active stance through the form of research. The role of the critical researcher is to explicitly involve one's self in the research process by sharing all parts of the research process with the participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Within the context of this study, my position as a critically humanistic researcher called on me to introduce my participants to the constructs under investigation, to intentionally outline the ways in which participation engaged participants in the process of emancipation, to engage participants in the process of analysis through member checking and grand member checking, and to share writings as a vehicle for self-empowerment and a rejection of oppressive systems. Researchers working within this paradigm are intimately connected to the individual consciousness of the research participants. Through this relationship, a shared emphasis on liberation from traditional power structures such as race, class, and gender evolves in the process of data-gathering (Creswell, 2003). Further, the recognition of individual multiple realities results in extolled participant narratives with an aim to empower. This is necessary according to Halliwell & Mousley (2003), because, "The human, from this perspective, is too amorphous to be easily defined, and to try to name it in a prescriptive way is paradoxically to be anti-humanist, because it denies individuals the role of interpreting for themselves what being human means" (p.1). Thus, critical humanism serves as a platform to both inform others of individual stories and to join participants in this process of self-discovery.

Within the context of this study, the focus on individuals historically marginalized as a result of their class status necessitated an emancipatory framework. Further, trauma itself can be conceptualized as an oppressive force in that it can shape family systems through maladaptive coping strategies (Figley & Barnes, 2005). The intersection of contextual events such as Hurricane Katrina and omni-present societal factors like class status calls upon humanistic

researchers to engage in a process of understanding as well as liberation. The intentionality of the study methodology arose from this critical paradigm to evoke human agency in a way that shapes not only family communication, but ideally dominant social discourse as well.

*Perspective: Social Constructionism*

Within the paradigm of critical humanism, research is guided by the selection of a perspective that further illuminates the guiding philosophies of the research and speaks to the ways in which knowledge is believed to be elucidated. Social constructionism is consistent with a paradigm of critical humanism in that there is both an ontological rejection of a discernable reality and a focus on emancipation from socially constructed power structures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Social constructionism focuses heavily on the role of language as the primary method through which reality is constructed in multiplicity. Denzin and Lincoln assert, "We are self-interpreting beings and language constitutes this being" (p.198). Within a qualitative paradigm, the perspective of social constructionism informs the research process in that the act of creating discourse constitutes a new construction of reality, and when situated within an explicitly emancipatory paradigm such as critical humanism, allows for a dialogue of liberation to be constructed.

Methodologically, this study informs the social constructionist perspective through the integration of Social Class Worldview Model. SCWM itself is founded upon a theory of social construction and argues that class status is both created socially and interpreted individually in a manner that shapes personal reality (Liu, et. al, 2005). The integration of class-based discussion between the researcher and participants will draw from the assumptions outlined by SCWM and will assume the tenets of social constructionism that "[lead] to an improvement of the human condition" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.200). Moreover, the use of social constructionism as a

perspective allowed the participants to share their own personal stories with an emphasis on the language central to their experiences. Designed as a cathartic process, the shaping of personal narratives through interactive discourse was an empowering process for participants (Barry, 1997).

### *Strategy: Multiple Critical Case Studies*

The case study design as a strategy of qualitative methodology involves studying a phenomenon that is both bound by population and time (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, when research seeks to address a question specific to a certain group of individuals and / or occurring relative to a specific event or process, the case study design is an ideal strategy for conducting the research. The intention of this practice is to inform the reader through a descriptive account of circumstances relative to social processes (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Merriam describes three essential components of case study investigation:

- 1) Particularistic – Case studies are focused on illuminating the particulars of an event, process or phenomenon. Cases are selected for their ability to reveal qualities particular to this process and to contribute to theory. Additionally, Shaw (as cited in Merriam, 1998) states that case studies, “concentrate attention on the way particular groups of people confront specific problems, taking a holistic view of the situation” (p. 29).
- 2) Descriptive – The presentation of case studies in qualitative methodology is intentionally thick in its description. The focus on interaction and holism calls for rich portrayal of the events and processes specific to the cases being investigated. There is an emphasis on literary techniques and the use of language to illuminate themes.
- 3) Heuristic – Case studies are designed to expand the understanding of phenomenon. Stake (as cited in Merriam, 1998) states, “Previously unknown relationships and variables can

be expected to emerge from case studies leading to a rethinking of the phenomenon being studied. Insights into how things get to be the way they are can be expected to result” (p. 30).

Case studies can differ in their intention to inform descriptively, historically, or in an evaluative manner (Merriam, 1988). Embedded within the evaluative design is the critical case study. Critical case studies operate within a critical paradigm and are guided by the assumption that the setting of the evaluation is oppressive (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The intention of the case study then is to illuminate patterns that contribute to the marginalization of specific groups. This agenda is achieved through what Rossman and Rallis call, “a critique of existing social structures and patterns” (p.106).

Traditional case studies illuminate one unit – individual, family, organization – and the dynamics within that entity (Merriam, 1998). However, studies attempting to identify cross-case themes employ a multiple case study design. Rather than looking for themes and sub-themes within one single case, multiple case studies allow the researcher to investigate both within case and cross-case themes. Variation between cases allows for persuasive interpretation of the phenomenon that is central to all of the cases being studied. Moreover, when used to investigate areas that are previously lacking in research, the multiple case study design provides a template for the burgeoning field.

This study employed a multiple critical case study design. Merriam (1998) states that case studies are particularly relevant when research intends to uncover process. The family recovery process from Hurricane Katrina then is illuminated by the cases that were chosen for investigation. Additionally, Merriam asserts that case studies are particularly useful when attempting to investigate “complex social units consisting of multiple variables” (p. 41).

Certainly the family is a complex social unit undoubtedly consisting of multiple variables, including that of family class status. Further, the use of multiple cases was an appropriate fit for this study due to the lack of research currently conducted in this area and because the cross-case analysis strengthens future researchers' ability to appropriately study the interwoven constructs of family, class, and trauma. Finally, a critical design was employed in order to strengthen the consistency between paradigm and strategy and to reinforce the objective of participant empowerment.

### *Methods*

#### *Trustworthiness & Authenticity*

Qualitative research seeks to improve the validity of findings by explicitly addressing issues of study trustworthiness and authenticity through design. The credibility or trustworthiness of study results is obtained by ensuring research practice that conforms to models designed to enhance validity. Anderson and Herr (as cited in Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003) cite five specific criteria for participatory action research that should be addressed to enhance the trustworthiness of findings: outcome validity, process validity, democratic validity, catalytic validity, and dialogic validity.

Outcome validity of a study is measured by the level to which the emancipatory agenda inherent in the study design is achieved (Anderson and Herr as cited in Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003). While this is addressed through member checking with participants to evaluate their level of perceived empowerment, it also concerns the researcher's ability to reshape the problem as a result of thematic analysis. Researchers are called upon to reflect upon study findings in a way that enhances the possibility of continued scholarly action relative to the issues being studied. Qualitative researchers must also address process validity – adequate evaluations of the ways in

which multiple perspectives frame the study. Triangulation of data through the use of multiple methods of data collection and the integration of a variety of sources most effectively addresses concerns of process validity (Maxwell, 2005). Democratic validity concerns the inclusion of multiple stakeholders and their varied interests in the study (Anderson and Herr as cited in Gall, Gall, and Borg). Multiple case study design can address this challenge to validity by investigating many cases involving individuals connected to the problem under investigation. Additionally, member checking ensures that participant voices are contributing to the evolution of salient themes. Addressing issues of catalytic validity, which relates to the level at which change occurs for participants in their particular settings, is best attended to through a researcher's reflective journal. The journal is kept by the researcher as a log of the change process occurring throughout the study. Finally, ensuring dialogic validity requires that researchers engage in peer debriefing during the interpretation of findings. Through engaging colleagues in the identification of themes and analysis of participant meanings, researchers can improve the likelihood that their perceptions are representative of emerging themes.

In addition to evaluating research trustworthiness, Guba and Lincoln (1989) discuss the necessity of including measures to ensure the authenticity of qualitative study. Five criteria are outlined that evaluate the authentic nature of qualitative research engaging in a constructionist perspective: fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity. Fairness compels the researcher to strike a balance in the presentation of participant voices in the evaluation and presentation of research findings in order to reduce bias. Both ontological and educative authenticity address the need for raised consciousness, ontologically on the part of the researcher and educative to the population exposed to the research. Finally, catalytic and tactical authenticity are closely aligned with the goals of action



research. A study that is sufficiently catalytically authentic prompts active change on the part of research participants. Tactical authenticity requires that the researcher provide participants with the tools and training necessary to implement the change process in their lives.

### *Site and Sample Selection*

#### *Participants.*

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that participant selection in multiple case studies within a critical paradigm is purposeful rather than random. Purposive case sampling can be further demarcated by sampling strategy. Within typical case sampling, a researcher seeks to construct a population for study that is likely to demonstrate the processes under investigation (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Therefore, this study utilized purposeful typical case sampling and the sample consisted of marginalized families who returned to the city of New Orleans to participate in the recovery process. Drawing from the tenets of SCWM (Liu, et. al, 2005), families self-identified as being members of a marginalized social class and consisted of two adults in the home. Seven families were selected as cases and while relationships between the participating adults varied, all participants identified themselves as family.

Families initiated contact after seeing fliers posted around the New Orleans Metropolitan Region. The initial telephone contact was based on a telephone interview guide (Appendix A) and included a conversation regarding the family's perception of their class status, the part of the city they live in and when and how they chose to return to New Orleans following the storm. Families who met study criteria were given a brief description of what study participation entailed, scheduled their first interview, and were told that they would receive \$100 at the end of the study as a thank you for their participation.

*Site.*

The purposeful sampling design informed the decision to select participants from within the New Orleans city limits. Maxwell (2005) states that an important component of purposeful sampling is to provide a heterogeneous sample within the confines of bounding parameters. While the different areas of the city suffered vastly different direct effects of Hurricane Katrina, there is a shared experience of trauma recovery for the city as a whole that served as the bounding parameter for site selection. Therefore, fliers (Appendix B) were placed throughout the city in multiple localities in order to draw a broad but representative population sample. Moreover, fliers were placed in areas likely to be accessible to populations self-identified as lower or marginalized classes, including bus stops, thrift store parking lots, church parking lots, and specific grocery stores.

*Role of Researcher*

Qualitative research recognizes the researcher as an involved participant in the research process. As such, there must be intentional recognition of the ways in which the researcher's role in the study influences and shapes the process and outcomes. The researcher is compelled to actively participate in the substantiation of trustworthiness and authenticity throughout the study, as well as to explicitly delineate the ways in which entry to the research site is gained and the manner in which the researcher will provide the participants with reciprocal involvement throughout the study.

*Researcher within a critical paradigm.*

The explicitly participatory nature of a researcher within a critical paradigm requires a direct solicitation of participant involvement in study process and analysis (Rossman & Rallis,

2003). Therefore, during each interaction with participants I delineated the intention of the interview as well as called for feedback at the close of the discussion. Moreover, participants were engaged in the analysis process through member checking following each interview. In order to achieve this goal of reciprocal feedback from participants, oral summaries of each interview were provided to the participants for evaluation at the outset of our next meeting. Participants had the opportunity to participate in a reconstruction of the summary by adding feedback and making suggestions for a more accurate recapitulation of their meanings.

In addition, researchers working within a critical paradigm must document their perceptions both as they enter the study and throughout the change process. This documentation assists in confirming the trustworthiness of the study findings by providing the reader with an understanding of the researcher's lens (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The Researcher as Instrument Statement (Appendix C) provides an extensively detailed narrative account of the researcher's level of engagement with the community being studied as well as contributes a personal historical account of the relationship of the researcher to the study topic. The inclusion of the Researcher as Instrument statement in this study illuminates the way in which the researcher is situated within the context of family trauma following Hurricane Katrina and the views and biases of the researcher relative to constructions of social class. Further, the statement outlines the significant ways in which I as the researcher contributed to the construction and interpretations of study design, outcomes and findings. Additionally, the reflexive journal (Appendix D) is an ongoing log maintained by the researcher that reflects insights related to the study, recognized biases, the researcher's personal change process, and the researcher observations of the change process for participants (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003). This study

included a regularly maintained reflexive journal that served to improve catalytic validity through the observation of the participant and researcher change processes.

*Gaining entry.*

Creswell (2003) states that a component of the researcher's role in qualitative research includes an explanation of the ways in which the researcher has gained access to the study sites. An implicit component of the site selection for qualitative research is often the researcher's personal connection with the sites under investigation. My knowledge of the city that comes from having lived there allowed me to place fliers in areas that are diverse geographically as well as culturally. Additionally, my connection to the city and understanding of the local culture created an additional level of trust and comfort during the initial screening telephone calls. The interviews were conducted near or in participant homes and a key element to my acceptance as a researcher was having a camera man who was born and raised in the city. Participants engaged in conversations with him about the food, the people and the culture, and the mutuality of respect that emerged resulted in a welcoming and open environment for the interviews.

*Reciprocity.*

Reciprocity is defined by Rossman and Rallis (2003) as, "the need for mutual benefit in human interaction" (p.159). Within the context of qualitative research, the concept of reciprocity elucidates the incumbent responsibility of the researcher to provide the study participants with a meaningful experience grounded in safe and ethical parameters. Further, the reciprocal nature of the research relationship calls upon the researcher to state clearly the expectations for study participation and to communicate the requirements of the participants at the outset of the study. This study's situation within a critical paradigm required that participants were intentionally

engaged in the process of actual change through study participation. In order to satisfy the norms of reciprocity, once participants were determined to be eligible for participation, I engaged with them in a conversation about the expectations of participation in the study and asked them what they hoped to gain from participation. The reflexive journal provided a place for monitoring of the ongoing reciprocity throughout the study. Finally, participants engaged in a discussion at the end of the interview process in which they shared their insights regarding the themes that emerged from discussions and the ways in which they imagined those insights might best be used to serve families recovering from natural disaster trauma.

### *Data Collection*

Data collection procedures consisted of three different methods in order to improve the trustworthiness of results through the triangulation of data. Rossman and Rallis (2003) define triangulation as, "A variety of methods used to build the picture that you are investigating. This helps ensure that you have not studied only a fraction of the complexity that you seek to understand" (p.69). Further, triangulation ensures that study findings are not biased based on systemic flaws inherent in one specific method of data collection (Maxwell, 2005). This study employed a series of interviews with each case studied, observation of systemic familial interaction patterns as well as observations of the larger surrounding community, and the analysis of artifact data provided by the family as representative of the family's recovery process from Hurricane Katrina.

### *Interviews.*

Interviews within the qualitative paradigm and used as a method of data collection are designed to elicit participant narratives that can highlight themes relative to the topic under

investigation (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The interview is conceptualized as a conversation between researcher and participant in which the researcher is able to situate the participant life stories thematically within a broader narrative relative to the study intentions. Kvale (1996) identifies three components of the conversation that arise from interviews: conversational technique, mode of knowing, and human reality. The conversational technique is dependent upon the interview structure and is designed to elicit a co-constructed reality between the researcher and participant. This participatory reality serves as a mode of knowing when research is situated in a constructivist perspective that understands belief to be analogous to truth. Finally, the social constructionist understanding of human reality as a facet of dialogue is illuminated through the interview process in that the conversation between the researcher and participants does not represent reality but is in fact reality itself.

Qualitative study must intentionally design the structure of interviews to result in a construction of reality that will best illuminate the processes being investigated. Therefore, the interview structure chosen must be consistent with the paradigm framing the research as well as the intention of the study. Action research requires an open-ended interview style so that the researchers and participants can shape the conversation to both illuminate participant lived experiences and aid in constructing a liberating experience (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Additionally, the multiple case study design calls for the standardization of question stems in order to ensure that cross-case themes are relative to the same underlying social constructs being studied. Thus, this study utilized standard open-ended interviews that included pre-constructed interview guides (see Appendices E, F and G) guiding conversation but were intentionally designed to allow flexibility within the conversations.

The adult members of each family participating in the study were asked to participate in a series of three hour-long interviews. The inclusion of multiple interviews with each of the cases allowed for both depth and breadth of the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The multiple case study design promoted the breadth of understanding through cross-case analysis while the series of interviews with each family allowed for a depth of understanding for within-case analysis by achieving data saturation. The first interview evolved from the interview guide (Appendix E) designed to elicit conversation about systemic family change throughout the recovery process from the hurricane. The second interview (Appendix F) focused on the family's perception of their class status and the way in which it contributed to their family's overall experiences and processes as a result of the hurricane. The final interview (Appendix G) challenged the families to bring artifacts to the interview that are representational of their family experiences following the hurricane and the conversation centered on their understanding of how the artifact is meaningful. Each interview was both audio and videotaped to assist in accurate data analysis.

### *Observation.*

Adler and Adler (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) refer to observation as, "the fundamental base of all research methods" (p.673). However, there remains considerable debate regarding the methods surrounding collection of observational data. Assumptions that guide the paradigmatic construction of research study must be consistent with the suppositions leading to selecting a method of observation. Within the context of this study, the critical paradigm and constructionist perspective call for both observation of systemic family processes and evaluation of the meaningful dialogue within the larger community that constitutes the vessel in which family dialogue exists. Therefore, two methods of observational data were collected and contribute to the triangulation of data.

In order to record patterns of family interaction imbedded in family conversation surrounding class and hurricane recovery, the interviews were videotaped and later observed. While interview transcripts were used to analyze dialogical content, a second analysis of tactical family interactions was conducted by observing the video tapes after the interviews and constructing detailed field notes (Appendix H) specific to familial exchanges. However, it was also necessary to observe and record the larger community dialogue in that dominant social discourse provides a frame in which independent realities are structured. As such, observations of conversations in public places related to Hurricane Katrina and natural disasters were observed and detailed field notes were recorded (Appendix I). Places to observe social exchanges were selected when they were within a participant neighborhood and represented a large gathering place for individuals who may be more likely to identify themselves as members of marginalized classes. To support Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) claim that, "true objectivity has been held to be the result of agreement between participants and observers as to what is really going on in a given situation" (p.676), the families were engaged in conversations regarding their understanding of the social climate and its relationship to their families' processes. Further, this interactive participation contributed to the active participation inherent in action research.

*Artifact data.*

In addition to contributing to the triangulation of data and ultimate trustworthiness of the study, the analysis of artifact data allows researchers working with multiple cases to explore the conflicting voices of varied participants through representational objects (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Moreover, artifacts provide the researcher with the opportunity to analyze behavior through tangible objects that may represent experience as opposed to recalled memory (Maxwell, 2005). Although the analysis of the material culture through socially constructed documents and



items such as pamphlets, advertisements, etc. is often undertaken by qualitative researchers, artifact data meaningful directly to participant families was analyzed within this study. In the attempt to ascertain the way in which class is a factor for each family participating in the study, the application of SCWM holds that individual class constructions are more salient than societal notions of class structure (Liu, et. al., 2005). Therefore, families were asked to contribute artifacts to be analyzed that they deem to be most representational of their recovery experience within the context of their class status.

Artifact analysis began in the third interview wherein families brought any item or set of items that they believe to be symbolic of their experiences. The interview guide for this interview was broadly structured to allow a great amount of flexibility for the family to explain how and why they chose their objects and the ways in which these objects are symbolic within the context of their familial understanding. Further, I took observational notes regarding the nature of the artifact (Appendix J) and contributed these findings to the transcripts and observational field notes for data analysis.

### *Data Analysis*

#### *Contributing data.*

The analysis of data drew from interview transcriptions, field notes of interview videotape observations, field notes from naturalistic observation, and observational notes of artifact data. Qualitative studies primarily rely on the audio or video taping of interviews in order to precisely document the words, tones and inflections of study participants (Kvale, 1996). This study utilized both forms of taping to document the interview experiences. I translated the majority of the audio recordings of interviews by myself, purposefully selecting at least one interview per case study to transcribe autonomously, into transcribed records of the

conversations in order to fully immerse myself in the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Video tapes were analyzed for interactional content and recorded through field notes.

The data analyzed throughout the study was subject to intentionally structured member checks in order to contribute to the study trustworthiness and authenticity as well as to actively engage participants in the research process. Each interview concluded with questions regarding participant experience within the interview. Additionally, members received oral summaries of all interview content and were asked to provide feedback to ensure data accuracy. Participants were asked to contribute to the researcher / participant discourse regarding the accuracy of researcher conclusions. Additionally, I engaged in peer debriefing as I developed codes and themes in order to contribute to the study authenticity.

*Analysis process.*

Data analysis was an inductive process wherein I initially constructed emic categories based on participants' actual wording (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This process requires that categories initially evolve from the transcribed interview records in order to make use of participant dialogue as the referent method for categorization. However, once categories were established, all study data were reviewed to establish data that supported this categorical analysis.

Following the emergence of categories, I began to code the data (Appendix K). Data first were coded by using various colors to represent broad categories or "chunks" that were identified (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). After the initial coding process, data was re-examined and a second, more detailed categorization occurred still utilizing an emic strategy based on participant language. These smaller chunks of coded data were then analyzed for thematic similarities. This study includes both within-case and cross-case analysis. Therefore, themes salient to particular

families were identified as were themes emerging as relevant across participants. Once again, within-case labels for themes were generated from participant language.

The presentation of data herein is dependent upon the delivery of themes and participant narratives through thick description (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The within-case analysis emerged from the themes that were particularly salient for each family. Through data immersion and member checking for authenticity, I attempted to construct the rich family narrative that grew out of the study process. The cross-case analysis is presented with the aim of illuminating the themes that spanned cases in order to facilitate an understanding of the broader experience for these families of living in lower-class strata and recovering from Hurricane Katrina and is delivered through the thick description of participant themes.

### *Limitations*

Qualitative study is not designed with the intention of generalizing themes to larger populations. However, themes derived from qualitative inquiry are generalizable to theory (Yin, 1994). As such, this study should be understood to be contributing to the larger social discourse regarding the experiences of families in lower social classes following hurricanes and specifically Hurricane Katrina, but should not be used to generalize findings to specific populations. Further, the grounding in a perspective and model that view reality as socially constructed necessarily means that the subjective experiences of participants prior to and during the research process result in unique co-constructed realities that are relevant specifically to their experiences. This study is bound by the participants being studied and the results are a presentation of the narratives specific to their familial lives.

Additionally, the systemic frame of this study necessitates an understanding that it is the space within and between people that is being explored. Therefore, assumptions about individual

experiences relative to class status and natural disaster recovery cannot be uncovered from these study findings. While the individuals participating in this study speak from the context of their own lived experience, the conversations guiding the study are designed to illuminate the way in which they experienced systemic change and are not an exploration of their own independent realities.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Rossman and Rallis (2003) outline four distinct theories of ethics that should guide the construction of a qualitative study. The ethic of consequences demands that researchers consider what will occur as a result of their actions. This study was specifically designed to not only illuminate participant narratives, but also to generate actual change processes within participant lives. In order to ensure that the results of this action research were ethical, member checking specific to participant change processes were infused at the end of each interview. This allowed participants to reflect on their experiences and gave me the opportunity to offer reciprocal guidance when needed. The ethic of rights and responsibilities demands that researchers consider the basic human rights of the participants in the study and take care to protect those rights. This study underwent rigorous evaluation by the William and Mary IRB to ensure that the rights of participants were not being violated in any way. Further, the inclusion of the Informed Consent document (Appendix L) delineated the specifics of study involvement and specifically outlined participant rights with respect to their participation in the study. The ethic of social justice insists that research should involve a focus on highlighting previously quieted voices in an effort to combat institutionalized oppression. The critical frame of this study and subsequent emancipatory tactics infused throughout the study design meet this call to social action.

The ethic of care requires researchers to recognize the impact of action on relational change. This ethic is particularly relevant for this study in that family units comprise the participating cases and the process of evaluating family dynamics has the potential to impact future familial interactions. While the member checking processes mentioned earlier were designed to provide participants with the opportunity to express concern over these potential changes, this is a challenge in all action research. There is always the potential that change resulting from participation could result in stress for a family. While there was no way to assure that this research resulted in only positive change, through personal involvement with the research participants and my expressed offer to serve as a source for needed referrals, families utilized the researcher / participant connection to combat any negative stress that arose as a result of research participation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Within Case Themes

#### *Introduction*

The preceding chapter presented the methodological procedures used to conduct this qualitative inquiry. This chapter will illustrate the within-case themes that evolved as a result of the multiple case study interviews conducted with each of the seven participant families. These within-case themes illustrate the dedication to an action research paradigm in which the participants were provided a space to illuminate their family narratives. Each case study will be presented as a familial story in which the participants engaged in the process of redefining their experiences. The perspective of Social Constructionism informs this presentation as the families' evolving discourse which incorporates societal messages and family interactions to construct unique realities is co-constructed within the space of the interview and alongside the researcher.

Two adults represented each of the study families and participated in a series of three, hour-long interviews designed to uncover their experiences of recovery from Hurricane Katrina. Each family constructed themes unique to their experiences and illustrative of their family dynamics, independent realities, and messages related to social class. Participants were given the freedom during the interviews to expand upon ideas important to them whether or not they were directly tied to the research questions. This autonomous dialogue was fostered in an attempt to further the action research paradigm through the process of empowerment and emancipation from constricting power structures. However, in keeping with the social constructionist notion that all beings are socially and culturally embedded, participants spoke of family and community relationships in all interviews which is evident in each theme that evolved for each case. Family

changes and dynamics are therefore continually illustrated throughout the research findings, emphasizing the importance of the study focus on evolving family systems.

Throughout chapter four, themes and sub-themes are given titles that utilize participant language, whereas I determined the order of their presentation in an effort to construct a holistic narrative that evolves in a manner consistent with the family's experiences. This integration of participant voice and researcher interpretation is consistent with the perspective of Social Constructionism which argues that each new interaction creates a reality constructed by all individuals present in the moment. Therefore, while the themes are derived from the answers given by participants in the interviews, the reality that emerged is inherently connected to my voice. Moreover, within each case presentation, the interjection of artifact data and observation data is used to support themes and sub-themes. While the artifacts were chosen entirely by participants, I constructed both the artifact notes and the video observation notes without participant input. Therefore, while the participant language exists as the primary data driving themes, the triangulation of data is offered independently, furthering the integration of researcher and participant voice. Following this presentation of case narratives, I will investigate the case themes within the context of Social Class Worldview Model (SCWM). While SCWM was a driving force within the context of the interviews and inspired the selection of many interview questions, a separate and intentional analysis of the data through this lens will allow for a more conceptually complete understanding of the impact of social class on family experiences.

#### *Claude & Monique*

Claude and Monique met with me for three mornings in a row sitting outside in Jackson Square in the heart of the French Quarter. Although our initial interview times were necessarily postponed because Claude was briefly incarcerated, once they were able to attend the interviews

they arrived on time or early for each meeting. Claude was 38 at the time of the interview and Monique was 26 and eight months pregnant with the couple's first child together – a girl. Monique revealed that she has two other children but has not had custody of either for some time. The couple identifies alternately as engaged or married and Monique describes herself as “Caucasian / White” whereas Claude stated that he is “what they call native of Louisiana – Creole American.” They live in the French Quarter and requested an early morning interview time within walking distance of their home because Claude is a day laborer and needed to arrive early to work in order to be ensured employment for the day. While they were not together prior to the storm, they credit the Hurricane as a primary factor in how they found one another and at the time of the interview had been together for about one year. Claude did the majority of speaking in the interviews but the couple checked in with each other throughout with both verbal and non-verbal cues. Their interviews resulted in five significant themes that illustrate their experience with and recovering from the Hurricane, along with their perceptions about social class and its influence on their lives. The following themes and subthemes will unfold Claude and Monique's narrative:

Themes	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2
<b>“Everything was destroyed”</b>	“Completely devastated like everybody else”	“Never been in a storm before, never be in another”
<b>“Wanted to come back to where I was born”</b>	“Evacuee, class, race, all that stuff”	“A way to get back was to get a job”
<b>“Someone who is undesirable”</b>	“Poor working class”	“Having to depend on other people”
<b>“I feel kind of connected now”</b>	“The strength – that was through my family”	“They share the same experience that I do”
<b>“Now I can understand”</b>	“Alleviate that kind of pressure”	“Changed me a little bit”



*“Everything Was Destroyed”*

Claude and Monique began their first interview by recounting their direct experiences with the hurricane itself. This set the stage for the emotions, frustrations, hopes, and systemic changes that have defined their lives since Hurricane Katrina and was presented by both participants intensely. Video observation of the initial interview revealed Claude’s exaggerated body language and Monique’s strained facial expressions as they alternately told their stories about how they experienced the evacuation and initial return to the city. Although the couple did not experience the hurricane together, they told their stories as overlapping compatible narratives, with the revelation of one instigating similar or contrasting experiences of the other. This theme encompasses their discussions surrounding what it was like to realize that the hurricane had forever altered their lives and how that impacts the way they look at the stability of their future. Two distinct subthemes emerged relating to experiencing the immediate shock of physical property loss and then the way in which this new experience of having been through a hurricane impacts future decisions for their family’s wellbeing.

*“Completely devastated like everybody else.”*

As Claude and Monique introduced their story, they both emphasized the intense surprise that they experienced as the hurricane extended before them. While throughout the interviews the couple shared the specifics of the actual hurricane and their evacuation experience by weaving threads of details into a larger narrative of their post-Hurricane Katrina lives, they initially presented their struggle with the specific act of returning to a home that represented the loss of an old way of living. Claude spoke with a voice for himself and his community: “I was completely devastated like everybody else because we expected to come back to our homes the following day. I did not expect for any of the things that happened to happen.”

Claude spoke of his connection to property destroyed by the hurricane and the way in which it was representative for him of his pre and post Katrina lives. Although Monique did not offer a great deal of dialogue regarding this subtheme, video observation notes reveal that she frequently nodded her head and uttered “Mmmm” and “Yeah, yeah” as his story of experiencing his personal loss unfolded:

When your home has eight feet of water from one end of the property line to the other . . . and you come back to an environment like that and you literally have to pick up the pieces of what is left, you know – I mean anything can become of sentimental value . . . just ANY object that was left in your home the way it was before the hurricane – it becomes valuable to you – that was an item that sort of you remember as being in a former life, right?

In addition to the interview dialogue surrounding the emotions connected with discovering a ruined home, the couple’s artifact data supported this theme. Claude considers himself to be an amateur artist and, prior to the storm, had shown his work in independent galleries in the city. The first artifact he presented was a sketch book that primarily contained rough sketches of people in various poses. The book had been left in his apartment when he evacuated and upon gaining access to his home, he recovered it along with the other items he considered somewhat salvageable. Artifact notes describe the book as containing sketches with bleeding ink depicting drawings that were smeared and faded but still recognizable. The metal binding of the book was rusted from the submersion in hurricane water and pages were falling out and in other places loosely connected to the spirals in only one or two areas. As I described Claude handling the artifact during my video observation, I noted that he handled the notebook gently and took care to pass it to Monique after briefly gesturing toward setting it down on the

bench where they sat. As the couple discussed the book and why Claude chose to salvage this item, he stated, "I mean, it may not be that good, but it's something left over from the storm, you know?" As he mused about why he might have held on to it for these three years following the storm, Monique responded, "I guess you saved it for something like this, huh?" and gently laughed as she placed her hand on his knee. Claude finally arrived at his conclusion as to why the book was worthy of being an item to keep:

So once you kind of start having to have the energy and desire to rid the contents of the home so that you can make your home habitable again, then you know, some of the things that you keep, some of the things just can't be saved. This is one of the things that maintained some level of value to ME.

*"Never been in a storm before, never be in another."*

As Monique and Claude spoke about their feelings surrounding the destruction of the things around them, they reflected on how they were unprepared for the devastation due to their status as virgins of the hurricane experience despite having both grown up in southern Louisiana. Monique related her failure to evacuate prior to the storm to her lack of understanding of what it would entail when she stated, "Well, I was in the storm, I had never been in a storm before. I was three months pregnant at the time and living with my uncle... After the storm hit we got rescued by a boat." Although Claude evacuated prior to the storm, he too described his experience as having been different from anything he knew to anticipate. He described the evacuation as "very tumultuous" and once again enjoined himself with his community stating, "It was a unique situation and no one was really prepared for it."

The couple translated their inexperience with hurricanes and the resulting personal and community chaos into a new way of protecting their family for the future. Monique described her

experiences as “probably influenc[ing]” the way in which they would approach another hurricane, should it be predicted to hit New Orleans. For Monique, the decision to leave prior to any future hurricanes was made during Katrina. She said, “I promised myself then that I’d never be in another hurricane. I swore I’d leave when I found out there was one coming.” However, both Claude and Monique incorporated their impending role as parents into why they would not ride out another storm. Monique differentiated between the autonomy of two adults deciding to stay and the responsibility of being a parent when deciding whether to leave:

I would make sure that I would leave – and I don’t know that I would come back. I wouldn’t want to endanger my daughter to any trauma like I went through...If it were just us two [Claude and Monique] it probably wouldn’t be so bad...but I want the welfare of my daughter to be protected and I don’t want her going through that trauma that we went through.

Claude concurred and noted how they would likely sacrifice the community they love in favor of protecting their family when he concluded, “Living in a famous city is a really nice thing to say [but] we wouldn’t want to experience that again. We would leave – and probably decide to live in another community and not come back.”

*“Wanted to Come Back to Where I was Born”*

The community that embodies New Orleans was described by Claude and Monique as an intricate component of their identities both as individuals and as a couple. The way in which social class is interwoven into their perceptions of self within the climate of the community was shifted as a result of the hurricane in dynamic and at times conflicting ways. As the couple independently worked to return home and then to establish a new viable life in the city that raised them, they struggled to form their own understanding of how class status had been

redefined and what that meant for them economically as well as personally. Within this theme of trudging toward recovery, two subthemes are evident. Claude presented a new reality of the ways in which social class both dissolved and remained essential in the immediate aftermath of the storm, while the couple both discussed the ways that employment and access to work contributed to their ability to rebound.

*“Evacuee, class, race – all that stuff.”*

The second interview focused primarily on social class and the impact status had on the recovery process. For Claude, his evolving understanding of the impact social class status had on the initial experience of hurricane recovery was conflicted. In some ways, he saw class as dissolving into the waters of the storm. He believed that all individuals who experienced the storm merged into one class – that of evacuee – “Just in route to an evacuation center, some people lost their lives, so – money and class and all of those socio-terms became completely irrelevant. Time for leisure conversations are irrelevant.” Ability to comply with authority in order to gain access to resources became a primary focus, and Claude stated that being “reduced to just the possessions on your back” meant that often people of varying levels of class were left without the means to even identify themselves with formal identification. He lamented the struggle of all evacuees, saying, “When you’re in a situation where you have no civil rights – you would like to think that you have civil rights, but if you can’t produce a valid ID then those types of rights are surrendered.”

In addition to the limited resources for all evacuees, Claude and Monique both reported that immediately following the storm, amenities that they would previously have attributed to those in higher classes many times lost their previous value, creating the sense that they were living in “a medieval type of society” (Claude). Monique talked about stores taking cash only,

“no credit cards,” and Claude reported his observation of other people who might have previously relied on their credit cards as a tool for survival now unable to depend on their status anymore – “You could have had a million dollar limit on your credit card and you were S.O.L. [Shit Out of Luck] unless you had cash.” Additionally, video observation demonstrated that Claude chuckled as he recounted his perception of cell phones as status symbols prior to the storm and how that shifted in the immediate wake:

A lot of modern things – like a flip kind of cell phone as opposed to the regular kind, people make class distinctions over those. But if your cell phone didn’t work, it didn’t matter. And maybe the cheaper kinds were the ones that had reception.

However, as the couple explained the dissolution of class status following the storm, they simultaneously spoke about ways in which the social connections of individuals in higher classes afforded opportunities that those without connections did not have. Claude said, “It was – who you know. A lot of things in life is who you know, and a situation like this is no different.” An important tool for re-entry into the city was the ability to obtain a pass that allowed you to travel in and out of the quarantined areas. Claude explained that, “they were only given to city employees, but only some city employees – not everyone was given one.” These passes enabled evacuees to start the process of rebuilding their homes and lives but Claude remarked, “I don’t know – you had to be a doctor or something like that.” Ultimately, his reflections revealed that, from his perception, the beginning of the rebuilding process was intimately connected to previous class markers: “It became almost like a police state, whereas depending upon what your economic status was before the hurricane depended on whether you was able to come back.”

*“A way to get back was to get a job.”*

Unable to rely on social connections or economic status as a means to return to the city, Claude sought employment as a method to getting back home. He was able to get hired in Lafayette on a clean-up crew for New Orleans which allowed him to legally re-enter the city:

One way to get back to the city was to get a job ... they housed you in a hotel which at that time didn't have electricity and running water, but never-the-less, a place to house those like me who wanted money.

Claude saw his return to the city as much more than just an emotional return home, but as a necessary part of his being able to recover. He pointed out that physically being in the city made it easier for him to access aid and saw it as a necessity, saying, "You needed to be here and show photographs of your home...It became very instrumental to be in New Orleans at that time."

Both Claude and Monique had a strong desire to return home, but had different experiences in the process. Monique reported, "I just wanted to come back to where I was born at, where I lived, and just see how things had changed." Because she waited a year to return, she did not have the difficulties of gaining access to the city that Claude experienced, but she did struggle to find employment and establish a new, secure life once she arrived – "The city was pretty much empty for a year, and then there were people coming back in, so – work was really hard to find and [my life in relation to class status] was probably more challenging after the hurricane."

### *"Someone Who is Undesirable"*

As Monique and Claude described their lives connected to the hurricane, they revealed how their sense of self has been shaped by a feeling of being unwanted or uncared for by the population at large. Although each gained strength through extended family and sought shelter in the arms of their relatives, they betrayed hostility regarding the reactions of others to their new

and unexpected status as “evacuees.” They identify the relationship between their self-perceived class status to be both connected to and separate from the treatment they received from the external population. The subthemes that emerged as Claude and Monique discussed their feelings of being looked down upon are related to their internalized responses to their experiences as “working poor ... evacuees” and their impression that the populations outside of New Orleans were simultaneously opportunistic and apathetic toward their suffering.

*“Poor working class.”*

When given the opportunity to define their class status together or separately, Monique emphatically replied, “Our family’s together.” Claude went on to describe their status as, “Poor working class.” The variables that contribute to Claude’s label for their family were summed up in his definition:

She and I and trying to have a child – I don’t make minimum wage, but I don’t have no CEO salary. I have a minimal education only, went to 2 years of college and in my field I am at the middle pay rate of what my field pays. But never-the-less, when you look at the whole entire spectrum, I think we are poor working class.

Claude and Monique were asked to reflect on what this means for them as a couple and as parents-to-be, and video observation notes show that they sat quietly, appearing to contemplate the question, looking to each other and then breaking into matching smiles.

It means that we can feed ourselves; we can put a roof over our head and a little leisure. Luxury we may look at as something far off...Right now I can only afford to travel locally, maybe within a 300 mile radius. I do own a car but I rent an apartment, so you know, I guess that’s us. (Claude)



He went on to describe the “modern conveniences” such as movies and the internet that he and Monique can access through the community but, “just not under my roof where I pay rent.” In addition, Monique spoke of the challenges of having the limited access to resources she experiences as being part of the “poor working class.” She explained, “I can’t get ID right now because I can’t locate my mother. Without her I can’t get a birth certificate and I have no proof of who I am... now I can’t get WIC for my baby or for myself.”

While Monique believes that she has been in the same social class since her childhood, Claude stated that he believes the hurricane resulted in a downward step for him with relation to class. He reported that he felt different as soon as he became an “evacuee” and spoke openly about his shifting identity:

It was just really, in 24 hours, due to circumstances that I could not foresee or control that I have become one of those persons who I would consider the way in which I used to think before the hurricane as undesirable...now I was one of those people who felt like I guess homeless people do as people.

As Claude evacuated to Lafayette to stay with family and then returned to New Orleans as part of a clean-up crew, he “felt like [he] was a drifter” and, unaccustomed to being homeless with shifting employment, said, “It’s a real, real, real weird feeling.”

In addition to their own feelings of self-doubt and struggle related to their class status, Claude regularly spoke about how he experienced the prejudices of others. He began to notice that “people looked at you different...they were watching you more.” The word “evacuee” was synonymous for Claude with the feeling of being unwelcome in Lafayette – “it was a difficult label to have.” His experience of feeling that he was not trusted and was unwelcome was “uncomfortable,” and as he spoke about this rejection, Monique nodded her head emphatically.

The observation of her behavior during this component of the interview revealed that she regularly bit her nails, shifted on the bench frequently, and was startled by the unexpected noises that filled Jackson Square.

*“Having to depend on other people.”*

As the couple temporarily relocated in their respective evacuation cities, the lack of a welcoming reception resulted in an increased focus for each of them on the extended family that gave them shelter. Monique initially evacuated to Houston where she was hospitalized with a respiratory infection. Being pregnant and sick, she was reluctant to leave the hospital and stay in the Astrodome because of the stories she had heard about the ill treatment of evacuees. She sought out her mother despite a lack of closeness: “I was there [in Texas] for probably maybe 2 months and then I went to Arizona where my mother was, and still is somewhere... So, yeah – I went to Arizona to find her.” Claude explained the importance for him of being able to rely on family in his evacuation city Lafayette by saying, “This was a situation where we had to depend on other people for day-to-day living things – money, food, stuff like that, and a lot of my family comes from the city of Lafayette so I wasn’t a complete stranger.” He differentiated his evacuation experience from that of other evacuees because of his ability to stay with family:

My personal experiences being an evacuee – I was not like the others. There was someone to provide me with a home and with a physical address... So even in a community I’m not as familiar with, I still have kinship there and I think that separates me.

However, despite their ability to turn to family for support, both Claude and Monique experienced a feeling of rejection from the people in their hosting communities. Claude shared his frustration with the lack of assistance when he said, “No one outside of New Orleans or

Louisiana wants to accept evacuees.” They each experienced fear at being forced to relocate into a community they perceived to be hostile. Monique said simply, “I didn’t like it very much – I didn’t like being somewhere I didn’t know nobody – pretty much just scared,” whereas Claude explained the accompanying identity change that came with his move: “You were incarcerated if you were not in the state facility you were to be in, so now instead of being a person abiding by the law you’ve become a victim of the law.” Additionally, he felt abandoned by the government in multiple ways including the initial refusal of the mayor of Lafayette to welcome evacuees and extending to the federal government, stating, “We would like to maybe have had our federal government play a larger part in the recovery effort.” Finally, even helping professionals who were in place in the city left Claude feeling disappointed:

You would like to think that doctors, professionals have some amount of spiritual guidance and compassion for people they have to treat, you know. Some cases though there isn’t. In an event like this where it was very traumatic and a lot of people had a lot of emotions and there were a lot of people with a lot of political diversities and such, I guess they just lost some compassion.

In addition to living with a feeling of rejection, the couple noted that as the recovery effort began to take hold in New Orleans, individuals from outside of the city swooped in to embrace the opportunity of exploitation. Claude noted that the pain and suffering of his fellow community members was being recorded and broadcast for profit, and he explained his dismay:

Before [the 9<sup>th</sup> ward] was demolished they turned it into a quote in quote tourist site...as a matter of fact, I think a tv show has come out glamorizing that point in time, they call it K-ville...I guess a lot of that imagery people were able to profiteer from that and that’s exactly what’s happened. It’s now exotic scenery.

Video observation notes offered support for the resulting distrust Claude and Monique have developed for outsiders. For the third interview, I had arrived 5 minutes late due to traffic. At the conclusion of the interview when I gave the couple their \$100 for participating along with a small baby gift, Claude said, “See, Monique! There are nice people! She didn’t think you was coming when you were late – get our 2 interviews and then stiff us with the money.”

*“I Feel Kind of Connected Now”*

Despite the thematic expression throughout the interviews of being neglected or exploited by the world outside of New Orleans, both Claude and Monique frequently expressed a sense of strengthened family and community that blossomed from the collective hurricane experience. This theme encompassing the people that have already given and continue to provide support was quantitatively supported by more data than any other theme. For this couple, the primary positive that grew out of the hurricane was the ability to learn to relate to other people through shared experiences, including their own family members. The theme is further divided into these two categories of the people who construct their support networks – family and community.

*“The strength – that was through my family.”*

The reliance on family as a support network developed for Claude and Monique at the point of evacuation. Monique described her daily struggle to get through the experience of evacuation and how she turned to her family – “I was with my family pretty much the whole time – so I relied on [them.]” Claude immediately added to her dialogue with his own familial experience in evacuation, stating, “The strength – that was through my family. I wasn’t the only family member that evacuated – it was me and my mother.”

This reliance on family of origin was a primary pillar for both Claude and Monique in the evacuation, but as they established their life in the recovery and rebuilding process, they constructed a new family with one another as their new foundation of strength. Claude considers the hurricane to be a bonding experience for the two of them, even though they did not experience it together:

I think what it is that happened with us ... Even though we weren't together before the storm, I still consider her to be one of the people of whom, the population whom I'm now with ... Yeah – that's brought us together for sure, definitely.

When responding to the prompt, "What are the things that keep you going day to day?," Claude responded singularly – "Her. She keeps me going." Monique concurred, "That's pretty much it." The observation data from the videos supported this close connection verbalized by the couple, with notes that included their sitting close together, frequently touching one another with light touches, watching one another's faces as the other spoke, and working jointly to physically handle the artifacts and other personal items such as their hats and her purse. Claude further emphasized their connection when he modified his earlier statement by saying, "We keep each other going." Monique, in a visibly relaxed posture and looking at Claude's face as she spoke concluded, "If there's something bothering us, we talk. And that's about how we keep each other moving on, we get the strength to move on."

*"They share the same experience that I do."*

Claude and Monique's inclusion into a new supportive community came as a surprise to the couple. Claude articulated his internal struggle with becoming part of the new New Orleans by stating, "You can't even drive by and not see all the homeless people, people who don't dress like you – you have to sort of look deep inside yourself because you're all in the same place

now.” However, as they each came to realize the bond they shared with other people who are recovering from the hurricane, they came to view their network as a positive – “Totally different groups of people coming together just to try to survive and it is a beautiful thing” (Claude).

Claude elaborated on why his new community is such a profound force for him, stating,

[Living through the hurricane] puts you in the minority of the populations, and just being in a minority in general doesn't feel too good. So, when you speak about it to other people you don't feel as much of that minority. Just knowing that you can communicate with other people makes you feel better.

Monique, too, finds herself to be more connected now to other individuals who experienced Hurricane Katrina because, “they share the same experience that I do.”

In addition to the communal bond that rose alongside a city in re-birth, Claude and Monique add an additional layer of connection to those who are not only hurricane survivors, but share their economic struggles as well. Monique told of how she was able to access resources when she returned to the city by networking with other people who had navigated the web of federal aid and programs – “I just interacted with people. They knew about the programs, where you could get money, how you could get money. There were people on the street you didn't even know that would tell you.” Claude regularly learns about programs his family might qualify for by associating with, “other people in similar economic circles,” considering them not only social supports, but also “centers for information on any manner of things.” Finally, Claude's driving force has now shifted from a pre-hurricane focus on acquisition of material wealth to involvement in a community that struggles to be respected by the larger world, be it because of classism or status as a former “evacuee”: “I feel connected now to a population that is more about educating people about what it is like to be in this type of situation.”

*“Now I Can Understand”*

Claude and Monique spoke throughout all three interviews about the people they are now, following Hurricane Katrina. The couple infused a feeling of resilience as they elaborated on the ways in which they find strength to continue recovering and how these experiences have forever shaped their lives. Both spoke about the person they have become as quite separate from the person they were before the storm, with Claude expressing a more intense perception of personal change and growth. Additionally, they each attribute their development to the tools they used and use to carry them through the trying times. Claude paralleled his experiences to other victims of natural disaster, saying, “Now I can understand how people feel in tornados, people in the tsunami. I can understand these things now.” As they each reflected on what this new level of understanding means for them individually as well as relationally, two subthemes developed out of the data: a concentration on challenges accompanied by their methods for overcoming these obstacles and the ways in which the hurricane and subsequent experiences have shifted their personal identities.

*“Alleviate that kind of pressure.”*

Claude experienced temptation to turn to what he perceived to be negative coping mechanisms at many points throughout the hurricane and recovery, and when discussing the more challenging times, he first expanded upon what it is like for him to reject an inner desire to use drugs or alcohol as a means of escape. His identity is intricately tied to his community and he explained the experience of rejecting what he perceived to be accepted communal responses to stress:

New Orleans is a city of bad people who had bad habits for years. You don't stop being human – you don't stop being the person that you was for the last 30 years...[Many

people sought] drugs as a means – as an escape, as some kind of antidote to depression, but we haven't chosen that.

I asked Claude and Monique to examine how they not only rejected these temptations, but also what they used to garner strength in the absence of substances. Claude first spoke about their strength as a couple:

That's why we're together, because whenever there is a temptation to try to alleviate our pain and misery from this dealing with our circumstances, we use our inner strength from one another as a sort of watchful eye as to keep our minds away from those immediate types of antidotes – the temptation.

Another way that Claude works to reduce his anxiety is to utilize his artwork as a creative outlet. He spoke about his status as “an amateur artist” prior to Katrina and the pride he felt when he completed a painting. His return to art was born out of the sketch book he presented as an artifact. Looking at the faded drawings, he said, “These were sketches for paintings that I wanted to do, that I was working out in my mind, and I can still see what I was thinking.” He has begun to construct new paintings based on the remnants of work that was being developed before the storm.

Finally, the couple felt strength in their fortune. They spoke of how the recognition that many other people suffered and lost a great deal more than they did was one way they maintained a grateful and positive attitude. Monique demonstrated non-verbal support of Claude's expression of thankfulness, evidenced in the video observation, when tears welled in her eyes as she chewed on a fingernail and gingerly nodded her head, looking her fiancée in the eyes as he spoke:



You're speaking to someone who is basically dealing with the aftermath of the recovery process who is able to speak about it. I mean a large number of people lost their lives ... so just for me to even be alive here and have this conversation and be part of this recovery experience, I'm grateful.

*"Changed me a little bit."*

When asked to elaborate on the emotions that have accompanied their ongoing recovery, Monique said, "probably scared," whereas Claude described his feelings as, "very sad and very angry." However, they normalized these responses on their own, stating, "It has brought out an emotional response that is natural to anybody" (Claude). Although they used negative feelings to describe their emotional states, both Claude and Monique described their evolved selves as something they are proud of. Claude initially described some of the negative changes he has made, reporting a shift to, "being more of a pessimist in life as opposed to an optimist," but then went on to say that his connection to humanity has deepened, creating a more fulfilling sense of self:

Whereas I might not have been the most compassionate person [before the storm], it's made me a little bit more aware of all of the problems in the world and also problems intrinsic with just the human condition. So, for me to think about my own personal desires, I don't think about those things anymore. I always think about other people now. This focus on people is identified by Claude as a positive change. His conclusion on his personal evolution is, "I kinda sorta almost like the person I am now more than the person I was then... I almost like it because it's more challenging and it's a little bit more refreshing."

Monique described her personal evolution in only positive ways. She strongly identifies with the new community that she feels has developed following the storm and credits her

newfound connection to people to the experience of shared connectivity. She reflected on her prior self, stating, "I wasn't very social before the storm." However, as she evaluated how she interacts with others now, she reported, "After the storm I started meeting a lot of people and would talk to them about my experience and pretty much opened up more and started being social with them," then concluded, "I get along with people more now."

### *SCWM Analysis*

The constructionist underpinnings of SCWM require that a family's social class status be derived from their shared or independent self-identifying terms relative to class. Claude and Monique stressed that they share a class status, identifying themselves as "poor working class." SCWM asserts that subjective class descriptors are garnered from the interpretation of societal messages relative to a person's worldview. Claude and Monique directly addressed their internalization of the messages they received by others, reporting that they became "someone who is undesirable," as soon as they became an evacuee. Claude independently connected this to financial status, believing that the communities outside of New Orleans became more welcoming of evacuees once federal aid began to come in and he and his fellow displaced New Orleanians were able to contribute economically, positing, "Once we started to receive federal funding, the people's attitudes started to change from surrounding communities about evacuees." However, he and Monique addressed continued classist messages once back in New Orleans, using the term "undesirable" three different times to describe the way they were treated by others.

Movement toward a homeostatic worldview is also a continuing source of struggle for the couple. Claude in particular feels that his class status has changed since the hurricane, describing his prior self as being "a very materialistic person." As the couple struggle financially to prepare to welcome a new child and maintain their home, Claude's values have shifted to a focus on

human relationships as opposed to the material items they can no longer afford. However, this transition has been challenging and he spoke about the struggle to accept the fact that he is now part of what he perceives to be a lower class:

Whereas I would not have desired to go eat at a homeless shelter where they do feed you – that’s something that I just would not have done before hurricane Katrina – but now, I see that the food is healthy and the conditions aren’t so bad...So that’s one thing that she and I now look at as something that we do.

Additionally, Claude reflected on the previous disdain he had for individuals he would have “looked down upon” who were members of the class he now considers himself in. This evolution was sudden when, “overnight everything was gone,” and he has worked to become more “accepting of people” with whom he now shares cultural and financial status.

Claude and Monique’s turbulent relationship with their social class status is born out of the struggle to identify with a social group that is different than one’s referent group of origin. For Claude in particular, the hurricane stripped him of a tenuous hold on material items that represented for him more than just wealth, but access to higher social groups and the accompanying privileges. In order to maintain and improve a strong sense of self, Claude and Monique have adjusted the values that drive their self-evaluations to focus on the intangible qualities that they possess and are not in danger of losing with the twist of a storm cloud.

#### *Danielle & Greg*

I met Danielle and Greg for all three of our interviews in the living room of their home on the Westbank of New Orleans. The streets approaching their house are some of New Orleans’ worst, with potholes littering the driving path, requiring drivers to coast slowly at speeds no greater than 10 miles an hour. Both participants greeted myself and my camera man at our car for

each interview and walked us out at each conclusion, explaining that the neighborhood “can be a little rough.” The home was small and clean and the participants moved the worn furniture to create a circle for us to sit in while we conducted the interviews. They attended each interview casually dressed, having come in from gardening before the first two interviews which were held in the morning. The third interview was in the evening and the atmosphere continued to be relaxed and welcoming, with the couple offering us a beer before we began.

Danielle introduced herself as a forty-four year old African American mother of 3 teenagers. Greg, her long-time boyfriend, was forty-three, a father-figure to Danielle’s 3 children, and the biological father of one child who no longer lived with the couple. Both participants grew up on the Westbank in New Orleans and had lived in the area for the majority of their lives. However, out of all of the cases studied, this family stayed away from New Orleans the longest, having evacuated to Texas where they lived for 2 and a half years. They had been back on the Westbank for six months when they participated in the study.

The interviews with Danielle and Greg produced four major themes consisting of two to three subthemes each. The family’s journey through the hurricane evacuation, moving to an unfamiliar location, adjusting to a foreign culture, and then returning to a changed home town is illustrated through the following thematic presentation of their collective voices:

Themes	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2	Subtheme 3
<b>“It was a whole new beginning”</b>	“I have a family to take care of”	“I really appreciate what they were doing for us”	“They was really ungrateful and crazy”
<b>“The good thing is we all still together”</b>	“We’re closer I think”	“The whole house to ourselves”	“I want friends, yeah”
<b>“Devastating to have to up and leave”</b>	“We missed home”	“Texas was real, real nice”	“People are so different now”
<b>“The Blessed Class”</b>	“As long as everything is paid and a roof’s over our head”	“Praying every day”	

*“It Was a Whole New Beginning”*

Danielle and Greg began their journey to Texas with their four children and another family in tow, two cars packed full with the possessions to sustain eight people for an undeterminable amount of time. Although they conveyed their forced evacuation from New Orleans with ambivalence, they embraced the trip on many levels as a fresh start. This theme details the components of their initial evacuation that they felt contributed to the experience as a whole. Their attitude about the evacuation was optimistic and is reflected in Greg’s statement, “it was a whole new beginning, so we were ready to start.” Three subthemes emerged as the couple described their experiences arriving at a shelter in Houston and then establishing a new life for their family in Texas, wherein they discussed how their own motivation played a role in their successful relocation, the importance of the assistance they received from the people in the Houston area, and their thoughts about the reaction of their fellow evacuees to their new host city.

*“I have a family to take care of.”*

Danielle and Greg arrived in Texas ready to get their new life started. They initially stayed with a friend of the family, but due to overcrowding in a small apartment, soon moved into a local church shelter where they stayed until they were able to rent their own home. The transition to the shelter was viewed as an opportunity by the couple. Greg explained that their leaving the apartment was friendly, but they “wanted [their] own [space] anyway.” Although the shelter was communal living, it allowed the family the opportunity to stay in their own room which was important because they describe themselves as “family oriented.” Throughout the interviews they reiterated that they embraced the opportunity for a “new beginning.” This sentiment was supported by artifact data notes. Danielle presented a Remax tote bag that she had filled with papers given to her at the shelter about where to find work, what the bus schedules were, local want ads, and real estate guides. She explained the bag contents – “The papers that I had brought with me [from New Orleans], I didn’t keep – I just had so much stuff packed in my truck. So, I just started all over with the stuff they gave me.”

Both Danielle and Greg expressed a value system rooted strongly in their ability to own their recovery progress. Central to this ownership was a motivation to immediately look for work and a home in the area. Greg demonstrated his strong internal locus of control, saying, “You can’t expect a job just to fall in your lap.” He also spoke about the importance he places on having employment:

I just adapt to my surroundings and I have to have a job – I have a family to take care of... We got there on a Sunday. Started looking that Monday. I just went riding around looking for temporary offices, temporary services, jobs that I’ve seen hiring. I just went in and put in applications.

Eventually, Greg was able to find work with a Houston branch of his New Orleans employer, Remax. The importance of this initial job to the family and their perception of their family identity was reiterated throughout the interview and supported by their bringing the tote that came from this job as artifact data.

The family also stressed that it was important to them to find a home rather than an apartment to begin their new life. Danielle explained, “We always had a little house – we didn’t live in an apartment or anything.” Both participants wanted to emulate some of the surroundings they had in New Orleans and thought it was important for their children to have that continuity – “Our kids are used to a house, a backyard where they can play and run and do whatever they want. That’s what I’m used to; that’s what she used to” (Greg). Therefore, upon arrival at the shelter while Greg was out looking for work, Danielle began the process of finding a family home – “Yeah, so we found a house and he got the job that same day.”

While the family was still in the shelter, they took pride in their ability to earn liberties and rewards by demonstrating their appreciation to the shelter volunteers. Danielle described their standing in the shelter and how they contributed to earning that status:

So we got through it together really and we did because everyone was to meet every day at one of the rooms. We make up our bed... we’d just help out like that, you know, just to show appreciation...So we got privilege. We was privileged. They gave all the kids cell phones and they treated us different because we act different.

Greg also explained how, in addition to contributing to the general upkeep of the shelter, the family made an effort to conduct themselves in specific ways that they viewed as indicative of higher class status. He said, “My mama always told me, you could have a quarter in your pocket. That don’t mean you have to look like you don’t have no money, because money attracts

money.” The children were encouraged by their parents to show respect to volunteers by speaking with “yes ma’ams, no ma’ams, pleases, thank yous” and Danielle and Greg felt that this resulted in benefits for the children – “Everybody likes those kids” (Danielle).

*“I really appreciate what they were doing for us.”*

While Danielle and Greg view their family as autonomously motivated, they consistently conveyed gratitude and appreciation for the many people they credit with helping them to transition to a new home in Texas. They spoke by name of the many volunteers who gave their time in the shelter and also told stories of community members who went out of their way to provide support to the new evacuees.

When reflecting on their time in the shelter, Danielle and Greg’s family remembered the attention they received from volunteers, the services the shelter provided to assist in establishing a new life, and the material goods that were given to evacuees. Danielle felt recognized as valuable when the volunteers would remember their names and when they would bring items to their room specifically to meet their individual needs. Additionally, the couple told in tandem of how nice the items they were given were:

Basically it was like Dillard’s shopping there. That’s what I called it – Dillard’s and Macy’s, everything that was in there was brand new on hangers (Danielle).

Brand new! (Greg).

Socks and, now – Baby! – we had so many underwears, just packs and packs (Danielle).

School supplies, book bags – everything that you need to start off again they had for you. (Greg).

In addition to the people who provided assistance through the shelter, Danielle and Greg met a number of Houston community members who offered both help and friendship to the



family as they attempted to adjust to their new surroundings. The couple spoke of “Joan,” “Nancy,” “Lori,” “Ruth,” “Chad,” “Marcia,” and a woman whose name escaped them they had met in a Walgreen’s parking lot. Many of these people invited Greg and Danielle along with their children into their homes for dinners or parties where they introduced the evacuees to their families. Danielle recounted how “Ruth” gave her family, “a thousand dollar check to give our [new] landlord, which he told me to keep it, you know, and get something for the kids or whatever.” When they, again finishing one another’s sentences, told the story of the woman from the Walgreen’s parking lot, video observation showed that they looked directly into one another’s eyes and smiled while they unraveled their memories. The couple recalled that the woman had identified them as evacuees by their license plates and all of the belongings packed high in their car. She gave them money, asked them to wait in the parking lot, and then went into the store, coming back out with supplies for the family. They stood in the parking lot talking with the stranger for, “like two hours” and ended up going to her house for dinner. Eventually, the woman and her family visited them in the shelter and they visited her in her home one more time. Greg looked at his hands and shook his head as he said, “That’s just straight up, people being nice.”

While all of the assistance the couple received was appreciated, they marveled at how there were reports on the national media of racist behavior against evacuees. Greg described their experiences – “The whole time I was out there, the whole time, not one – just seeing how it was – there was more white people helping than blacks. It was just – that’s the way it was for us anyway. And they were so cool.” They decided collectively that the helping experiences that meant the most to them were the personalized ones wherein people got to know them as people and looked past their race or status as evacuees – “Sharing what’s important about you, you

know? What do you like? And the things that make you feel good... Because you never know – you and that person may have a whole lot in common.”

*“They was really ungrateful and crazy.”*

Although Greg and Danielle both felt frustration directed at external assistance and agencies at times during their evacuation, they kept their expressions of irritation within the confines of their relationship rather than outwardly showing disapproval. Primarily, it was FEMA who created the most heartache for the couple when they wouldn’t provide any housing assistance to the family because, although the neighborhood and community surrounding their home was destroyed, the property itself had not taken on any water. Danielle spoke directly to Greg as she reflected on the experience, asking:

“They said, we’re not going to pay for you all because you have to go back to where you all was at because nothing happened to the house, remember?”

“Yeah, I remember. I said, go back where? We can’t go back there!” (Greg)

“Oh, God, I was so sick.” (Danielle)

However, despite the frustration that arose, the couple spoke of keeping a positive attitude by reclaiming the control they could – “So, that’s when we just wound up getting jobs” (Danielle).

Although they personally refrained from directing their frustration to the people assisting them, the couple reported that they regularly watched other evacuees whom they described as, “really ungrateful and crazy.” They felt that this behavior reflected poorly on all New Orleanians and throughout the interview they would return to the behavior of the other people in the shelter. Specifically, Greg expressed irritation at a lack of motivation he saw in his fellow evacuees:

They wasn’t really trying to better themselves at all, you know, just taking advantage of the things that the people were giving us to carry on with your life. You weren’t supposed

to lay around and just wait on them to do everything for you. They had everything for you to give to you to better yourself, but a lot of people just took the money... They acted like they were going to be there forever.

Danielle was most frustrated with the opportunism and laziness she felt the other people in the shelter displayed toward their hosts:

It just pissed me off because they was talking down about the people helping us. Because they had lunch, breakfast, you know, everything for you, but [the other evacuees] would get up and just leave their plates there. They were doing nothing – drinking beer, had drugs coming through there, throwing the beers in people’s yards, wearing cut-offs, just like – it was ridiculous!

In addition to being ungrateful, Danielle and Greg mentioned that their particular shelter was in a church and they felt that the behavior of the other evacuees was disrespectful to both the volunteers as well as, “to God.” It was important for them that as a component of their own identity they differentiate themselves from the people they saw as unmotivated. Greg illustrated this point by saying,

But the people couldn’t wait to get back here – ‘I want to go back home. I want to go back home.’ Okay, you know why you want to go back home? ‘Cause you wasn’t doing nothin’ here and now you scared of change. A lot of people scared of change. I’m not. I love change. Always a new beginning for me.

*“The Good Thing is We All Still Together”*

The greatest strengths and struggles for Danielle and Greg were their relationships with other people. They described themselves as “people people” and throughout the interview spoke specifically about people and interactions that had shaped or continue to shape their experiences

throughout the hurricane recovery. As we explored their family's hurricane experience and the conversation extended into varying tentacles of thought, each new idea contained their connections to other people as an underlying component. Danielle and Greg felt challenged when they faced the prospect of living in a town with no ready-made social connections, but found solace in their increasingly strong family bonds as well as their ability to spark new friendships – “everywhere we go, we meet people” (Danielle). The discussions directly addressing personal relationships broke into three subthemes: the strength of their relationship and the closeness of their family, the changing family dynamics that came with the intersection of aging teenagers exploring a new environment, and the experiences the couple had negotiating a foreign culture while developing new friendships.

*“We’re closer now I think.”*

The initial evacuation created stress for the family because of the uncertainty of where members of their extended family would go. Although Greg and Danielle had their four children with them, they temporarily couldn't locate Greg's mother, creating a great deal of fear within the family as a whole. Greg lamented, “It was just messed up,” when they were unable to locate her by phone and no other members of his family knew if she had evacuated or where she might have gone. Danielle explained – “It was devastating because she lives by herself. We couldn't find her. We went to the Red Cross [in Texas] and then they found her.” However, once the family was all accounted for, Danielle and Greg drew strength from what they saw as their good fortune that their family had not been devastated in the ways others around them had:

We didn't lose anyone. Nobody died. I have a couple of friends who drowned, others who were in jail. Older people I know who's houses was already bad off – it's worse

now and they can't seem to get help. A lot of people went on drugs ... but we all together (Danielle).

Additionally, Greg had the opportunity to expand his extended family while in Texas by making contact with his, "brother from another mother." The couple established a new relationship with the brother, whom Greg described as "a remarkable person," and his wife, and now view their family as a larger whole.

The couple reflected on the way in which the storm benefited them directly by increasing their connection with one another and as Greg stated, "We closer now, I think." They also said that in addition to each other, "we had the kids – they was always into sports or had some kind of play... I know we always busy with them" (Danielle). Video observation data demonstrated physical representations of this closeness, including notations on the couple lightly touching one another as they spoke, often turning the conversation to each other and away from the interviewer, and playful physical shoves when they disagreed on topics. The discussion on their relationship was a volleyed effort and both Danielle and Greg smiled while they explained:

You know what? Wherever me and her – as long as I'm with her, everything's fine with me. You know, it's my partner. Bonnie and Clyde (Greg).

Hansel and Gretel (Danielle).

We make good wherever we go together... When you've got the friend, and... (Greg).

He's my friend. I slapped him in the head, he slap me in the head *laugh* (Danielle).

Yeah, I would rather not deal with anybody else (Greg).

This intimate bond between partners was the base for the family's successful transition into their new environment and has enabled a positive return experience to New Orleans despite many identified challenges.

*"The whole house to ourselves."*

The family-centered focus of Danielle and Greg's lives was evident throughout the interview process. Their home was decorated with family photos and paintings and the children's awards and diplomas were prominently displayed on a three-tiered glass display shelf in the front room of the home. During two of the interviews, one of the children wandered in and out of the house asking questions and casually laughing and joking with them. They spoke at length of the pride they hold in their children's accomplishments, describing all three of Danielle's children as "good" and saying that "they never get in no trouble." Moreover, when they spoke of the move to Texas, one of the points they both returned to regularly was how the children pushed them to find a home so that they could enroll in school:

Yeah, a lot of people was like, 'Oh, I'm not putting my kid into school here.' But I said, 'Well, my kids is bugging us every day, bugging the people [at the shelter] – We want to go to school.' So a school happened to be right in walking distance... So that's how they went.

Both parents expressed pride in the children's drive to finish their education and showed me their high school diplomas on two separate occasions.

However, despite the close connection between parents and children, the move to Texas coincided with Danielle's three children reaching later adolescence, and the family began to spend more time apart as the children established their emerging adult independence. This was not seen as a negative for the family, but rather was reflected on as both a component of the independence Danielle and Greg had fostered as parents and an opportunity for the couple to spend more time with each other. Danielle's daughter returned home to New Orleans and lived by herself during the last year that the family was in Texas in order to graduate with her high

school class. As her older boys began to spend more time outside of the home, the couple watched with detached curiosity and amusement. She described her sons' social life, saying, "They go party all night," and both she and Greg chuckled when she reported, "He up till five o'clock with 'em, you know?"

The blossoming independence for the couple sparked excitement and they began to guard their couple-time from interruptions, encouraging the kids to find things to do outside of the home. They told a story about how they were embarrassed when a sign they put up for their children to stay out was discovered by a neighbor, and as they remembered the events both doubled over in laughter on the couch:

I tell my kids, 'You've got to go because you punished.' 'Why?' 'Because I want it just to be us for a change.' You know, so I put a sign on the door: DO NOT KNOCK ON MY FUCKING DOOR! So we could see 'em coming... When our Baby and his best friend and his mom and dad come over, and they knock on the door and they seen the sign, so they left. I said, 'Oh SHIT! They done seen the sign!'

Once they returned to New Orleans to stay only Danielle's youngest son remained in the family home. Her daughter continued to live with friends and her middle son they described as "a wanderer" and "a nomad" staying primarily with friends and relatives around New Orleans. However, the biggest adjustment for the family was the life cycle off-time leaving of Greg's son, whom they referred to only as "Baby." The couple had custody of Baby since his infancy and at the time of the interviews he was reported to be 11 years old. While they were in Texas they discovered that Baby's mother had been released from prison and was living with a new child in a nearby town. The couple decided that he should live with his mother and explained how they agonized over the decision:

He had started being real bad in school and once getting his dad in jail. So it was like, maybe he needs to be around his mom and realize (Danielle).

He needs the glasses on the other side (Greg).

So, we asked her to do something for him and she didn't want to. We're like, oh – you got to realize your responsibility, too (Danielle).

It's time for you to step up, and she's like, 'I don't have anywhere for him to sleep, and I said, 'Well, you have to find out where' (Greg).

But, he's doing fine (Danielle).

Yeah, he's very, very good (Greg).

Although Baby has visited New Orleans since the family has moved back, he didn't tell Danielle and Greg he was there and they only found out when someone they knew saw him in a nearby neighborhood. Although Danielle had a slight frown when she said, "He keeps in touch with the kids more than us," they immediately praised his independence. She explained, "That's how we raised him – We love you. If you need us, we there. But enjoy yourself and I'll see you when I'll see you."

*"I want friends, yeah."*

In addition to the family ties that give strength to Greg and Danielle, they consider a strong community rooted in a social network of friends to be a crucial component of a satisfactory life. Having lived the majority of their lives in an overwhelmingly African American section of New Orleans, the move to Texas challenged the couple to establish friendships with people of different races and cultures than they were accustomed to. While they worked to make sense of the cultural shifts, they approached the experience with a curious, humor-based stance that was accompanied by a generally laissez faire attitude regarding differences.



The home that the family rented was located in a mostly Mexican and Vietnamese section of Houston. When recounting their neighborhood and the developing friendships, they spoke often in categories to discuss the people they met but were primarily complimentary of their neighbors and laughed light-heartedly at cultural differences. The majority of their immediate neighbors were “Mexicans,” and Greg felt that they “watched out for each other.” The couple enjoyed the communal gatherings in the neighborhood and readily became part of the parties:

Remember the guy with the Budweiser Lights in his garage? He had the fluorescents, remember? (Danielle)

The Mexicans love to party! But I mean, they’re real nice. On Thursdays all the families get together. And everybody’s partying in their garage (Greg).

Danielle addressed the language barrier with the Vietnamese shop owners in their community, saying that even though they couldn’t speak the same language, “They know what I wanted which was cool. They couldn’t say [Greg’s] name, so they’d ‘Where’s Paco today?’” Greg appreciated the nick-name, saying, “I liked it.”

The strongest cultural differences the couple experienced were between themselves and the “real rich” “Caucasian” parents of their children’s friends in school. There was one couple in particular that they developed a friendship with, but said, “They’re wild, man – wild people. They go to strip clubs. She go to strip clubs with him – Then they tell you about it. I’m like – It’s a little bit too wild for me!” As Danielle thought about all of the different people she met and developed relationships with, she concluded, “It was enlightening. [Pause]. But it was hard, too.”

Eventually, the couple established some friendships that they consider to be permanent and significant. Greg described a co-worker – “A White guy – a real Texan, wearing nice boots, fifteen hundred dollar boots, and to everyone he’s, ‘Hello, Darlin’” and spoke about him as “my

man.” They had a reunion in New Orleans planned for the month following the interview. When the couple finished talking about all of the various friends they had made in Texas – those that were casual acquaintances and those they maintained – Greg declared, “It was good. I enjoyed it. I’d like to – I’d go back today.”

*“Devastating to Have to Up and Leave”*

In addition to the thematic concentration on the individual relationships that impact their lives, Danielle and Greg expressed decided ambivalence concerning their preferred community. Although they “were contemplating about getting ready to get out” of New Orleans prior to the storm, the unexpected intense departure brought about feelings of regret and nostalgia while they simultaneously embraced the abundance of opportunities they believed Texas provided. The couple remains undecided about which community is a better fit and where they should establish a permanent home. Danielle struggled to articulate her conflicted feelings – “It was like - - - you gain one thing, but you lost so much at the same time.” Their reflections on the benefits and drawbacks of each community produced three subthemes centered on an attachment to New Orleans, a newfound love for Texas, and the ways in which their New Orleans community has shifted following the storm.

*“We missed home.”*

The initial realization that the impending hurricane would require their evacuation was “devastating” for Danielle and Greg. In addition to fearing the loss of their home, Danielle had recently invested a large amount of newly received back child support into their rented property on the Westbank. As she described her loss, tears welled up in her eyes – “What bothered me was... I went for all these years [with no money] and then here – I put it all in this here house.”

On the heels of a family reunion that epitomized the family's intermingled relationship between extended family and a long-time community home, the family packed their things to evacuate.

Throughout their time in Texas, Greg said, "We missed home." The children in particular had a hard time adjusting to the new schools and new friends, missing their New Orleans friends "more than anything." While all of the children were anxious to get back to school once they had arrived in Texas, their integration into a new school community was challenging. Danielle said, "Our daughter, she met a few girls, but she didn't like it. She wanted to come back."

Additionally, after only a few weeks in a new school, their middle son began to struggle academically. He made the decision to withdraw from the schools in Texas and autonomously completed a home-school course enabling him to earn a high school diploma.

As the couple discussed their own feelings about their hometown, Greg poignantly stated, "[Texas] was nice, but we missed home...that was where we born and raised." In addition to listing the extended family members who they could no longer see, the couple discussed at length the cultural components of New Orleans that eventually drew them back:

You know, New Orleans, we never close. Like in Texas at twelve o'clock, everything's shut down. On Sundays you can't buy beer until... (Greg)

After twelve! (Danielle)

After twelve. And we were being there on Sunday mornings – football coming on, you know? (Greg)

Got the barbecue... (Danielle)

We've got to get the game, got to get the beer cold, and we were getting in line and it's like – we're early birds! (Greg)

Artifact data supported the couple's continued pining for New Orleans despite their voluntarily remaining in Texas for over two years. Greg presented "Little Man" – a statue of an African American Jazz musician playing the saxophone with 'New Orleans 2006' engraved in the base – as his artifact for the study. The couple smiled as they remembered finding him at a salvage sale while driving down a Texas highway. Greg remarked, "I got to get him" and explained the draw of the New Orleans tourist memorabilia:

It was real personal for me to have something like this because if you go on Bourbon Street you always see a guy playing the saxophone. It just meant a lot to me when I seen it because I never thought I would be back there. So I said, 'Well, if we never go back, I'll have something from New Orleans.' Nice Little Man...

The only marked tension between the couple arose during their presentation of Little Man when they discussed where they will eventually live. Danielle complained, "We once said, once the kids graduate we ought to be leaving [New Orleans.] I would, but now all the kids graduating, now he want to stay here." Greg initially responded by saying, "Now that they leaving we have opportunities to go and do what we want to do now," but as Danielle continued to push for a commitment to return to Texas, Greg looked to his feet and quietly uttered, "You never know."

*"It was real, real nice."*

Despite the impenetrable ties that eventually guided the family to return to New Orleans, their recollections of Texas as both a location and a community were overwhelmingly positive. The initial ride to Texas was full of anxiety and doubt about what the future held and they joined the contra-flow traffic to Texas because Danielle had a friend in the Houston area who loved the city. Upon arrival in the city, their awaiting friend did not answer her phone. Exhausted, the family pulled into "an IHOP" looking for a place to rest. Their first encounter with a Texas

native was representative of all of the help they would receive throughout their stay – “We went in and told the guy what our situation was and he fed us. He fed us and everything, told us we could sleep in the parking lot in our vehicles, which was cool. Able was his name.”

The reflections they offered on Texas were complimentary about everything from the people to the neighborhood they lived in to the schools their youngest two children attended. Greg spoke about the people as “just nicer” and Danielle reminisced about their neighborhood, saying, “Oh, I loved it, just loved it. It was real nice.” As they explained the schools that their children attended, they expressed a longing for the resources available in a more affluent community like Houston – “They have everything – fencing, an Olympic-sized swimming pool, and my daughter, she’s into cosmetology, and they have a whole building just for cosmetology – nails, hair, it worked out perfect.” Greg in particular enjoyed the sprawling developing Metropolis that distinguishes Houston from the more historic focus of New Orleans – “You could drive – just ride till you get tired. You know, you could see so much different. I like all the land. I like seeing the cows, the different stuff like that. It was just really different.” Additionally, while Greg’s artifact demonstrated a connection to New Orleans, Danielle’s Remax tote artifact represented her love for their newer Texas home – “The first thing I got there... I always think about [Texas.]”

*“People are so different now.”*

Complicating the ambivalence for Danielle and Greg regarding where to live their new empty-nest lives are the changes that they see in their New Orleans community. Upon finally making the decision to return home, they anticipated a return to the familiar and comfortable New Orleans they had lived in most of their lives. However, the couple believes that the New Orleans they knew before they left may have permanently receded with the hurricane flood

waters. Although they did not own the home they lived in prior to leaving, they believed the property owners would have kept their possessions for them to retrieve when they got back. They arrived in their old Harvey neighborhood looking to collect appliances and furniture that would have remained undamaged in a home that didn't flood – “They had moved someone else in there who had tore everything up. It was just ridiculous, sold our refrigerator, stole the microwave.” Although they had the opportunity to move into Greg's mother's home following her move to a residential facility, they were frustrated by their inability to bring their possessions with them:

It was more of a mental thing for me, I guess, more mental, because we knew we would get more material things... It was just like pictures and memories that you can't replace, stuff like that... But then sometimes, it'll hit (Greg).

Yeah, sometimes I get, we'll say, aggravated (Danielle).

It's traumatizing (Greg).

In addition to the loss of material possessions and coping with the feelings of anger and frustration that accompany that loss, the couple spoke about the change in the people of their community. Danielle described a feeling of heightened irritability in the people in town, lamenting, “The people are so different now. You get a job, the people are so nasty. It's just – you're uptight. You're always uptight because of all of it.” There have also been shifts in demographics in the New Orleans neighborhoods that have led to a feeling of increased vulnerability for the couple in a neighborhood they have known for their whole lives. Greg explained the changes:

Over in the Ninth Ward... there's nothing there. They're not even rebuilding or anything and all of those people are just ass-out, so now all the people that was living over there, they came back here from wherever they were. They're all on this side [of the Mississippi

River] now, so the crime rate is even higher... The Westbank have more killings than anywhere in the world now. They have more killings in New Orleans than in Iraq.

Danielle described a shooting that had happened on the corner just blocks from their street the week before the interviews in which a man was shot and killed in the middle of the day. Video observation of the couple while they spoke about their neighborhood showed that they reached across the space separating them on the sofa, touching fingers while Danielle said, "There just nothing over here no more."

### *"The Blessed Class"*

Danielle and Greg connect their familial strength to a positive outlook and a reliance on spirituality that they see as the driving force in their lives. Although they identify struggles connected with their lack of financial resources, their analysis of their social class status was focused on thankfulness as opposed to challenge. As the couple untangled their beliefs and assumptions about what it means to be part of what they initially termed "working class," they spoke primarily of the reliance they have on spirituality as a means for persevering. Within this theme, two identifiable subthemes emerged which include a detailed description of what it means to be "blessed" within the context of their social class, and a discussion on their spiritual connection to a God that serves as their guide and protector.

*"As long as everything is paid and a roof's over our head."*

When asked to discuss their social class status, Greg and Danielle spoke to the benefits of being a member of their social class. Initially, Greg used the term "working class" with Danielle suggesting "Lower middle class" as a possibility. Financially, the couple spoke about a desire to have more economic stability, stating, "We're trying not to live paycheck to paycheck" while

lamenting the struggles that come with unsecure employment. When the first interview was conducted Greg had just been laid off, but even though the interviews were conducted three days in a row, by the third interview he had secured a new job to begin the next week. The family also had their water turned off while we were there and Greg explained that he could turn the water back on illegally until they had enough money to pay the back bills. However, despite their reports of an inability to keep up with bills, the couple accepted this as “the way it is” and did not discuss any associated negative feelings. Video observation data demonstrated body language that was casual and relaxed during this discussion wherein both Greg and Danielle sat comfortably and slightly slouched on the couch, with smiles and raised eyebrows that were consistent with an untroubled demeanor.

As the discussion surrounding class status evolved, Greg constructed a term he felt was a better way to identify how they perceive themselves, saying, “Like I say, that’s the day as long as everything is paid and a roof’s over our head and we’ve got food, I call it blessed. The Blessed Class.” Both Danielle and Greg embraced this label and decided that it should be the identifier used in the study for their family – “Yeah, Blessed is better.” The couple acknowledged the hardship of Greg’s job loss, saying, “That sucks” (Greg), but immediately followed by identifying his alternate feelings of being fortunate to find work so quickly – “But I start working Thursday, so, again, Blessed” (Greg). The couple believes that their positive outlook provided them with the strength to get through the hurricane and subsequent recovery and continues to carry them day by day. Greg connected being blessed with looking to the positive things the future will hold and said, “You know, since all that has happened, we just moved on, try not to live in the past.”



*“Praying every day.”*

Danielle and Greg emphasized deference to the Will of God as the primary factor that drove their decisions throughout the storm and as the commanding force in their lives as they stood at the time of the interviews. The initial evacuation experience was clearly connected to divine intervention for the couple, as illustrated by their ending up in a church shelter:

We didn't know how long we were going to stay. We just was praying every day and what else – what better place could you be? You're living in God's house, so we prayed every day that everything was going to work out. That's where he put us at, so I just went day by day, but you know, we got there on a Sunday! (Greg)

As the time to leave the shelter approached, they were torn about where they would end up. FEMA offered assistance for apartment living, but the couple wanted a house for their family. Once again, they put the decision in the Lord's hands – “We would've moved in one if that's where the Lord wanted us to be, but that wasn't where I would decide for us. So – He always give you what your desire is” (Greg). Their connection to Houston was strengthened when Danielle found a church she could attend with her kids, although she felt a pull back to New Orleans because, “I missed my church I had out here really.” Now back in New Orleans the family is once again part of the church community they left behind two and a half years before.

As they looked to the future and where they might live as the children move out of the home, again God was considered to be the ultimate authority in the decision. Even though Greg “would like to go to Texas” to live, he argued that making a specific plan – “on such and such a date I'm going to be moving” – would be impractical because they have no way of knowing what path God will put them on. Greg described how he comes to life decisions:

For me, I don't make any plans. I'm where God wants me to be. That's how I look at it.

Every time I try to plan something then it just don't work out. So, I just let – I just follow him now. If he want me to leave, I'll leave.

For Greg and Danielle, this faith in God and his plans for their family has thus far provided nothing but “blessings.” There was an underlying fear that autonomous secular decision making might strip their fortune from them, thus they “give it up” and wait for a sign.

### *SCWM Analysis*

The social class worldview of Danielle and Greg is rooted in their experiences as having been long time members of a social group with similar financial resources, cultural beliefs, and expectations for behavior. As life-long residents of the New Orleans Westbank prior to the storm, Danielle and Greg were exposed almost entirely to individuals who shared similar class-based beliefs and as an outgrowth of that experience, the couple expressed confident and assured beliefs surrounding their decisions. Although the move to Houston required that the couple come in contact with many people who were of different social classes, neither participant expressed experiences of receiving classist messages. They negotiated their new interactions secure in the confidence that their value systems and worldviews are valid, even as they became friends with “the rich, rich” people of their child's educational community. As evidence of their acceptance within this community, Danielle told of Baby's relationship with a particular white family who “loved him to death.” This enjoining of their family into groups they considered to be of respectable class status was driven by internalized class messages that directed their behavior in a way that they believed would secure their acceptance. However, although they did not state or imply that they experienced feelings of classism, their eventual return to New Orleans and a

more homeostatic community may indicate a certain level of discomfort with living in an unfamiliar class system.

The construction of Danielle and Greg's social class worldview is rooted in a strong faith-based belief system that holds that God will provide while it is up to the individual to take advantages of the opportunities laid before them. Both Greg and Danielle exhibited expressions of downward classism as they differentiated their family from individuals they felt did not embrace opportunity. The couple frequently described themselves as "different" from the other evacuees at the shelter and valued the recognition of shelter volunteers who provided them with what they believed were rewards such as "a full bed – not no twin like the others got" based on their demonstration of these values through behavior. Additionally, their description of the ways in which they dressed, spoke, and behaved in a manner intentionally consistent with people who "got money" illustrated their attempts to construct an internalized homeostatic worldview in which they were separate from the individuals around them.

In addition to a strong faith in God and belief that maintaining employment is a crucial component of living, the couple makes decisions based on an internalized guide to what is morally correct as opposed to a having a strong reverence for community laws. They spoke negatively of people who didn't display appropriate manners in the shelter as "outrageous" and mentioned several ways in which those individuals broke the law. However, when my camera man mentioned that he would like to have a Crescent City Water Meter cover, Danielle walked to the one in their sidewalk, glanced around, and said, "I get it for you if you want it." Additionally, Greg's assertion that he could restore water to their home illegally was not accompanied by a sense of shame. The couple's worldview allows for decisions to be made based on an internal measure of value set by a faith in God rather than laws that may represent

values not held by their immediate community. The couple's social class worldview is reasonably secure and, while challenged by the forced evacuation following the hurricane, has provided them with a sense of pride in self that they have maintained throughout the recovery experience.

*Edgar and Susan*

The interviews with Edgar and Susan were conducted at a road-side table on a French Quarter sidewalk just outside of a local bar. Although the couple had originally suggested one of their favorite Quarter coffee houses as a meeting place, the punk music pumping from the imposing corner speakers prevented me from recording the audio, so we walked down Decatur Street until we found a comfortable spot and returned there for each assembly. The couple's dress was casual and visibly consistent with their status as the youngest couple interviewed for the study – Susan age 26 and Edgar age 20. The interviews were held at midday and the heat of a New Orleans summer set the tone for the sedate and reflective conversations we enjoyed. Edgar's arm remained in a cast throughout the interviews although he referenced the injury only once to describe how the mugging that had broken his arm symbolized his growing disenchantment with the city.

Prior to the storm, Edgar lived with his mother in the Kansas house he had grown up in but he adopted New Orleans as a home when he arrived two weeks following the storm, "looking for work." Susan is "from Southeastern Texas" and had moved to New Orleans for the financial opportunities of a bigger city some years before the hurricane. The couple met one another two months after Katrina hit and currently live in a shared French Quarter apartment. They described themselves as "Caucasian" and as "part-time college students" "taking a break from classes" who were employed as a construction worker and waitress respectively. The following five

themes evolved out of their three interviews and collectively they reveal how two lives merged together around the natural disaster that has forever altered them:

Themes	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2	Subtheme 3
<b>“Running from the hurricane”</b>	“You’re not going to die in my house”	“The city was in darkness”	
<b>“Money is useless in a city under water”</b>	“Instead of being separated”	“This is America. What happened?”	
<b>“Living in New Orleans”</b>	“Lacking a lot around here”	“Everybody’s doing their own thing”	
<b>“We don’t have money”</b>	“If I’d had more opportunity”	“We go to work and pay our bills”	
<b>“What I am now”</b>	“Now I feel suffocated”	“We talk”	“Nothing like a good natural disaster to mold your character”

### *“Running From the Hurricane”*

Throughout their interviews, Edgar and Susan described lives filled with feelings of anxiety and desperation. As the interview data began to congeal into thematic threads, the experience for Susan of living through the hurricane combined with the couple’s challenges with adjusting very soon after the storm to life in a “lawless” city began to emerge as a central component of their ongoing feelings that they have little control over their lives. This theme elucidates the couple’s connection between the hurricane and the “chaos” that surrounded them during that time. Susan spoke of her belief that she had no way to extract herself from the impact of the storm, saying, “I felt like I was running from the hurricane for a while.” Two subthemes are present; one in which Susan describes living through the actual storm and the other where the couple describes the emotions they experienced as they returned to a newly devastated city and community.

*"You're not going to die in my house."*

Although Edgar did not live in New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina hit the city, Susan was living alone in an apartment in a working class area of town known as "Gentilly." As she prepared to "hunker down" for the storm rather than evacuate, Susan's landlord came to her and insisted she leave – "I didn't know any better and she came to board [the house] up and she said, 'No. You're not going to die in my house. You're coming with me now.'" The duo did not evacuate far, choosing to stay in Gulfport, Mississippi where the landlord had family. However, the Gulf Coast of Mississippi was hit just as hard by the storm as New Orleans and Susan ended up "riding it out" despite her evacuation. She described the scene in the Gulfport home:

[We were hit] pretty hard, yeah. We were hunkered underneath mattresses in the hallway at one point because the pressure in the house was so great. No water [came in] the house. We took a walk as soon as the winds were calm enough for us to and the water line was probably about 3 and a half, four blocks away from where we were.

For a few days following the storm, Susan stayed with her landlord's family and absorbed the devastation around her. She described her experience as a "frustrating" and "chaotic" and this sense of tumult was supported by artifact data. Susan brought a burned *Green Day* CD she had with her during those days in Gulfport following the storm. She described how it is intertwined with her memory of that time:

In Gulfport we had a swimming pool in the back yard. Thank God we were able to bucket water and flush the toilet. I sat out at that pool. It was so hot! I think the day after Katrina was the hottest day we have ever experienced in our lives. I remember being in that pool, just listening to this album over and over.

As she listened to the music on a battery powered CD player, she found a powerful connection to the lyrics – “There’s one song in particular where he screams ‘Somebody get me a beer!’ And I remember turning that up really loud and I screamed it with him, and it’s still – I can still feel the same thing.”

Following the storm, Susan’s landlord left Gulfport to check on other family in the area and Susan found herself at a loss as to where she should go. She described her aimless trek, recalling, “She just brought me to the interstate with my things and I hitchhiked.” As she walked down the near-empty interstate, she decided to attempt to return to her home state of Texas. During the artifact interview she lamented she no longer had the item she wanted to bring – her hitchhiking sign from that solitary walk:

It’s a cardboard cutout of Jim Morrison, the mug shot, one of his arrests in Florida. I had got it in some head shop, I don’t remember, but I just took a big Sharpe marker and wrote ‘Jackson Airport – Please Help!’ with a peace sign on the side. I just wanted to get out of there and it got me the hell out... A black family picked me up, kids and everything.

Although Susan’s father bought her an airline ticket to get from Jackson to Texas, she arrived just in time to stay with her family through Hurricane Rita. Again, destruction surrounded her and her “family’s house was destroyed.” For a week following Rita, she stayed with her family to clean up, but was anxious to get away from reminders of hurricane devastation. She described her ambivalence about where to physically be, recalling, “I had to chop down trees in the yard and all of that and I just wanted to go and try to get back to normal.” Approximately one month following Katrina, Susan returned to New Orleans. However, her love for the city is now powerfully shaped by her fear of another storm. Observation of the video-recorded interview showed that Susan bit the fingernails of the hand where she held a cigarette as

she spoke about her plans to leave New Orleans – “We’re going to get out. We have to get out of here soon... I have friends – they’ll never leave this city... but I don’t feel the same way anymore.”

*“The city was in darkness.”*

Susan returned to and Edgar arrived in New Orleans very soon following the storm. Although the population at large was not permitted to enter the city for the first four weeks after the levees collapsed, Edgar moved to his new home town just two weeks into the recovery as part of a team of clean-up workers. Susan re-entered the city as soon as she was able to secure a pass as a former resident. For both participants, the initial chaos of the city provoked a fear and distrust that continues to shape their perceptions of their environment. Edgar described what it was like for him to become a part of the “lawlessness” around him:

When I first came here I stayed in a tent. There was no housing available. Most of the city was in darkness. There was no power. There were Army MPs rolling around all hours of the night. There were armed checkpoints. It was really, really scary, honestly. Susan depicted the combination of a demolished and non-functional city with the escalating crime and victimization of citizens as “devastating.” Edgar recalled, “There was a lot of looting going on... people were getting shot at and shot and robbed and killed and a lot of women were getting raped.” He paused and then shook his head, extending the concrete reality of a loss of electricity to a metaphor for the mood of the people – “It seemed like it kind of darkened the whole city a little bit.”

As the rebuilding process began in earnest, Edgar continued to grapple with the behavior he saw around him. He expressed pride connected with his work and saw it as an opportunity to help people who had “lost everything” begin to find hope for a new life. However, many of the



men he worked with took the opportunity to engage in criminal activities and video observation showed that Edgar looked skyward as he spoke about that time in the recovery:

I can't really see [myself] looting. Like, looting is definitely something I would never do because like these people have lost everything and I'm going to go in there and try to take something? We worked on those two-story houses on the lakefront... and everything upstairs was kind of left... A lot of looting was going on in those houses... I don't see – it's kind of – it's very, very sad.

The distrust that began to develop for Edgar and Susan of the people in their community remained salient at the time of the interviews. Susan spoke of the current state of New Orleans as “the wild, wild west.” She explained that they still perceive their community to be in a state of chaos, saying, “It still feels pretty lawless around here inside the city. It does.” The couple spoke emphatically when they discussed the crime around them and Edgar lamented, “I think it's gotten progressively worse and there's not a whole lot being done about it.” Subsequently, the couple holds back from community involvement because, as Edgar explained, becoming a part of the society around them would be “taking a big chance.”

*“Money is Useless in a City Under Water”*

Although in many ways Edgar and Susan portrayed a sense of solidarity between themselves that is separate from their community at large, the experience of the storm also constructed for them a brief sense of classless community. An integral component of this shared bond was the failure of outside agencies, primarily the local and federal governments, to provide the resources and assistance that they felt they needed to recover. Edgar described the communal experience in the weeks following the storm by saying, “I mean, money is useless in a city under water.” This theme explores the importance Edgar and Susan put on access to resources during a

time of crisis and is divided into subthemes discussing the dissolution and subsequent reinstatement of social class structures and the community experience of feeling abandoned by helping agencies.

*“Instead of being separated.”*

Edgar and Susan described a communal feeling that developed immediately following the storm when people of varying class statuses worked together to share information. Susan said, “As much ugly as there has been, there has been – there was assistance... I’ve seen a lot of that.” They spoke of this assistance as having been generated from within the community. Edgar described a feeling of shared responsibility wherein “everybody [was] willing to help each other.” However, as time continued to press on the city and people remained unable to return to a life of “normalcy,” the couple saw that access to resources began to splinter.

The dissolution of the bonded community that developed in the wake of the hurricane began to become palpable for Edgar as the initial flood of funding dried up and people were required to look for assistance without explicit guidance. He explained this division, saying,

Well, I mean, after the hurricane the access was easier to do then than, say, like six months after the hurricane. The access for funds at first was definitely made here, and definitely to everybody, white, black ... [but then when] you’ve already evacuated and then you’re trying to get funds or something...

As the couple saw funding distributed differently based on many different components of social class, they noticed developing resentment within the community that served to divide the formerly united New Orleanians. They too expressed frustration at others who they saw as given more aid by the government than they received:

FEMA was taking care of everything [for them] so it's not like they chose to come back here and live in an abandoned house... They lived off the government for a good long while. Probably still a lot of them are getting all kind of assistance from [FEMA] wherever they got relocated to.

This division within the community based on access to resources was one part of the separation that began to develop for Edgar and Susan from their community and contributed to the isolation that was evidenced throughout the interviews.

*"This is America. What happened?"*

For Susan and Edgar, their inability to adequately access resources was representative of the experiences of many of their fellow evacuees and, although they portrayed a city divided three years post-hurricane, they placed the onus of responsibility for this communal suffering on different arms of the government. Repeatedly, they described disgust with the actions and inactions of their local civil authorities. Susan began to experience disbelief in her local leaders as she watched the news coverage prior to the storm:

I'm in my house and I'm just totally watching the hurricane come in and they were doing live interviews. They're showing the hurricane and [New Orleans Mayor Ray] Nagin looks at a reporter – straight in the eyes with sweat – and he looks like he's got a crisis.

'You want to trade jobs with me right now? Would you please trade jobs with me?' This is live television. He was supposed to – he was going to be responsible for us and help us out!

Both participants littered the interviews with frustration at what they perceived to be governmental incapability and a lack of responsiveness. Susan demanded to know why there was "no, go stand on the street corner and we'll come pick you up and get you the hell out of here"

while Edgar explained the need for increased assistance as he saw it because, "I'm not racist, it's just that [there are] a lot of people in general [in New Orleans] that are government dependent."

The couple believed that the government had added responsibility to these citizens and ultimately blames government failure for the faltering community that surrounds them.

Edgar rhetorically asked, "This is America. What happened?" Susan suggested that her experience with Hurricane Rita in Texas was much less traumatic because of an impressive response by the local government – "Texas government, local officials, they handled [Rita] in a much different organized fashion and I saw that." However, the couple also spoke of the lack of empathy displayed by FEMA officials and how that contributed to continued suffering. Susan recalled "the 350 square foot apartment I was living in was one-thousand-four-hundred-and-fifty dollars" because habitable apartments were so scarce, but when she appealed to FEMA for continued assistance she was met with hostility and no help – "It was horrible." Edgar philosophized about what he would have liked to have seen rather than the detached FEMA workers they felt offered little understanding:

Just provide me with whatever you want done. I'm manpower. I'm here for you...and gather more information about the person first...so it doesn't just feel like a stranger is just sitting here asking you about your whole situation... [don't] just come in and assume.

This lack of recognition of the human experience seemed to underlie all of the frustrations that Edgar and Susan reported with the other players in their hurricane experience, from the other workers in Edgar's crew, to local government officials, to the FEMA workers assigned to work with the evacuees.

*“Living in New Orleans”*

For Edgar and Susan, their experience with the hurricane is inextricably connected to their relationship with the community of New Orleans. Although Edgar arrived in New Orleans following the storm, he left Kentucky at sixteen years old and has lived all of what he considers to be his adult life in this new home town. Susan identifies New Orleans as representative of her burgeoning independence as well, having come to New Orleans on the precipice of her own adulthood and having established her autonomous identity within the city limits. Their relationship with the town is complicated and vacillates between a reverence for the unique culture and disenchantment with an increasing resentment for the ways in which the city has changed. Two subthemes were evident within this larger theme in which the couple discussed how their views on the city have morphed over the last three years and where they elaborated on the increasing isolation they feel from the people who are their neighbors.

*“Lacking a lot around here.”*

When they speak of the New Orleans that welcomed them as eager teenagers on the verge of adulthood, both Edgar and Susan reminisce fondly. Susan plainly stated, “Oh – I love this city,” while Edgar elaborated:

I really like the city. I used to really say I liked the people here because they are like nobody I ever met in my life. They’re like the live and let live and not bothering me – just happy and they don’t judge anything.

Artifact data supported this love for the city and their home in the French Quarter. Edgar brought a pair of pants that he has worn throughout his work in hurricane re-construction, and as he pointed to a paint stain he smiled to Susan and said, “This is from when we painted our apartment.”

However, the devastation of the hurricane and the recovery has left the couple feeling that they are, “lacking a lot around here.” Susan reported frustration with the stymied process of the city’s redevelopment, saying, “I just feel like it should be further along in three years than it is now.” They spoke both of traditional rebuilding objectives, mentioning the need for a local discount market such as Wal-mart four times in the interviews and discussing how Susan has been unable to get back into the technical school she was in prior to the storm because the location has moved, “to a portable building” not convenient to where she lives. However, they also looked to the government to provide some sort of activities in the city that would allow for cognitive and emotional release. The financial hardship created by the storm has taken a toll on the couple’s ability to pay to entertain themselves and they appeared to perceive that this was true for a majority of their fellow New Orleanians, saying, “There’s no money here” (Edgar). Susan took a sip of her beer as she complained, “We’re bored around here. Very bored... Anything that could be done to give us something more to do... Actual hands-on things, things to do.”

Edgar discussed the relationship between the community and alcohol, stating that without community activities, “that’s all there is here.” Although Edgar stated that they are, “not alcohol people,” video observation data indicated discordance between the couple with regards to drinking. At the beginning of the second interview, a waiter approached the table and Susan ordered a beer. Edgar then cancelled her order and ordered her a coke and then, glancing with slanted eyes sideways to Edgar, Susan called the waiter back and re-ordered the beer. The couple shifted immediately back into the discussion, but when they discussed the lack of activities available in the city it was Edgar who stressed the need for an alternative to alcohol specifically. Susan called for “organizing” of community events – “No matter what it is, you

know, coloring a felt picture to hang on a wall would be more fun than some of the stuff we have to do around here.”

The need for a community they feel would provide a more vibrant and meaningful life has led the couple to question whether or not they will remain in New Orleans. They worked together to verbalize how their relationship with the city has changed over the course of the recovery:

It's not – we kind of actually lost our luster in it. It's not like it's... (Edgar)

And it took a pretty long - - it took us both a while (Susan).

It just kind of goes away. You kind of start thinking realistically. It's really funny, man.

People act like it's not like reality. It's like its own reality. The city kind of overwhelms you, I guess (Edgar).

They revealed that they have already begun to save money in hopes that “maybe after Mardi Gras and the busy season [we'll] take what we've saved and... (Susan) Just getting out of here (Edgar). Just go ahead and getting out of here (Susan).” However, the potential move is not painless for the couple. Susan described her emotions connected with their plans for leaving:

I used to tell people it made me feel like we were in love with living in New Orleans after the storm... It's like living with someone you love, but they were breaking up with you in a way. It's like devastating. It's sad. It's really sad.

“Everybody's doing their own thing.”

The disenchantment that the couple feels with New Orleans is heavily connected to their joint frustration over the failure of the community as they see it to remain unified. Edgar and Susan each described a sense that community members are “just worried about themselves” and they expressed disappointment that people would embrace a sense of personal opportunism

rather than joining together in empathy and support. Edgar spoke about how he began to lose faith in the other residents as FEMA money started to roll into the city:

When it was brought to everybody's attention that [people] had used addresses and all this stuff to get recovery money – like falsified. I was thinking, wow... that's really sad. And I remember feeling sad that some family that really needs the money probably isn't eligible now. Just, some people really used this for a payday and that's really not anything good at all.

This sense of growing disheartenment with other people continued to escalate throughout the recovery for Edgar and Susan, leaving them at the time of the interview with the belief that most of the people around them were concerned only about their own wellbeing. Reflecting on the brief period wherein she experienced a sense of social solidarity, Susan said, "It's just dissolved. It's gone away. Nobody really tries to even think about it anymore. Everybody's doing their own thing to try to rebuild on their own." Edgar concurred, stating, "People are more worried about their own families and just recovering on their own... [They think - ] as far as my neighbor and his life, he can worry about that." This feeling of isolated existence was mirrored in the video observation data of the couple's body language in the interviews. In all three interviews, each participant sat back from the table and feet from one another in a much identified personal space. Susan and Edgar spoke with angry voices and downturned expressions as they lamented the dissolution of their previously beloved New Orleans community.

### *"We Don't Have Money"*

The challenges inherent in building a new life together post-Katrina are inseparably connected to money for Edgar and Susan, although as individuals they describe lives long-rooted in poverty. Their description of social class encompassed more than money but both reported a



disadvantage in all areas they identified as class descriptors. Therefore, as they move forward in the recovery process, Edgar and Susan express inherent challenges related to their status. They do not see their class struggles as having arisen as a result of the storm, but believe they may be complicated by the hurricane recovery. This theme identifies the couple's struggles to maintain financial stability and the ways in which class and money impact the rebuilding of their lives. Within this theme, two subthemes illustrate the complicated relationship between status and recovery for Edgar and Susan – a background of financial hardship and the impact on their lives of their current lack of resources.

*“If I'd had more opportunity...”*

Edgar and Susan both spoke about their childhood when the topic of social class arose in the second interview. Edgar grew up “poor” in Kentucky with his mother and sister on a small family farm. The farm provided food for the family but was not a source of income for his struggling single-parent mother. Edgar described in detail the meals his family would eat provided by the vegetables grown on their land, saying, “People talk about organic like it's something new.” He thought about how he arrived in New Orleans and concluded, “If I would have grown up differently and I had more opportunity in Kentucky, I probably wouldn't never come here either.” Susan too grew up with limited financial stability. She recalled her nomadic childhood – “My dad, for most of my life, he wanted to be an artist. He wanted to be in a rock band so we kind of traveled around a lot and had a minimal amount of money. I had two younger siblings and once the youngest one was born, he did sort of settle down and all that.”

This continuing lack of financial security was a primary reason for Susan's immediate return to New Orleans after Katrina. She was employed prior to the storm “for a music production company” as a way of furthering her dream of working in the music industry.

However, her salary was not enough to pay her bills, so she also worked as a cocktail waitress in the French Quarter. After a month away from the city, Susan had no means to make money and returned to the Quarter to earn “some of that FEMA money recycled by the construction workers” at the local bars. As the initial money boom receded, Susan once again struggled to pay bills and since the hurricane has worked only as a waitress, setting aside her dream of working in music.

Edgar also arrived in New Orleans, “definitely looking – I came here to make money.” Although he “didn’t plan to stay here as long as [he] did,” Edgar has developed a trade in the construction industry as a result of the storm. He expressed pride in his ability to earn money and benefit the couple by working, stating, “Like the place we live in now, we actually put the drywall up – we did that to exchange for rent.” This intimate connection for Edgar between his life in New Orleans and his pursuit in earning money was corroborated by artifact data. The pants that Edgar brought had been worn for the majority of jobs he held putting in FEMA trailers, gutting houses and remodeling storm-ravaged homes. Video observation notes show that Edgar held the pants in his lap and as he spoke about his job or earning money he would look down at them, reflecting on the frayed denim as he spoke about what it means for the couple that he be able to work and earn a living.

*“We go to work and pay our bills.”*

Neither Edgar nor Susan hesitated when describing their social class status as, “at least lower class.” They first identified class status as primarily connected to money, saying, “I make probably less than twenty thousand a year” (Edgar), but expanded their definition to include education level and material possessions. Both participants have a high school diploma but spoke of trying to increase their education portfolios. Edgar surmised, “If you did go to college....I’m

sure you get better opportunities and things,” and Susan reflected on her desire to get back to school in order to work toward middle class status, “because [that’s where] eventually we’ll hopefully be.” Although the couple believes that their current class status is born out of their childhood poverties, Susan was derailed in her pursuit of an education as a result of the storm and believes this to have been a setback in her working toward improved financial security.

The reality of “lower class status” for Edgar and Susan is primarily a lack of ability to engage in leisure activities. Susan describes their subsistence:

We have to work – we go to work to pay our bills. We stay home. We don’t have money to do anything at all. It’s rare that we get to go out and do something that we want to do... Work and pay bills – all work, no play.

Edgar too expressed frustration when he said, “We’re working to live.” For both participants, “not having any kind of savings or any kind of stability” (Edgar) was described repeatedly as “stressful.” As the conversation delved specifically into the sacrifices the couple makes in order to meet their financial obligations of rent and bills, Edgar concluded that in addition to not having the opportunity for leisure, everyday necessities are sometimes difficult to obtain:

I’m always stressed for money... Even if it’s like spending seventy-five dollars at Walmart when you’re broke [as opposed to] spending one hundred and fifty, you know what I mean? It’s not just entertainment purposes, but just on our living, it’s kind of stressful.

This financial desperation is a contributing factor in the couple’s plans to leave New Orleans.

The couple described New Orleans as being economically depressed since the storm and Susan in particular believed that a more financially robust environment might result in their own increased monetary stability. She looked to a future “maybe in Seattle” because “people at least have enough money to have fun there.”

*“What I Am Now”*

Quantitatively, the overwhelming majority of data produced by Susan and Edgar’s interviews concerned the ways in which they as people have changed as a result of living through the recovery from Hurricane Katrina. They spoke of the “fearfulness” and anxiety that permeates their lives in a way that they report it did not prior to the storm. However, despite the changes in the way they view themselves within the context of their community, both participants identified positives that have arisen as a result of the challenges they face. Within this theme, three subthemes developed in which the couple discussed the negative shifts they identify in themselves, how building their relationship with one another has brought them strength, and the sources of positive coping they have used to get through this experience.

*“Now I feel suffocated”*

Edgar and Susan described themselves as having morphed into “fearful” people as a result of the changes they have been witness to in the city. Susan directly tied her altered perceptions to the experience of watching members of her community exploit others for personal gain. She exuded a need for a reestablished faith in humanity when she described how she began to lose trust in her fellow man – “Once you go through something like that where it’s everybody for themselves, you’ve got to go out and you have somebody that’s going to loot or pillage you in order to survive... Fearful is a pretty good word for it.” Edgar raised his cast in support of the reasonable basis for her fear:

About four weeks ago I was walking... and a black male person asked me for a cigarette and I told him I didn’t have one. Then he came up behind me and hit me in the back of the head several time and then broke my arm and he robbed me and left.

The couple describes this incident as “a turning point” for them wherein they lost all faith in their community. Susan clenched her jaw as she said, “You could really live your whole life without being hit in the back of your head.”

In addition to the fear that permeates their lives, Susan and Edgar spoke of feeling “suffocated” by the constant reminders of the storm and the rebuilding process. Edgar reported, “I think now I feel suffocated because the city just feels like it’s too much for me to handle anymore... I don’t know – I don’t like talking about it.” Susan recounted a story where she was on vacation and a taxi driver, learning she was from New Orleans, asked her about Katrina:

I just kind of put my head down... You get sick of talking about it. And it’s just like whenever that’s all that you hear about and that’s your everyday... It really just starts to be really hard to breathe. That’s the reason him and I are saying, okay, that was it. We’re not going to deal with anymore of this.

As throughout the interviews the couple detailed their emotional exhaustion stemming from the constant reminders of the storm, Edgar summarized their thinking – “I mean, you can only think about how am I going to feed my family, rebuild my house for so long.”

*“We talk”*

The relationship between Edgar and Susan developed as they each attempted to establish a life in the post-Katrina New Orleans. Although they described a sense of isolation and seclusion from the community throughout the interview, they continually returned to the idea that they had one another to get them through the tough times. Their meeting was a chance one, although Susan pursued Edgar when he was working as a delivery man for a local restaurant – “I kept ordering more food and tipping him really well!” When they spoke about their relationship

they exhibited rare smiles and video observation revealed that they would bridge their spacious seating gap by reaching under the table to touch their feet during these parts of the interviews.

Meeting one another created a bridge for each of the participants out of the solitary experience of recovering from the storm alone. Edgar described his feelings as he attempted to negotiate the substantial shifts in his environment without anyone to call on for support:

I had just come from my mother into a devastated environment. It wasn't ordinary, but it was definitely a big change, a drastic change at that point. So I was trying to fend for myself, and it was definitely hard.

Susan seconded this sentiment when I asked her what got her "through the tough times" – "Maybe just each other. I lived alone before I met him, so that really helped out a lot [and] that's about all I could think of." The independent existence that each participant lived prior to meeting one another developed into a relationship that exists primarily apart from their surrounding community. Susan explained:

We stay at home a whole lot. We don't go out a whole lot. I mean, we have friends and stuff like that, but we know better than to try and be out and about and doing things walking around and stuff like that at nighttime around here.

Thus, having no family in the area and little communal interaction, Edgar and Susan rely primarily on one another for interpersonal support.

Video observation data supported their reliance on one another. When I asked them whether they would have known about one another's artifacts and subsequent personal meanings prior to the interview, Edgar responded with a resounding, "Of course!" They regularly looked into one another's eyes throughout the video and often took time to verbally separate from the interview to clarify points with one another. Although observation of this couple indicated some

incidents of irritation or frustration with one another, this often occurred when the couple spoke of the stress and fear they have developed. When speaking about support and perseverance, their physical reactions to one another were markedly connected.

*“Nothing like a good natural disaster to mold your character”*

Although many of the themes and subthemes that developed from Edgar and Susan’s interviews related to negative ways in which they view themselves and their community as a result of Hurricane Katrina, the couple identified a number of positive ways they have persevered through the recovery. In addition to their connection with each other, both participants acknowledged individual traits they believed contributed to their ability to “get through it all” (Susan). Edgar credits his personality with keeping him going, particularly when he was living alone without power or water in a tent in Central Park, stating, “My personality helped get me through my overall experience, [even though] it was an awkward one.” Susan too made reference to her personality or intrinsic self as something she takes pride in. She spoke about her triumphs, saying, “[I’m] very proud of [getting through the storm.] I don’t know if anybody could’ve done what I had to do to get out of there... You know, all by myself.” She referenced her *Green Day* CD artifact, carefully illustrated by her own hand with the album title, a star, and a heart with a gun resting on top, as “proof of living through it.”

In addition to the individual traits they listed as crucial to their recovery, both Susan and Edgar spoke of recognizing their own fortune when compared to the losses of so many others as a way in which they draw strength. Susan twice said, “It could have been a lot worse for me,” before detailing the ways many others experience profound loss. Additionally, Edgar spoke at length about the suffering of those around him and how he regularly feels thankful that he has not lost as much as they have:

It really opens your eyes up to what can happen as far as a hurricane and how many people lost their lives. How everything happened, like people trapped in the Superdome and no water, no food. It makes you think about it, wow, and this happened. It's not a movie. And a tent's nothing in comparison...

Susan described how the presence of all of the cumulative losses – those of the city, their community and their own – remain a constant presence in their lives, reminding the world to be cognizant:

We are reminded of it every day. Even if we don't talk about it, we think about it every day. We're reminded of it every day, of everything everybody went through, I mean that's really all I can think about. Even if we don't talk about it, it's there.

However, despite the pervasive, at times “suffocating” presence of the storm, Edgar concluded the third interview with recognition of the personal growth he feels he has achieved, saying, “There's nothing like a good natural disaster to mold your character.”

### *SCWM Analysis*

Edgar and Susan spoke specifically to all of the domains relative to their class status that they experience as significant and identified referent group of origin, referent group of aspiration, consciousness and saliency, behaviors, lifestyle and property relationships as salient. Both participants believe that their current class status has grown out of their roots in poverty. Susan painted a picture of her childhood disadvantages, describing her youth home as, “a little, teeny, tiny house,” and comparing her current apartment with the “real small spot” she lived in when she was young. Although they referenced aspirations to become “middle class,” they spoke with an intangible connection to that idea and primarily maintained a homeostatic worldview that solidified their position in the “lower class.”



In order to define the referent values for their constructed class, Edgar and Susan regularly identified the components of their own moral compasses. These ideas were paramount for the couple and Susan acknowledged the internal conflict she experiences as she attempts to follow her behavioral guidelines rather than succumbing to the pull of elevating personal need over reverence for the community. As she described others who engaged in criminal behavior to get what they needed to survive, she lamented, "I guess for most people it would change them into being more that way and honestly, they probably should be." This draw of abandoning moral certitude in an effort to improve living conditions was strong for the couple, but they fought it fiercely lest it diminish their already tenuous class status. In order to guard their value-driven philosophy, they utilized lateral classism as a method of criticizing the behavior of other "lower class" citizens not adhering to this moral code. Following discussions on criminal activity in relationship to the storm, Edgar regularly asserted, "It's not right."

For this couple, lifestyle and property relationships were the primary evidentiary examples of what it means to be "lower class." They perceive their lives to be negatively bound by their inability to access resources. While discussing the challenges inherent in having limited income, Edgar stated, "I haven't had the extra money to really do anything." The depressed demeanor the couple presented was most clearly evident in observation data when they spoke of not being able to enjoy life due to financial constraints. From the SCWM perspective, this negative association with the challenges of a marginalized class is expected of individuals with a strong desire to work toward a referent group of aspiration. Daily monetary limitations serve as reminders for Edgar and Susan of the distance they maintain from the "middle class" people they hope to become.

*Elvis and Ann Margaret*

I met with Elvis and Ann Margaret in a side room of “Buffa’s” – an iconic New Orleans neighborhood lounge where Ann Margaret tends bar. Chairs and tables were scattered haphazardly throughout the room and an abandoned pool table supported boxes of unopened liquors to the left of our circle of chairs. The room called up the prior glory days of the bar when patrons spilled over from the main room to listen to the now dusty jukebox or shoot a game while simultaneously demonstrating the post-Katrina decline of long-held New Orleans establishments. Each meeting was held mid-day during Ann Margaret’s break from her split-shift. They were visibly comfortable in their surroundings and, despite the fact that they had arrived in New Orleans just two months before Katrina, Ann Margaret often referred to the people who walked past us to get to the restrooms as her “other family.”

At the time of the interviews, Ann Margaret was 39 and Elvis was 33. They described themselves racially as, “pretty white” and wore clothes in a gothic-punk style including black concert t-shirts, black leather pants and Dock Martins. They struggled to define the nuances of their relationship with one another, settling eventually on “best friend exes [who] still live together” [Ann Margaret.] The restaurant was located in the New Orleans Fauburg Marigny within walking distance of the couple’s French Quarter apartment. Ann Margaret has two late-teenage children who live in Las Vegas with her mother and they have no children who live with them in the home.

The themes that developed through the course of the interviews with these two participants all emerged from the underlying splintering of their ten year romantic relationship following the storm. They presented their journeys through the experience as an initially cohesive narrative that divided into solitary and vastly different ramifications for them as distinct

individuals. The interviews were conducted days prior to Elvis' planned permanent return to Las Vegas and Ann Margaret reported that she agreed to participate "to help him out" by contributing all of the one hundred dollar participation money to his moving fund. Four distinct themes developed over the course of the three interviews, as illustrated below:

Themes	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2	Subtheme 3
<b>"It was all consuming"</b>	"Caught with our pants down"	"Getting back here was a nightmare"	"The new French Quarter"
<b>"We all spent our hurricane experience together"</b>	"You're in the worst hour of your life and here's some asshole"	"They made it a little better"	"We were a couple"
<b>"Working our tails off to get what we need"</b>	"Really, really struggling"	"We rode out the high times"	
<b>"Part of the acceptance and moving on"</b>	"My life really changed"	"Our releases"	

### *"It Was All Consuming"*

Elvis and Ann Margaret were the only two participants interviewed for the study who remained within the New Orleans city limits for the hurricane, evacuating the city five days after the hurricane under orders from the military police. Having just moved from Las Vegas to New Orleans, the couple was unprepared for a hurricane of this magnitude. Elvis reported that they "just thought we're going to have a hurricane party" and were not familiar enough with the social climate to notice the increased panic that accompanied Katrina when compared to other impending storms. As such, the weeks during and following the storm were "scary" and traumatic for the couple. This theme explores the logistics of their time during the hurricane and the way in which these experiences shaped their perceptions upon returning to the city. Within

this story of their hurricane experience, three chronological subthemes emerged detailing living through the storm, evacuation to a shelter and returning home in the aftermath of the storm, and the way in which their place within the New Orleans community changed as a result of their experiences.

*“Caught with our pants down.”*

Not knowing the difference between this storm and others that had threatened New Orleans, neither Elvis nor Ann Margaret ever considered evacuating prior to the hurricane. Elvis explained their rationale, saying, “We didn’t know what to expect, you know, we thought it was business as usual.” Although they attempted to make some last minute preparations, by the time Ann Margaret began riding her bike to the store to pick up “essentials,” the majority of stores had closed down. She described their lack of preparedness – “So, we ended up getting up stuff to boil, but we didn’t realize we couldn’t cook anything after the power was off. So, we were completely unprepared because we had no idea what was really going to happen.”

As the winds began to whip through the city and the storm bore down on New Orleans, Ann Margaret described the fear that began to emerge for the couple, saying, “We were really getting scared as the storm was coming on. We didn’t think there was anybody left in the city besides the two of us.” When the levees broke the day after the hurricane and flood waters began to rush into the city, Elvis recalled that a feeling of chaos began to envelop them that was “all consuming.” Lawlessness erupted around them and the couple stayed in their apartment for five days watching events unfold out of their window. Elvis recalled the panic that began to set in:

I remember there was a window right outside of our apartment and I was kind of taking watch, but I heard gunshots and trudging through the water like somebody running away.

It went from being an experience to being completely scary and creepy... I’m from Las

Vegas – there’s all kind of danger there, but this experience was something that scared the shit out of me.

After five days, they decided they “had to leave” (Ann Margaret). Elvis pushed for their departure – “It was comical – I was freaking out!” – and they walked through waters “up to our waist” to get to the Convention Center where they had heard word that busses would be picking up stranded citizens. For two days they sat outside of the Convention Center where they waited with “the best and worst of people” (Ann Margaret). Having “a little bit of money” in the bank that they were unable to access, they were without food and water along with their fellow survivors. As they recalled their conflict over whether or not to join in looting, they verbalized their ultimate decision that looting for food and water was morally acceptable. Together they explained their agony over this decision:

Even though they were telling you basically you could for groceries and whatnot (Ann Margaret)

Yeah, we couldn’t do it [at first] (Elvis)

But then, the ham. It’s the only thing we looted. There was a huge already cooked ham, so we brought that and all the plastic forks that were still on the counter and – we just passed it. There were hundreds of us out there, and we just passed that. Little kids were running around with slices of ham. That was the only thing we looted (Ann Margaret).

However, video observation showed Ann Margaret shaking her head in disapproval as they went on to describe the looters outside of a local mall, “with the enormous rolling suitcases just crammed with everything.”

*“Getting back here was a nightmare.”*

The experience of getting out of the city and into a shelter and then the eventual struggle to return home again were as traumatic for Ann Margaret and Elvis as the storm itself. Placed on a bus and sent to the Cajun Dome in Lafayette, they began to understand the magnitude of the devastation around them. Elvis recalled his first glimpse into the total destruction of the city – “[The bus] got to a truck stop in Lafayette and they were all watching [the news] in a TV room and we were like ‘Good Lord!’ When you’re in it, you’re too close to see.” The impact of the community destruction on the couple was evident in the artifact data they provided. Ann Margaret brought a scrapbook she had put together for Elvis while they stayed in the shelter. As she flipped through the pages her handwritten words exploded on the pages in vibrant colors; “Mass Destruction” “Death” “S.O.S.” “Looting” “Rape” “Shootings” and “God HELP us” accompanied the newspaper clippings and photos that told their Katrina story.

The Cajun Dome shelter was “scary the first night” (Ann Margaret) when the couple slept on cots among all the other evacuees brought in on busses. However, the following day the Red Cross workers began to separate the new residents into two separate sections. They described the division as being “families” in one area and “thugs” in another. While Elvis acknowledged, “we were racially typed,” the couple expressed gratitude at being placed in what they considered to be the “safe” area. Ann Margaret recalled the selection process:

We were lucky enough when they just kind of went through and hand-picked people who were sort of out of their element... I think they just chose people they knew would do best more so with families – us two stood out as we would do better. They put us in a safer area, you know.

The couple returned to New Orleans in October, and the struggle to return to the city was met with exacerbated fear at what they had come home to. “The shelter was closing and we were

going to be separated into a women's shelter and a men's shelter" (Ann Margaret) so the couple hitched a ride with some local musicians returning to the city. Upon arrival in the city they encountered their destroyed apartment – "The ceiling had caved in on our bed" – and they sorted through "two months of soaked, water-drenched clothing that would probably never become un-mildewed" (Elvis). Additionally, the police-state that governed the city was "unnerving" as they tried to reestablish their lives. Ann Margaret recalled witnessing a particular interaction between the police and a citizen where, "they just cocked [a bean-bag gun] at the back of this man's head. Just, you know, he was walking and he just didn't stop when they said stop or whatever." In their journey to reestablish normalcy in their lives, they waited for a feeling of "peace" to once again envelop them.

*"The new French Quarter."*

Three years following the storm, Elvis and Ann Margaret describe a forever altered community and reflect on how their position within that community has also changed. The police presence still permeates the city, but for Elvis there was an evolution of the way in which the authority shaped the community. At first, the couple reported feeling "frightened" by the overwhelming presence of military police and Elvis recalled, "They were talking about imposing Martial Law." However, as the recovery progressed, they began to appreciate the safety of having armed guards standing posts on the corner as they walked home in the evenings from their jobs. Three years post-Katrina, Elvis lamented the decline in police focus:

Now on Bourbon Street on a high volume night you'll see like four or five cops standing all together in the middle of the street drinking coffee and telling war stories. It's like, hey dude, spread out. But you can't say nothing."

In addition to the change brought on by a military infusion, the couple spoke about the adjustments in the population. Elvis described the conversations he hears, saying, "One sentiment I've heard is it was just a cleansing, a new city, like it was intended to happen." The couple presented their own class divisions relative to New Orleans street performers, taking pride in the return of the first musician, saying, "It was so exciting when we first got back and one of the street performers was back and that was just cool" (Ann Margaret) but expressing disappointment at the renewed presence of the primarily African American child tap dancers who hold performances on the corners in the French Quarter – "Then when I saw the tap-dancers back out there I was like, 'Whelp, here comes the crime'" (Elvis).

Although they were "newbies" to New Orleans before the hurricane, both participants identified a shift in their community identity as a result of having stayed in New Orleans through the storm. Ann Margaret explained her community standing, saying, "I am absolutely grandfathered like a one hundred year old man, you know? 'Cause if you were here through the storm, you're lifers. That's how they think of you." This inclusion in the New Orleans community is profoundly meaningful for Ann Margaret. She explained the feeling it gives her to be a New Orleanian:

For me, it's a very small town. My mother was just here a few weeks ago and she just can't get over that we can walk from here to the grocery store and twenty-five people will shout my name and say hello. I love this lifestyle. I love it.

Yet, for Elvis his envelopment in a tightly knit community created feelings of distress and suffocation. He contrasted Ann Margaret's sentiment with his own emotions connected to "the new French Quarter" – "I don't like everybody knowing my business. You know, hearing what my life's going through at the local pub. You know, that's not what I dig. I think that's my



frustration.” These dissimilar reactions to the shifting places they hold within their community are representative of the many ways in which the hurricane inspired different emotions for each of these participants.

*“We All Spent Our Hurricane Experience Together”*

The interview discussions with Elvis and Ann Margaret flirted in and out continuously around the relationships that influenced their hurricane and subsequent recovery. The way in which they experienced other people was markedly distinct and illustrated one of the primary factors they attribute to the dissolution of their romantic relationship. Although both participants offered stories of negative as well as positive interactions, Ann Margaret primarily chooses to “remember the good people” whereas Elvis’ hurricane and recovery is defined by those who he feels took “advantage” of him. Each component of their hurricane narrative contained detailed descriptions of human interactions all of which ultimately connected to the way they now view one another. This thematic exploration of the impact of relationships is broken into three subthemes – negative experiences with others, people and relationships defined as helpful and the way in which the couple’s own relationship ultimately came unraveled.

*“You’re in the worst hour of your life and here’s some asshole.”*

A presentation of the negative interactions Elvis and Ann Margaret experienced along their hurricane journey is best delivered chronologically, as their first experience of feeling “taken advantage of” occurred while the couple sat in their apartments bracing for the impending storm. The couple dually explained the arrival of their hurricane guest:

While the storm was really starting to come down our doorbell rings and this prostitute that worked Bourbon Street with big boa constrictors around her neck shows up at our

door. She's been thrown out of every hotel she tried to get into... so that's how we spent our storm – the three of us and her dogs and snakes (Ann Margaret).

And then the hooker ate all of our food while we were sleeping! We finally got some sleep... and we wake up the next morning and our wraps are gone! (Elvis)

Yeah – everything was gone (Ann Margaret).

Elvis recounted another interaction that occurred in route to the convention center. Ann Margaret prefaced his account by saying, “It was already bad enough... but then to get robbed on top of it!” Elvis explained:

There was a guy trudging through 4 feet deep water...with whiskey bottles around his neck... yelling, I got whiskey. I bought a bottle of Crown Royal... I just needed some whiskey, right? ... I poured it into my flask... and he had dumped out the Crown Royal and filled it with just whatever – probably flood water.

These experiences of criminal opportunism were echoed in their feelings regarding the reporters and news crews taking photographs of the devastation as it unfolded. Elvis recalled the many faces of desperation shown across the country and reflected on what it might have been like to be the subject of the photo. Disgustedly, he said, “How horrible is that? You're in the worst hour of your life and here's some asshole – Oh, look at that Time magazine!”

The evacuation to Lafayette was a dichotomous experience, wherein the couple recalled that the people around them were either supportive and helpful or negative in one of many ways. Overwhelmingly, it was Edgar who detailed the people who were apathetic, hostile, or took advantage of his vulnerability, saying, “the bad people are just what sticks in my head.” Although he did not ascribe malicious motives to the volunteers at the shelter, he did feel hurt at what he considered to be experiences where they demonstrated a lack of empathy. For Edgar,

there was a clear distinction between “Red Cross volunteers” and the local volunteers who he assumed “just wanted to tell their friends, ‘I’m volunteering’ or came to the shelter to earn “school credit.” The latter left him with a feeling of being second to the self-fulfillment they received as a helper and he expressed frustration with this, saying, “It [should be] more about the people who need the help!” The hostility he retains toward the shelter was evident in the Cajun Dome Resident Badge he brought as his artifact. Video observation data revealed that he clenched his fingers tightly around the clip-on badge, shaking it and then tossing it down on the chair beside him. Even his picture laminated on to the badge showed his face taugth with an expression of frustration.

Finally, Edgar described the events that led to his briefly moving out of the shelter and into the Lafayette community. As he scoured the newspaper for local want ads, a woman approached him offering to help him find work in the community and provide him with free room and board. With Ann Margaret out of town visiting her children, he jumped on the opportunity to earn money and escape the shelter routine. However, he soon came to regret his decision as a growing feeling of resentment grew toward the woman:

I was her charity case. I gave her three hundred dollars [of my FEMA money] to show my respect. The next day she’s wanting me to cut her yard, wash her dishes, do her laundry. I was like, what did you bring me here for... Pretty soon it comes out that she’s introducing me to everyone as ‘her evacuee.’ Like, ‘Well this is my evacuee.’ I didn’t have a name, I was her evacuee... That’s not really help, that’s just somebody working an angle.

These multiple experiences have culminated in a general suspicion of most people for Edgar. He spoke about the conclusion he has reached regarding people’s motives, saying, “If you’re really

good to me then I really think you're up to something. And I think that's changed because I wasn't always like that."

*"They made it a little better."*

In contrast to Edgar's primary focus on the negative relationships he developed throughout the hurricane and recovery, Ann Margaret spoke mostly of the people she saw as good, righteous, or helpful. Although both participants joined in the telling of these positive interactions, it was Ann Margaret who generally instigated discussion around someone who represented morality or had helped them in some way.

In contrast to the looters and thieves the couple spoke of with disdain, Ann Margaret also recalled people they met who were representative for her of individuals making moral choices in a difficult situation. She recalled "a very Christian lady" who asked that others not "judge" when she told her evacuation story. Ann Margaret laughed lightheartedly and smiled as she recounted the woman's story – "[She said], I stole a bus and I loaded everybody on there! I stole it, my brother knew how to drive it and we were out!" She also reminded Elvis of the couple who were crucial in their eventual inclusion on a bus out of town:

We met a couple of people that were staying at the Windsor and they were waiting in line for the busses. [At the Convention Center] we just kept getting, the busses will be here... but the busses were stationary, not loading, not doing anything. So the couple made a trip back up [to the Convention Center] just for us to tell us, 'say look, you guys are pretty cool, we just got news that the Windsor has hired private shuttles to take us out of town.

Although the couple assisted Elvis and Ann Margaret in pretending they were Windsor guests, this choice was to Ann Margaret an example of people breaking the rules for a humanitarian objective.

In addition to focusing her interpersonal stories on the positive interactions she had in New Orleans, Ann Margaret characterized the volunteers in the Cajun Dome as helpful and thoughtful. She stated that, “they would remember you when you asked for something and.. before we got a chance to check back with them on it, it was there for us.” While Elvis concurred that the Red Cross volunteers were “top notch,” Ann Margaret extended this to all of the people in helping rolls at the shelter. She identified local restaurants, stores, and community agencies as having shaped her experience into a positive one, stating, “We really couldn’t want for much.” Additionally, both participants discussed how their placement in the family section allowed them to draw inspiration from the “happiness” of the children by “getting lost in their world.” Ann Margaret’s artifact data supported this connection to the positive relationships she experienced. As she looked at newspaper clipping of volunteers standing outside of the Cajun Dome, she lightly touched the photo taking care to smooth out the edges that had been folded in.

*“We were a couple.”*

The most essential relationship in the lives of Ann Margaret and Elvis throughout the hurricane was their own. Although they had been in a long-term relationship for years prior to the storm, their relationship morphed into one of friendship as the couple grew apart in the recovery experience. They described their relationship prior to the storm in definitive terms – “We were a couple” (Ann Margaret). Their lives had been intimately connected and they described a history of connectedness in which one without the other would prompt questions by friends and acquaintances of, “where’s the other half?” Their lives were intertwined as co-impersonators in Las Vegas and included a shared responsibility for her children who, “stayed [in Las Vegas] when we came down to finish their last year of high school” and their jointly

owned dogs, as well. However, the storm, “did change the relationship – it just – changed things” for the couple.

Ann Margaret’s hurricane recovery was defined by an involvement in her work “family” which resulted in “a separate life” for her. Although she said, “No one dislikes him or anything, but he just doesn’t like hanging out,” Elvis described feelings of forced independence throughout the storm and their return to New Orleans. He described the beginning of their unraveling as having “feelings of abandonment. I felt like I was dealing with this whole thing alone.” Although the couple agreed to end their romantic involvement, they have remained “best friends” and roommates for the last two years. Elvis explained the complicated nature of their new status, saying, “We turned our engagement rings into best friend rings so that we don’t have to give them up but guys can hit on her.” Ann Margaret concurred, “Luckily, we’re still real close.” This connected but separate relationship was evidence in the body language demonstrated during video observation. While the couple would look at each other while telling stories, they also sat far apart for the interview. Ann Margaret made more eye contact with Elvis, turning her head down in attempt to look in his face as he spoke, while he often looked straight ahead or down as he twisted his ring when talking. The interviews also marked the close of the couple’s ten year shared household, as Elvis prepared to move back to Las Vegas the week following study participation. Both participants expressed anxiety about this impending separation. Ann Margaret said, “It’s hard for us when we haven’t not lived together in so long.”

#### *“Working Our Tails Off to Get What We Need”*

Although Elvis and Ann Margaret did not identify finances as a primary component of their recovery experience, saying, “We’re like the least money-driven people ever,” they did describe their own challenges related to financial security and the value they place as

employment as variables related to their recovery experience. While the couple disagreed on a class label that would adequately define their joint social class position, they agreed that money has been an unreliable factor in their lives, seeming to flow in and just as easily disappear.

Within this theme exploring the values they associate with class status and the subsequent impact on their hurricane recovery, Elvis and Ann Margaret spoke to two subthemes wherein they first defined who they are in relationship to social class and then discussed the sudden influx of resources they experienced immediately following the storm and how that has had lasting ramifications on their daily lives.

*“Really, really struggling.”*

When asked to define their status in a term they would use to identify their social class, Elvis suggested, “Lower middle class.” However, Ann Margaret vehemently disagreed with this label, protesting, “Fuck you! I’m not lower class – I enjoy life!” Although they were never able to agree on a term they both felt would be an accurate description, they presented a shared view on domains related to social class and what each domain means for their lives. They spoke of social class as primarily financial, saying, “Money’s the first thing I’d think of” (Ann Margaret), although they did also include employment – “not hustling, pan-handling, or stealing” – as a variable distinguishing people from the lower classes. The couple described their financial lives as being very fluid, reporting that at some times they “want for nothing” whereas at other times they have been “really, really struggling.” However, Ann Margaret said that at most times in their life, “I can afford to go to the movies – I mean, not every day, but the bills get paid.”

During the hurricane, lack of money created pressure for the couple. They had spent their first month in New Orleans “in this crappy Empress hotel” and “working sixteen hour days for like forty dollars” (Ann Margaret). They had only just secured an apartment when the storm

made its way through the Gulf. Elvis recalled, "That was a time when I wished I was more money driven!" The evacuation and subsequent loss of employment created additional hardship. While they were in the Cajun Dome, Elvis was arrested for public urination. They recalled the anxiety created by his incarceration:

For three days they wouldn't let him out and then I had to come up with eight hundred and twenty-five dollars that I never got back (Ann Margaret).

That was a lot of money for us (Elvis).

That was ALL of our money then (Ann Margaret).

Additionally, Elvis described feeling looked down upon by the residents in Lafayette and equated this disdain to his inability to contribute to the local economy. He remembered feeling as if "they were all looking at us like we were bums" and expressed frustration at being able to neither find a job locally nor return to New Orleans.

When discussing their current financial position, Ann Margaret spoke of the ways in which she felt she and those in similar situations could be assisted by governmental involvement. She belied the housing market in the area, demanding that "we need more affordable housing!" Additionally, she suggested, "We should get a tax break!" and offered other financial incentives that could be used "to help the recovery." Elvis talked about transportation and its connection to class, reporting that his reliance on a bicycle subjects him to "price gouging" in small local markets. He stressed that the recovery-spurred development of a Wal-mart on the outskirts of the city limits ignores those such as himself who are bound by a lack of reliable public transportation – "We work, live, play, eat in the Quarter or Marigny, so we can't always afford a cab ride."

*"We rode out the high times."*



Although the initial period following the hurricane was marked by financial struggle for Elvis and Ann Margaret, together they experienced a deluge of income once they returned to the city and secured employment. According to Ann Margaret, the increase in relief and recovery workers combined with the decrease in population to make employment abundant. She criticized New Orleanians who reported difficulty finding a job after the storm, saying, "If you couldn't get a job then, you weren't looking – You were NOT looking!" She immediately found employment with Buffas and described her experience:

There were two of us girls, for about two months we ran this bar ourselves. We just alternated days, we'd work double shifts – you know, noon to curfew. And we did that every day – we just didn't have anybody else. No food and we still made a LOT of money at that time.

Although Elvis also found work as a construction worker, he felt that because he had no prior experience, he "didn't catch a lot of breaks." However, Ann Margaret immediately reframed his experience, saying, "He would just go next door and talk to them and they would offer him an extra dollar an hour... He went through like twenty jobs just because the next place would always offer him more money." Elvis did concur and added that he felt experienced feelings of heightened autonomy by being able to say, "If you're going to keep treating me like dirt then I CAN go someplace else!"

This initial wave of superfluous funds created a sense of "euphoria" for the couple. Ann Margaret grinned widely and glanced to Elvis saying, "We went from having absolutely nothing to just going crazy... We had so much fun then!" She described the additional money they received from FEMA as contributing to their windfall, but then expressed a sense that it was undeserved:

There's been a lot of times in my life when I've been transient. I've had fires in my life and stuff and there was no one to help me then. You just lose everything and you're totally helpless. Where, here, they're giving you money and it's a lot of money. So we're all spending money that we shouldn't be.

However, the economic surge began to wither two to three months following their return. This shift back toward a previous way of living was stressful for the couple as they attempted to adjust back to living within financial constraints. Ann Margaret described the resulting frustrations, saying, "Now we don't remember how to live normal."

*"Part of the Acceptance and Moving On"*

For both Elvis and Ann Margaret, the storm shifted who they were in profound ways. However, while Elvis found himself changing in ways that he found to be detrimental and uncomfortable, Ann Margaret embraced the new life that developed around her and within her. Ultimately this growth in different directions led to a disintegration of their relationship with one another and, for Elvis, the relationship he had with the community of New Orleans. Throughout the hurricane recovery each of these two participants had unique ways of dealing with the challenges that faced them. Initially, Elvis turned to self-destructive methods of coping while Ann Margaret established strong networks of social support. However, with the hope that accompanied his plan to leave New Orleans, Elvis had begun just prior to the interviews to develop new tools for respite that he viewed as being more positive and life-affirming. This theme of developing self-discovery and change encompasses two subthemes detailing the specific ways the participants changed individually in relation to one another and the ways in which they each chose to get through the struggles brought about by the hurricane.

*“My life really changed”*

Although Elvis and Ann Margaret changed in profoundly different ways as a result of their experiences with the storm and ensuing recovery, they collectively painted a picture of each of their evolutions. The personality shifts that enveloped Elvis were portrayed by both participants as negative. Increasing isolation was described as the most detrimental of his adjustments. Elvis described the person he once was socially compared to the person he has become:

I used to be a people person and I loved to sit at the bar and just chat... Now it's a lot different – it's like I don't even give anybody a chance. I think it's how you just keep getting hit from all angles – I think that had a lot to do with it.

He elaborated on his assumptions about others saying, “I just don't like them. I just don't trust them.” In addition to his distrust of people, Ann Margaret reported that Elvis began to feel “stressed” as “the crime started to get real bad.” He described pervasive fear as being connected to constant reminders of the storm, saying, “Looking at all this stuff, it reminds me of all of it – of how horrible it was.” Searching for the personal growth that might have come from his experiences, Elvis decided, “I don't think we've learned anything – like a lesson or anything. I think we're trying to put it behind us. Well, ME anyway.”

Ann Margaret described a nearly polar experience marked by personal growth and satisfaction. She declared, “I like most of my changes. I've never been more comfortable in the skin I'm in.” Both participants used the word “opposite” to describe Ann Margaret's shifts in relation to those of Elvis. She spoke of finding a supportive social network, achieving satisfaction through her job and gaining self-confidence through the connections and

relationships she has fostered. The ultimate conclusion for her was that the hurricane had been a positive force in her life:

I wouldn't change it for anything. I had a lot of good come out of it. I feel bad saying that, but my life really changed for the better in so many ways. I always feel bad because it doesn't seem like you should ever have such good come out of bad things, but it did.

Despite her feelings of satisfaction, Ann Margaret described how the couple were unable to grow together effectively – “We made a great team [when things were bad], but as soon as things started lightening up and we could sort of feel like we were living again, that's when we started getting edgy with one another.” The combination of their disparate approaches to the recovery process created friction within the couple that ultimately led to the biggest change either of them experienced: independence.

*“Our releases.”*

The identification of the ways in which the couple pushed through the more challenging times in their recovery experience in some ways parallels the description of the evolved people they have become. Elvis described relying primarily on alcohol to get through the hurricane and the following two and a half years. He spoke about how what he viewed as “social drinking” prior to the storm evolved into “abuse” – “I think I took this to a whole new level – you know with the substance abuse stuff and booze as a medicinal thing as I thought I was doing something for myself to cope.” Although Ann Margaret never spoke in the interviews about Elvis' drinking, video observation showed that she nodded fervently, slightly rocking her body side to side when he responded to the question of how he made it through by saying, “I got drunk. I got drunk and made things worse, just to be honest.”

In the months leading up to the interview, Elvis described a newfound hope that sprang from the inception of the idea that he would leave New Orleans. He began to involve himself in other outlets for stress, including playing with his dogs and learning to play the guitar. He described his evolving relationship with music as “my therapy” and described a profound realization that, “I wasn’t doing any good [on the guitar] the drunker I got... So, I sort of traded one for the other.” Although Elvis did not describe a life of sobriety, he stated at the first interview, “I don’t think I’ve even drunk in two weeks, and that would never happen before.” However, before the interviews were completed, Elvis would drink again.

Ann Margaret relied on her new workplace family to provide her with the support she needed to get through the challenging parts of the recovery. She spoke of “friendship” as her anchor and allowed Elvis to elaborate for her – “She has a close knit group of friends that formed because of this place. They have a Monday night dinner club and everything.” Although she lamented an “extra 40 pounds” that followed her many social meals, but said, “Except for the extra weight, inside my head, I’ve never felt better about the person I am.” Elvis looked harder for her resources, saying, “I’ve put a lot of thought into [our] differences,” and concluded that her background gave her strength that he was lacking:

Her background is loving, nurturing, taking care of family kind of thing and I’m a 16 year old runaway... On her level I think she is a rare case of just being full of love and trust and kindness, where, myself, I’m a dick!

### *SCWM Analysis*

Elvis and Ann Margaret’s case study is most effectively analyzed through the SCWM assertion that classism and class are indistinguishable constructs (Liu & Ali, 2008). While the couple spoke to their financial and material status, they did not present a self-defined

construction of class that extended into the realm of values. However, throughout the interview the couple repeatedly distinguished themselves from those they perceived to be in higher or lower classes through values-based criticisms. Expressions of upward classism were evidenced when Ann Margaret exclaimed, "The richer the people, the nastier they were!" She described the opportunism of her landlord who, "owns half of Esplanade Avenue" and suggested that her self-centered behavior when "she didn't fix any of [the rental property] houses until she fixed hers" was evidence of moral bankruptcy.

A parallel argument was inherent in the couple's messages of downward classism wherein they associated the behavior of "looters" to be evidence of an inability to value the human experience and a failure to recognize accepted community standards. They stressed the differences they saw in their own looting of a ham – "the only thing we looted" – and the people outside of the Convention Center taking "X boxes, games, plasma TVs, [and] Saints gear." Additionally, they described feeling "scared" of "the gang bangers" on the other side of the shelter and regularly discussed how they more accurately "fit" with the "families" where they were housed. This expression of fear is a recognized component of classism and appeared as an effective tool for Elvis and Ann Margaret to maintain a homeostatic worldview that distinguished them from other people in their shelter.

Finally, Ann Margaret in particular exhibited signs of internalized classist messages when she rejected Elvis' decree that they were members of lower class strata. Although she conceded that she has many times in her life been "transient" and that an inability to remain financially stable has mediated many of their life experiences, she immediately rejected a label that she believed would identify her as financially compromised. Her internalized messages appear to indicate a belief that individuals in lower classes are incapable of having fun in addition to their

hardships, as evidenced when she offered proof that she could not be “lower class” by asserting, “I enjoy life!”

*James and Helen*

James and Helen described themselves to be 35 and 36 year-old Caucasians intimately connected to their shared work as artist / teachers. The couple had been married for four months at the time of the interviews and although they both lived in New Orleans prior to the storm, they “had to go to New York to find each other” where they met on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Like other couples in the study who began their relationship following the storm, James and Helen consider Katrina to be their match-maker and believe their lives were joined in the whirlwind of chaos following the hurricane.

Interviews with this couple were conducted over the course of three days at a two-story McDonalds located in the Uptown section of New Orleans. The couple chose this location because it was within walking distance from their home “a block from Central City,” having not purchased a new car since their last one broke down. They began the interviews with visibly guarded body language and answered the initial questions in short, staccato quips. However, once I revealed that my camera man and I had both lived in New Orleans for over ten years, they immediately shifted their postures to more relaxed stances and engaged in the interview process by answering questions at length.

James and Helen identified themselves securely in the “middle class,” distinguishing them from the other interview participants who all identified with more marginalized classes. However, they justified their interest in study participation by elaborating on childhoods marked by extreme poverty and value systems that straddled these two, at times conflicting, worlds. Thematically, their interview, observation and artifact data produced five distinct threads

investigating the varying components of their lives shaped by their experiences recovering from Hurricane Katrina:

Themes	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2	Subtheme 3
<b>“You still like the pie”</b>	<b>“It was like a fortress”</b>	<b>“It’s changed completely – it’s a whole weird spider now”</b>	
<b>“Lucky to have that kind of support”</b>			
<b>“It’s pretty middle class – having a hard work ethic”</b>	<b>“Poverty with a cape”</b>	<b>“A teacher and an artist”</b>	
<b>“Take responsibility”</b>	<b>“So profoundly fail us”</b>	<b>“They were like rats”</b>	
<b>“Suffering from post-traumatic-stress”</b>	<b>“As vulnerable as the space around me”</b>	<b>“Reevaluate my life”</b>	<b>“I’m not talking about God, but I’ll breathe”</b>

### *“You Still Like the Pie”*

The experience of evacuating their hometown of New Orleans and then returning to a changed city substantially impacted Helen and James. The couple told their evacuation stories with great detail and little emotion, but video observation data showed that as they began to talk about the new city that surrounds them the expressions on their faces intensified and their body language became more animated. However, as their stories unfolded, they began to internally connect components of the evacuation experience to the changes they feel in relationship to their surrounding community. Both participants described both frustration and pride at the lack of help from external sources they received during their evacuations, which then translated into a shared experience of isolation within an altered New Orleans community upon their return. Within this theme, two subthemes explored the details of each participants’ evacuation and return to the city and then the relationship they have developed with a newly diverse community.



*"It was like a fortress."*

Helen was living alone in an apartment with a cat when Katrina loomed large in the Gulf threatening an imminent landfall. She explored her options for communal evacuation and discovered, "a lot of people wouldn't take me and the animal." Unwilling to abandon her pet, she ultimately decided to follow her father, without destination, in the sea of contra-flow traffic exiting the state. They needed to stay close to New Orleans because her "dad's a program surveyor so [they] had to get back to the ports as soon as [they] could." They hoped to stay in Baton Rouge, but were stymied by the overcrowding which she described as "a cluster-fuck at that point." Eventually, they settled in Lafayette and Helen explained, "Luckily, I had some friends so we stayed with them for a while and we ended up getting an apartment together. I got employed and it was like, OK."

Although James rented an apartment in New Orleans, he had left the state a month before the storm to visit family and friends in the North. He watched on the news as the hurricane approached Louisiana and, having no way to get back to the city and make preparations or collect his things, he called a friend who had also left New Orleans with him and asked, "What do I do?" His original plan included following his friend's family to the city of Slidell located on the North Shore of Lake Pontchartrain, but he decided to bring his fourteen year-old-brother with him and chose instead to travel to Kansas City where he had attended art school in order to gather resources and then continued on to Texas. In Kansas City he obtained a car for fifty dollars with a "drive shaft ripped in half." After repairing the vehicle, he and his brother panhandled money in grocery store parking lots and made their way to the city of Houston.

Both participants returned to New Orleans approximately a month following the storm. Although James had, "snuck back over on side roads" a week after the hurricane, the devastation

overwhelmed him and he returned to Texas for three more weeks. Although the city was guarded “like a fortress” both James and Helen were able to gain re-entry before the larger population.

Helen’s father was given permission to enter as “a member of the National Guard – a weekend warrior,” and she and her cat came with him and again rented an apartment with him, this time in a suburb of New Orleans called “Harahan.” James joined a friend who was a property owner and landlord from New Orleans and they used their connection to his real estate business to gain access – “We were like, I’m a business owner – I own such and such properties. But if we said, I live on Burgundy, they were just like get lost. But if you could promote a business...”

The devastation of the city was powerfully depressing for both Helen and James. Helen’s artifact data inspired conversation about that initial return. She presented a photographed black and white self-portrait she had made in her studio warehouse amid the hurricane wreckage. As she reflected on the photo:

It actually brings back smells. It makes me think of what it was like to be there and what it was like to climb on all of that [destroyed furniture.] It was horrible. It smelled horrible. There was mold everywhere. It was pretty disgusting.

James expressed his disbelief as he wandered around the city, taking in the profound destruction. He described the process he went through realizing that the stories he had heard about his city were real:

I have friends that are full of shit – I’m like, you’re pulling my leg, now pull the other one and they were telling me they saw shit, but I saw it – the stuff, the people piled around and I was like, aw, man.

The emotional strain of recalling the scenes of devastation they had each witnessed was made clear when James declared, “Man, I need a cigarette.”

*“It’s changed completely – it’s like a whole weird spider now.”*

Throughout the interviews, the participants returned frequently to the unfamiliar nature of their new community. James lamented the people who have forever left the city, changing the composition of a culture he once felt connected to, saying, “People are still saying, yeah, I’m coming back. They’re not coming back.” One way the city has shifted in the minds of the couple is the alteration in demographics populating historically stagnant sections of the city. Helen explained the importance of this within the community, saying, “It might not mean anything to other people, but the boundaries and sections of town mean stuff to people here.” Both participants discussed the ways in which various sections of town have engaged in rebuilding or failed to prosper, indicating dissatisfaction with the increased media and national attention on some neighborhoods to the detriment of others. Helen spoke about the historically Caucasian section of New Orleans known as Broadmoor that sits adjacent to the highly publicized Lower Ninth Ward – “They’re always struggling but no funding or help goes to them And honestly, they just need a little bit.” Additionally, she addressed the influx of people of differing cultures, classes and ethnicities to traditionally upper middle class White neighborhoods and revealed sympathy for the long-standing property holders in those communities – “Whatever, they bought their property when they did and they established their community the way they wanted it.”

The couple demonstrated ambivalence when discussing the demographic changes of the New Orleans population. While they identified “the taco trucks” that set up roadside taco stands on New Orleans streets as evidence that the increasing Hispanic population is changing the New Orleans they once knew, Helen also said, “Well, I guess I’m not opposed to the taco trucks... the meat is good.” Moreover, they engaged in racially-based jokes when discussing the looting that took place during the evacuation. James spoke of “Wild Oats,” a grocery store selling natural

foods, which opened its doors to residents stranded in the city. He laughed as he imagined the response of African American residents to the food selection, saying, "I'm sure they rolled out barrels of oats and were like – what the hell is this! I wish I could have seen it! I would've given anything to see it – What the hell is healthy?" to which Helen responded, "Edamame? What do you do with that, smoke it?" However, they also identified themselves as proud members of a mostly Black city, saying, "That's who we are down here!"

One way in which Helen and James feel connected to their new community is through their shared feelings of abandonment by the larger nation. Both James and Helen called for assistance to restore order to the community, ending the increased crime in areas such as "the Westbank now called the Gaza Strip." However, they believe funding for the New Orleans recovery effort is neglected in favor of more traditionally Caucasian community needs outside of the Gulf Coast. They spoke conjointly about their love for the city and their regret that they are not part of a community more specifically supported by their American brethren:

I don't know – 'cause it kills me because there are not many places that I would like to live in this world. This is like, it. I feel like that last kid who doesn't get as much pie because all of the other kids got the pie (James).

Pretty much. That's a pretty good analogy. I mean, you still like the pie. It's still good pie (Helen).

*"Lucky to Have That Kind of Support"*

Although quantitatively the data contributing to this theme exploring the connection between the relationships James and Helen have with family and friends and their hurricane recovery is sparse in comparison to other themes, these discussions contained powerful assertions and contributed to ideas independent from their other threads of thought. No

subthemes were present within this theme, but rather all of the data focus on the impact their hurricane experiences have had on the personal connections in their lives.

The intimate relationships explored by the couple throughout the interviews centered primarily on those with their immediate family and the bond they have established with one another. Every interpersonal relationship was discussed within the context of the hurricane and subsequent recovery, as the couple untangled the ways in which their connections shifted and were strengthened as a result of their experiences. Both participants spoke specifically of their fathers and how their relationships have changed. Helen stated that living with her father following the storm resulted in an improved and closer relationship between the two of them:

The way our relationship kind of ended in my late teens wasn't exactly favorable, so this was a real good way to have a decent relationship again. It was such a small space [in our apartment]... but it worked, so whatever. Like a year later when it was time for me to move out he was very sad about it.

Although James wasn't able to see his father following the storm, he felt a renewed sense of connection when his father was forced to evacuate his Texas home following Rita and the two shared their hurricane stories. He lamented the fact that he did not visit his father prior to Rita while he was in Texas – “I'm like – I had this one chance to see my dad, and – it's just aggravating.”

In addition to discussing their relationships with their fathers, the couple each spoke about fostering connection with other members of their families of origin. James described taking his younger brother on his post-Katrina cross-country journey and being able to “just hang out,” bridging the gap that had developed between them over recent years. Helen spoke of

embracing a role of leadership within her family once she discovered that her mother and grandmother had also evacuated to Lafayette:

I was able to help get her into a nursing facility... So I went shopping in the middle of Lafayette for a nursing facility and she's crying and [I said to my mother] – o.k., I'm driving, give me the list. That's what you do – the safety of your family is more important than anything else.

For Helen, this connection to family provided a sense of stability and security while she was in Lafayette and she said, "I feel really, really lucky to have that kind of support." Additionally, she expressed a belief that her family's togetherness illustrated evidence of her rise to middle class status, saying, "I mean [family support] is pretty middle class as far as I'm concerned."

In addition to discussing the impact the hurricane had on their familial relationships, James and Helen spoke of how their lives were forever altered when the storm and subsequent events led them to one another. During the initial evacuation from the city, Helen's previous relationship disintegrated – "I was with a different person and we were engaged to be married, and yeah – the hurricane hit and a lot of things happened and it didn't work out." Having just returned to New Orleans, both participants were independently invited to attend an art show in New York. It was there that they met and fell in love. James recalled, "So, I got up there and I met the exact right person and that was cool." When asked to describe any possible benefits that he garnered as a result of the storm, James replied, "Well, I got her." Video observation data paralleled the described closeness of the couple. Throughout the interview, Helen and James privately and quietly maintained body contact by discretely rubbing one another's backs, resting their hands on the other's thigh under the table and touching feet as they spoke. Although James often stared down while he talked appearing to gather his thoughts, Helen watched him intently.

In addition, he sought eye contact with her when it was her turn to speak and smiled at her when she made deliberate points.

*“It’s Pretty Middle Class – Having a Hard Work Ethic”*

When discussing the impact of social class on their lives and recovery, James and Helen spoke to financial status, property ownership, values and employment. For both participants, the rise to a self-defined inclusion in the “middle class” grew out of conscious escape of their childhood poverty. While Helen identified her family as having always embraced middle class values while being limited by financial hardship, James detailed a youth firmly positioned in the “lower class.” The couple described the values, intelligence and work ethics that they attribute to their ability to climb the social ladder. Crucial to this rise is the fundamental infusion of their professions into their identity as individuals and as a married couple. Moreover, they attribute connect the concrete markers they identify with their inclusion in the middle class to their lives post-hurricane.

*“Poverty with a cape.”*

Helen spoke infrequently about her childhood life, referencing only her parent’s limited finances as a hurdle to accessing material goods she associates with middle class life. James, however, discussed his early family life at length. He revealed the details of his earliest family structure:

My dad went over to Vietnam and came back and my parents split up. So when we were going through all that we were homeless – lived in a state park... So, I came up in like serious, super poverty – like, poverty with a cape, man.

There were many social consequences of this lifestyle for James, including the fact that he saw his father “only very sporadically” and that he, “never really lived around people.” Additionally, he discussed the ramification on his health of having to struggle so mightily for access to food:

I really kept my eyes open when I was little about how extremely brutal the class system is in this country, and one of the ways it affected me personally is my teeth, my diet...

Like, if I have fifty cents I get a candy bar because that's food... So it was killing me through my diet.

When thinking about his formation of ideas surrounding class, James reported, “I mean, I saw myself as never really being able to compete in the class system, so I was like, fuck class. It was really non-existent to me.”

However, in their married life, James and Helen believe that they have achieved a middle class existence. When member checking, I asked James, “So, you would define yourself as middle class?” to which he replied, “I guess so, I've got a house payment – no more lower class [for us]!” In addition to their status as property owners, Helen described the couple as “boring and safe” – representative of her ideas of middle class life. She also offered their maintenance of a relationship with her parents as proof of being “pretty middle class.” However, the couple returned the conversation to their home ownership repeatedly, indicating the value they assign to this as an important indicator of class status. Within this identity, the couple stressed their uniqueness; middle class but incorporating fringe ideas and subsequently non-traditional material possessions. James spoke of the fears he now has as a new property owner and member of the middle class that during another storm, his house might be subject to looting. However, Helen returned to the idea that their possessions would be worthless to those in lower classes who wouldn't know what to do with them:



What are they going to take? Some paintings? Some feminist art that they don't know anything about? Some cameras that they don't know how to work? They wouldn't understand what any of the other stuff we had was.

This reference to their status as artists within a middle class community also alludes to the importance the couple place on maintenance of employment as a crucial factor in maintaining a middle class life.

*"A teacher and an artist."*

James and Helen both identify dually as artists and teachers. Although James sporadically teaches school, having not taught "in a long time" at the time of the interviews, and primarily makes his living through selling his art, Helen maintains employment as an art teacher while simultaneously identifying as a "feminist artist." Both participants spoke repeatedly about the connection between their passions for art and education and the ways in which it influences the direction of their lives. For Helen, teaching "underprivileged kids" in Orleans Parish provides a sense of making a difference in the world. She believes that particularly now, post-Katrina, when many of her students face so many "additional challenges," she has the opportunity to make a profound impact, saying, "This is my population. These are my kids. This is the time." James described having thrived as an educator because of his connection to students who struggle as he did. He explained:

The problems I didn't get when I was teaching are the problems they give her. I represent the presence of someone who's absent. The same case as in my life. My dad was homeless and shit, so, who wasn't around? My dad... These kids are just railing. If I come in, I don't have a problem with them.

In addition to a passion for educating, James and Helen both deeply identify as artists. They spoke of the many ways in which the hurricane has influenced their artistic paths. Both lost a great deal of artwork following the storm – “storms just kill art” (James). However, the destruction from the flood also provided both participants with new inspiration to create. Helen’s artifact was the first artwork she made in connection with the storm. She brought in a print of the photograph in which she stands nude wearing pink satin bridal shoes on a ladder overlooking the destruction of her former warehouse studio and described the piece as “giving hope.” James intended to display his website as artifact data, although we were unable to access the McDonald’s wireless to see the page. He described the item he most wanted to show on the page as “Cigar-box guitars” made from “Katrina wood.” Embedded in his work, he describes a message of “reusing” rather than “discarding.” He verbalized the passion he felt in creating art out of the destruction – “Everyone wanted to pitch everything and I was like, No! It’s really old wood. Don’t throw it away! Not so much that, but in the end, I wanted to make something, I guess, that would make sound again.”

James and Helen were conflicted about the impact of Katrina on the art world. Although Helen passionately rebuked artists photographing the impact of Katrina and profiting as a result, stating, “I have friends that I don’t speak to anymore because of their Katrina work,” she did describe “exposure” she has received following the hurricane as a positive thing. The artifact photo she presented was featured in an exhibit of Hurricane Katrina artwork at the New Orleans Museum of art which resulted in her first showing at the museum. Additionally, she spoke with pride of a mural that she and her students painted on a New Orleans building during the rebuilding process that was featured prominently on CNN. James, too, benefited as an artist in that his Hurricane Katrina woodworking has sold “more than anything I’ve ever done.” Helen

explained her conflicted feelings, on the one hand condemning “opportunistic artists” while simultaneously arguing, “As an artist, that’s what it’s all about – coverage, coverage, coverage.”

*“Take Responsibility”*

A significant theme for James and Helen was the failure they saw of others around them to “take responsibility” for themselves or within their position of authority and / or helper. Both participants were noted in video observation to sit back forcefully against the McDonald’s booth, sometimes throwing their hands in the air, as they recounted ways in which the people surrounding them were disappointments. The conversations that contributed to this theme were delivered in voices filled with anger and sarcasm. For this couple, the hurricane demonstrated the need for a call to responsible action for people in all classes and strata of society. The theme is divided into the discussions surrounding the external forces and helping agents who came to New Orleans in response to the storm and the people who make up the underprivileged population in the city.

*“So profoundly fail us.”*

While James and Helen did recognize some helpers who provided affirming assistance, the majority of people they described were disappointing in their efforts. They acknowledged the Red Cross, Al Copeland – “that guy who owned Popeyes” – and the occasional “cool volunteer worker from somewhere else” for providing meaningful aid. For the couple this included, “free [vaccines]... people who want to teach... kits to clean up your stuff... [and] food, food, food.” However, in their thankfulness, they included a wish that those from outside the community would provide assistance and “then step back! Don’t take over” (Helen).

The couple's criticism of people not affiliated with their community was broken into two categories – those who were supposed to help and did not and people who came into the city to exploit the vulnerability of the citizens. Although most aid workers received praise, both participants viewed the police, governmental agencies and the government as having failed in their duties. James spoke roundly of his “harassment” by police, beginning with his evacuation route in Kansas City and continuing through the initial recovery in New Orleans. In the parking lot of a grocery store in Kansas, James and his brother constructed a sign reading “Give us some ice” and waited for help from patrons. He recoiled at the intervention by local police who he described as “suspicious” and who reprimanded him with the message that “solicitation is wrong.” When describing the police encounters he had in New Orleans, James identified each story by the police man's home state – “Michigan,” “Pennsylvania,” “New Mexico” – and expressed his belief that their lack of knowledge of the local community and culture led to a clash between them and him.

When discussing the governmental interventions in the city during and immediately following the storm, James proclaimed, “The ability to which the government can so profoundly fail us has never been so obvious to me.” The couple dismissed the Mayor as “a dumb ass” and his plans for city revitalization to be “canning and serving Jazz.” Additionally, they experienced the distribution of government aid to be random, stating, “When they told us we couldn't get a food stamp card because we weren't here during the storm, I was like, seriously? I have nothing – no way to make money and you won't give me a food stamp card?” Video observation of the couple's body movements supported their assertions that they were angry by revealing James' clenched fists and Helen's rolling eyes as they spoke about their government.

In addition to the belief they held that authority failed to recognize the humanity of their plight, James and Helen harshly criticized the outsiders who, “came to take a picture and document our tragedy then sell it back to us” (Helen). Helen vigorously portrayed the art that exposed photographs of Katrina as exploitive, asking, “Why would you go make light of someone else’s tragedy like that?” and her sarcasm bled through her voice when she rhetorically asked and then answered, “Why take advantage? It’s like, oh, right, you’re a pariah.” James described the tour busses that continued at the time of the interviews to travel the town creating the sensation that, “we’re like the zoo or something.” He pleaded with tourists and outsiders to remember, “that I’m a person.”

*“They were like rats.”*

In addition to disgust in the behavior of non-New Orleanians, Helen and James expressed profound disappointment in the actions of many of their community members. During the initial weeks of his return when food and water were scarce, James witnessed selfishness that he described as, “people losing their minds.” He recounted a fight between some of his neighbors over a loaf of bread – “It was crazy. People would grab it and they were like – it’s my bread! They were like rats, total rats.” Additionally, Helen spoke critically of looters who took more than what they needed to survive, saying, “If you need food and water, that’s fantastic. Clothes, diapers, fine. But if there’s no electricity you don’t need a flat screen television.”

Another disappointment for the couple was the lack of shared community “sense” in which neighbors made decisions that took into account the wellbeing of their family as well as that of those around them. Helen described the evacuation, saying, “Nobody really took the time to find out about the elderly people in the neighborhood or even said I have an extra seat.” For James, the new generation of the Ninth Ward led to the catastrophic loss in that area of the city.

He described the neighborhood as being established by “African American GIs from World War II who couldn’t buy a house” but stated that the current generation of “kids [in the Ninth Ward] are dumbasses.” He called for a community memory that would recall the devastation of past hurricanes and encourage proper evacuation procedures, but expressed dismay as he said, “Somebody has to be that person and it’s not going to be those dumbass kids.” Although the couple both spoke of the Public Service Announcements on television encouraging hurricane preparedness, Helen exclaimed, “Like, wow – the TV has to tell us to do it – that’s fantastic!”

Finally, Helen spoke repeatedly to the frustration she feels with what she believes to be inappropriate parenting behavior of the parents of many of her students. She described a news story on a local television that illustrated her feelings:

We had this *wonderful* story about parents who still worked out of town in Alexandria and Mississippi and these kids were living by themselves in FEMA trailers and they are glamorizing it. Like, this kid’s great – he’s graduating from St. Augustine, he’s by himself and he’s 17. I’m like, that’s *illegal*. Like, social services? Oh, I forgot, they don’t work here anymore.

She described the emotional state of her children saying, “they’re still really, really, really angry” and how she attempts to address their suffering while teaching social messages despite the fact that they don’t get those lessons at home, saying, “There’s a monster in this room, and I want you to respect women too, and I want you to learn too. Whatever, I’m the crazy white art teacher.” For Helen, her connection to her students is an opportunity to correct the failures of some of her fellow New Orleanians.

*“Suffering From Post-Traumatic-Stress”*

James and Helen spoke at length about the ways in which the process of recovering from the hurricane has impacted them as people. Although video observation of interactions and body language did not reveal demonstrations of sadness through physical posturing, Helen in particular's verbal intonations were powerful when she discussed the changes she sees in herself. Her voice was louder and more forceful when she revealed the emotional toll the hurricane has taken on her and quieted almost to a whisper when discussing the ways she gets through bad days. The couple placed themselves within the context of their community when Helen said, "I think we're all suffering from post-traumatic-stress around here," and demonstrated a strong connection to one another by turning the conversation away from me and to each other as they searched to explain the way in which they now evaluate their lives. The theme illustrating the personal impact of the hurricane on the couple revealed three subthemes – an exploration of their emotions surrounding the storm and recovery, a discussion about how they now assess their lives in different ways and presentation of the tools they use to persevere in the face of challenge.

*"As vulnerable as the space around me."*

The defenselessness Helen experienced in the wake of the storm was most powerfully represented by the self-portrait she presented as artifact data. She referenced her nudity in the photo by explaining, "I wanted to be as vulnerable as the space around me." For Helen, this photograph provided the opportunity to visually demonstrate the montage of emotions she experienced walking into her destroyed warehouse and internalizing all of the damage around her. She explained her thought process as she stood on a ladder, naked, overlooking the destruction on the floor below and waited for the camera shutter to click:

I think it talks about the home we're building of humans and women and like the displacement of things and people and the whole thing about it not being stable and

climbing up. That's where you get the hope. So it's like, yeah, I'm trying to get higher...

It was really important to give [the experience of being in the storm] dignity.

James too described the emotions that he experienced as he first looked around his city, existing simultaneously as observer and victim:

In some ways it was kind of morbidly beautiful to be coming up Orleans [Avenue] from the bottom of the city to the top – and it was kind of off-putting and wrong that you couldn't hear any birds or squirrels or anything...It was kind of like denial. Beyond that, it was just kind of like, you have a couple of dead bodies. It didn't occur to me to lock the doors and stay inside, what else am I going to do?

As the discussion moved toward the sustained impact of the storm, James initially said, "I mean, I think it was right after the storm when we all changed." However, Helen argued that the changes are ongoing, responding, "Oh, I don't know. I think we're still coping and dealing and decompressing," resulting in vigorous head nods of agreement from James. Video data supported a feeling of sustained emotional impact as throughout this portion of the discussion both participants avoided eye contact with me and sought instead the walls behind my head or looked to the ceiling until they found and locked on the gazes of one another.

In addition to the overwhelming emotional impact of the experiences they had in New Orleans, Helen also described significant personal changes she attributes to her experiences in Lafayette. Upon arrival in her evacuation city, Helen immediately sought employment with the Lafayette public schools. The influx of Katrina children created a need for additional teachers and as a result she was hired and began work immediately. However, when her students discovered her website depicting feminist artwork, she was promptly fired. She described her reaction:



It's not a porn site – it's an art site. It's like, 'Ooh, you caught me! I make art!' It was a big disappointment to find out that I thought Louisiana was open minded and progressive – I guess living in New Orleans I was sheltered from the redneck, Christianity, beater-ville.

This dismissal from education and its connection to the art she so passionately creates was profoundly disappointing for Helen. She discussed the long-term impact it has had on her, saying, "It broke my heart. Broke my heart. With people, and trusting things... like, I don't trust people as much anymore psychologically."

*"Reevaluate my life."*

The impact of the storm created changes for the couple in the way in which they assess their place within the context of the community in addition to sparking a sense of increased determination to pursue the life they might only have dreamed about before the storm. For James, his travels outside of Louisiana since Katrina have resulted in repeated inquiries that he feels call upon him to be the voice for the community at large. While prior to the storm he said he might have easily stepped into that role, the profound devastation of Katrina has caused him to recoil from such a Herculean task. He explained – "You're in the conversation and its this big job of representing everything... and that's the worst thing you can do is misrepresent." He explained that he feels his life has been minimally impacted when compared to many other Katrina victims, saying, "I just feel like whatever I lost or my friends lost, it's localized. I mean there are people who died. There are all different kinds of devastation." The gravity of some people's losses creates for James the sense that it would be improper for him to reveal his own experiences in a manner that would imply that his losses are representative of the losses of others.

The impact of such profound tragedy inspired in Helen a need to pursue dreams she had previously set aside. She differentiated their experiences, saying, "I can't speak for [James]" but described how she was motivated to embrace her life in a new way:

It made me reevaluate my life in a way that I consider things to be a little bit more dire or a little bit more pressing, like I really need to do something, or not. Even with relationships. So it's like, ok, if I want to have these things or have someone in my life, I need to do it.

This sense of urgency was one of the reasons she pursued her relationship with James as quickly and intensely as she did. While she had previously been "focused on my art," the timing of their meeting intersected with her revelation that she wanted a family and resulted in her contributions to their moving forward to eventual marriage.

*"I'm not talking about God, but I'll breathe."*

The search for strategies to alleviate some of the pain and stress that continued to arise for the couple throughout the recovery resulted in varying and at times conflicting methods of release. Both participants spoke about their shared love for animals and the catharsis they have experienced by being able to help the abandoned animals in the storm. Helen's evacuation experience was shaped by her cat and the fact that many evacuation plans were not feasible with an animal. James told the story of the couple's second cat, a rescue animal his friend found while walking the city after the storm. Additionally, although they were not together in the initial weeks of their return to the city, both James and Helen recalled helping abandoned animals as a way of contributing to the community:

Whatever food we couldn't eat we were feeding the stray animals. There were cats and dogs everywhere! It was horrible. They were starving, we didn't know what to do... So

we just had a routine. We'd set up a little thing of water and food and every time we came back it was gone.

The couple also spoke about helping other people as a way to begin the healing process for themselves. In addition to talking about her position as an educator as a way of helping, Helen discussed assisting other New Orleanians who had fewer resources than she did during the storm, saying, "People need to help each other out!" James too recounted stories of providing help and relief to the people suffering around him – "I would go under the bridge there and make sure those people were eating – and I would play my guitar, 'cause I play music, and I would just play." While on his evacuation odyssey, James and his younger brother spent time in Houston and, despite his status as an evacuee, decided to volunteer at the Astrodome to help out other evacuees. He said, "I was like, I worked in a hospital for a few years, I can do this. So, let's go do some Astrodome work!" He viewed this work as a way to pass the time while also providing a service to his fellow New Orleanians.

Finally, the couple was ambivalent about talking about feelings and emotions as a way to find solace and release. Although they both recounted many instances wherein they engaged in lengthy conversations about their Katrina experiences with family, friends, and one another, Helen said, "It's hard to talk about it because we live it." Additionally, when describing the ways in which her school worked to provide times for cathartic release, she rejected the connection between spiritual dialogue and recovery. Catholic Charities led the therapeutic sessions for faculty in her school and she said, "Every other faculty meeting, we're like, 'And now we're going to talk about God and breathe.' And I'm just like, 'I'm not talking about God, but I'll breathe.'" However, both Helen and James reported talking to one another as a way they maintain strength. Moreover, Helen has been engaged in personal counseling for two years to discuss

issues she has related to her firing in Lafayette and dealing with the hurricane recovery. She expressed her thankfulness for the free counseling services she receives, saying, "Ever since they opened up the United Way since the storm, I'm like – free counseling? Wow! Where have you been all of my life? And I go like every other week and talk to her about it."

### *SCWM Analysis*

James and Helen's worldview relative to social class status encompasses many domains but is primarily connected to their referent group of origin and their referent group of aspiration. When asked to describe social class, the couple discussed values, employment, financial status and property ownership. Of these, property ownership defined their move to "middle class." However, the references to poverty-laden childhoods clearly reveal the development of values for the couple that include a strong desire to escape "lower class" status. In order to achieve this hierarchical climb, they have embraced values they believe to be representative of the middle class. When discussing James' mother's unconventional method for daycare – "she just dropped me off at the library for like four hours every day" – the couple dissected the values interwoven into her actions, distinguishing those they now view as acceptable from those inconsistent with middle class thinking. James described this behavior as "abandoning your kid" which they both attributed to her lack of financial resources but Helen underscored the educative value as beneficial. They championed family togetherness, education, and maintaining owned property as the middle class values they have embraced in their adulthood.

In addition to transforming their value sets to match those of their referent group of aspiration – the middle class – James and Helen regularly invoked expressions of downward classism as a method of distinguishing themselves from their former "lower class" comrades. They spoke with disapproval of the behavior of many Katrina evacuees who looted or engaged in

other criminal activities. Opportunism was seen by the couple as decidedly un-middle class, as evidenced by Helen's assertion that her search for immediate employment was "pretty middle class" as opposed to the reliance on FEMA money of other evacuees. Additionally, her sympathy for upper-middle class homeowners whose neighborhoods changed with the influx of new racial and ethnic minorities clearly surpassed her compassion for individuals still living in FEMA trailers who she felt should "take responsibility" for their recovery.

Within their internal constructions of their social class status, James and Helen appear to tenuously hold on to their membership in the middle class. Each time the couple discussed class directly and elaborated on what they believe to be their current status, they would interject stories of contrast from their youth. This ever-looming threat of internalized childhood class status is contained by their classist messages, wherein they distinguish themselves as separate from others they perceive to be representative of their former class. Moreover, James and Helen in many ways report feeling marginalized as a result of their backgrounds of poverty. When discussing the parameters for study participation and whether or not the couple would be a good fit for participation, James enthusiastically stated, "Well that's us alright. I mean, I own a house now, but I haven't had shit for most of my life."

#### *Nelly and Yvonne*

Nelly and Yvonne were both the only single gendered pair to participate in the study and the only case study wherein there has never been any romantic involvement. Rather, Nelly, a 55 year old African American nurse and Yvonne, a 34 year old African American storage space clerk are aunt and niece. The women have always been emotionally close and reported coming from a tight-knit family but did not live together prior to the storm. Both women lost their romantic partners in the wake of Hurricane Katrina – Yvonne to a break-up and Nelly to her

husband's death from cancer. The formation of their new family was a result of these losses and the other hardships each had to endure through the recovery process. They reported that they rely on "each other" for strength and have found a comfortable new life with one another as companions.

I met with these two women for each of our three interviews in the living room of their four bedroom home. The focal point of the home was a large picture window in the front room that made up much of the wall looking out into the front yard. We sat around a cardboard table set up in this front room over the course of three days as the women told the stories of how their households have merged over the preceding three years. In addition to Nelly and Yvonne, Yvonne's 14 year old son and Nelly's four year old boxer both live in the home. Although the house architecturally provides an obvious opportunity for separation with two bedrooms flanking either side of the main living space, the women live intertwined lives sharing all of the responsibilities and duties of a home. Their Katrina tales twisted around broad-reaching themes, but ultimately led back to uncovering the path that brought them together. Five themes emerged from the data to illustrate their ultimately conjoined journeys:

Themes	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2	Subtheme 3
<b>"I was a mess"</b>	"I ended up..."	"No place like New Orleans"	
<b>"What I had to go through"</b>	"I cried as much as I could"	"He went through a lot of stuff"	
<b>"Get to know me as a person"</b>	"Sympathetic to the plight"	"Had it thrown in our face"	"Painted with a broad brush"
<b>"You know what to do when you don't have money"</b>	"The work I do"	"They showed me the drill"	"Having to evacuate and have no money"
<b>"Trying to rebuild my life"</b>	"Able to be around some family"	"A much better attitude"	"Get my life back"

*"I Was a Mess"*

Although Nelly and Yvonne had separate experiences during the storm, evacuation, and return to the city, in many ways their stories developed throughout the interviews in a parallel process. The women comfortably built on one another's dialogue, contributing ways in which their own journeys were unique or differed. Both women had lived, along with all of their extended family, in New Orleans for their entire lives. The evacuation was traumatic in its expediency and intensity, but also in that it forced the women to leave their homes, family and community. A rich narrative detailing their independent experiences with evacuating from the hurricane provided the foundation for the ensuing anxieties and struggles the women encountered as they attempted to reconstruct lives that differed markedly from those they led pre-storm. Their stories of the hardship of evacuation – "I was a mess. No clothes, hadn't bathed in days, had a toothache that started, just really bad off" (Nelly) – also provided contrast to the profound comfort the women found in simply returning to their New Orleans community. Within this theme, two subthemes distinguish these separate components of their journeys in which they first evacuated to unfamiliar cities and communities and then eventually returned home to their communal networks of support.

*"I ended up..."*

Although both women spoke about the New Orleans culture that rejects the idea of hurricane evacuation, saying, "Some people are just like that cause they figure they got through Betsy and Camille," they stated that they did remember and as such chose to evacuate – "Betsy was the first day of school so I can remember it well... we know it happen, we know it happen" (Nelly). Nelly had been married to her first husband for only six months when Hurricane Katrina threatened to destroy their mutual hometown. Considered "essential staff" as a nurse for the

Touro Hospital Psychiatric Ward, Nelly reported to work prior to the storm planning to stay through with her patients. The morning before the storm hit, her husband dropped her off at work and told her he would “ride out the storm” at their apartment twelve blocks away. However, the hospital was as unprepared for the levee failure as the rest of the city and as the waters began to rise, essential staff were relieved of their duties and ordered to evacuate:

We were under the impression that the hospital had someplace for us to stay. So we were there until that Thursday morning when we had a meeting. After the meeting, we were told that there was no place to stay and we needed to get out the best way you could.

Now, there was no telephone service and... I couldn't go home.

Unsure of where her husband was and having no way to contact him, Nelly rode with three coworkers to Baton Rouge. There, she spent three days and nights sleeping in the car in a parking lot before speaking with her sister in Atlanta who bought her a plane ticket out. Nelly recalled her arrival, saying, “When [my sister] saw me, she couldn't believe – I looked like a vagabond, but that's the way it is... I don't like Atlanta, I just need to say that. So, I stayed there for a week but I wanted to get home.”

While Nelly was preparing to work through the storm, Yvonne and her son were evacuating their apartment above the storage unit facility she managed. She was ordered by her company to close up the site, so, “We left out... They had us board up everything and that Saturday we were out of the city.” Initially, Yvonne and her son evacuated to New Rose, Louisiana. However, New Rose was also hit by the hurricane and so she and her son moved on, eventually ending up in Shreveport where Yvonne stayed for over a year. She was uncomfortable in her new surroundings, saying, “Before I came here [to New Orleans] I never was really



sleeping good.” Having never lived anywhere without her family and friends, she had a difficult time adjusting to her lack of a social network:

Just like when I got a job and I felt like I was lost. I was sitting at the job one day and we found out it was Friday. And it was like déjà vu or something cause I was like – Friday, what am I going to do, cause I like to go out a lot. And I was like, Friday – nothing to do.

Nobody I knew, so, there ain’t no going out. It just wasn’t right. It didn’t seem right.

However, although Nelly struggled without the support of her New Orleans community, she stated that she frequently reminded herself that at least she had her son, because, “it always been just me and him.”

*“No place like New Orleans.”*

Although the length of time away from New Orleans was vastly different for Nelly and Yvonne, both women pined for home and were ecstatic to finally return for good. Yvonne was in Shreveport “maybe 18 months” but would come back to New Orleans “almost every three months.” She described her time in Shreveport as filled with a longing for the comfort she found in New Orleans. Yvonne recalled how palpable her need to return home was while she was away:

You know, for some strange reason I felt like – I was catching these anxiety attacks and sometimes I’d be sleeping and catch them. ‘Cause I felt like I knew I wanted to be here [in New Orleans] but I couldn’t be here.

When she was finally able to return home and move in with her aunt, her anxiety dissipated. She experienced the relief in the absence of physical tension and anxiety, allowing her body to sleep soundly for the first time since the hurricane – “I never was sleeping, but the minute I came down here, I slept. And it wasn’t that much of a sleep, but I felt like I just came home and went

to sleep.” Although the rebuilding of a New Orleans life had just begun for Yvonne, she described the peace the return home brought her – “When I got back down here I just felt at home.”

Nelly too longed for a return home, but rather than wait a long time in Atlanta, she returned to New Orleans as soon as she could get into the city. She was alone in Atlanta and her husband was in their apartment in Uptown New Orleans. For the first few weeks following the storm, Nelly would listen to New Orleans radio to get information:

We were steadily listening every night to Garland Robinette and my first thought was I was never going to come back... But once I got to Atlanta and I don't care what anybody says – there is no place like the city of New Orleans! I felt like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz 'cause I just wanted to click my heels together – there's no place on the face of the Earth like this city.

Within a month, Nelly was able to return to her husband as well as her beloved community. She described the trip home with an excited voice, saying, “We did like 110 coming back here and my husband was in the apartment, no lights on, hot as hell, and I walked in and – God, it was just so good to see him.” She and her husband immediately went out into the city. Video observation data demonstrates the enthusiasm of her words. As she told of her first night out, her fist banged down on the table and her voice filled the room:

We got up and we went straight to the French Quarter. I'm not a Quarter, bar person, but there we were, sitting in Razoos. And I called my sister and I said guess where I am? I'M SITTING IN THE FRENCH QUARTER! It was just so great – the best feeling in the world. No ice, had nothing, but I was home. And everything was going to be o.k. after that.

*“What I Had to Go Through”*

Both Nelly and Yvonne recounted substantial amounts of grief as they described their lives in the three years since the hurricane. While some of the sadness they experienced tied directly to the hurricane and the losses associated with it, other losses were less directly connected. However, each component of sorrow was connected in some way to this event which forever marks their lives. There was an air of acceptance in Nelly’s remark, “I guess it’s just what I had to go through.” As the women spoke about their personal grief and loss and the motivation they had to move forward, they also recounted the significant losses of their closest loved ones. Yvonne spoke of her son’s struggle with the changes in his life as a result of Katrina while Nelly told of the pain and suffering her husband experienced, ultimately losing his life. This theme is divided into two subthemes – the personal losses that each woman experienced and then the detailed accounts of the losses of their most important men.

*“I cried as much as I could.”*

Yvonne described the losses she experienced in very practical terms, often saying things such as, “things is replaceable.” However, there were moments in the interviews when she would touch on an emotion connected to the grief she experienced following the storm, and during those times she freely discussed her sadness as well as her determination to move forward. She reflected on the initial weeks following the storm and said, “It was traumatizing at first, at the beginning of it. I mean, I had to pick myself up because of my son and just get us going. We was lucky, we had a lot of help.” Although her physical property loss was substantial, she only mourned the loss of her son’s baby pictures. She regretted the loss of mementos, saying, “The only thing that keeps me awake is why I didn’t take the pictures that time. Why? ‘Cause every other time I had the pictures packed. Why didn’t I take them that time?”

Artifact data lends credence to this theme. Yvonne's artifacts were two of her son's birthday cards that remained untouched in her apartment following the hurricane sitting propped open on the top of a television with the glass blown out. Yvonne described the emotional recovery of the cards when she first set foot in her flooded apartment:

They was just sitting like that, and I had a lot of stuff for [my son] that I used to save – saved just everything. And believe it or not all of the other stuff [of his] was in a plastic bag and I probably would have been able to get that but everything was so swelled up on the doors and stuff. I was kind of scared to just walk through in general... so this was the only thing I just got out there.

Although the only two possessions Yvonne and her son were able to salvage were these two birthday cards, she emphasized the importance of experiencing the sadness and then intentionally moving forward – “So, I mean, it wasn't as bad as it seems. I mean, trust me, I cried as much as I could, but after that I started just getting stronger.”

While Nelly's apartment was not significantly damaged in the storm, it flooded a week after she returned home. She laughed heartily as she recalled the irony of the situation – “As a result of Katrina the ground had shifted and broke the pipes under the ground and my apartment flooded – one week after we were home!” However, although the majority of their items were lost in this secondary flood, Nelly spoke little of her property loss. Her primary grief entangled with the storm is that of losing her husband. She reflected on the progression of his illness immediately following their return to New Orleans and said, “Katrina didn't – I don't know – it didn't help. Did it hurt? I don't know.” Compounding the challenge of caring for a dying husband was the fact that, due to the closure of her hospital and subsequent job loss following the storm, the couple no longer had health insurance when he fell ill. One of the components of

grief Nelly spoke of was that of having to beg for assistance. Tears ran down her cheeks as she said, “When my husband got sick he didn’t have any insurance. So, I knew how it was to have to say, hey – I need help, and I’d never been in that position before.” Although the initial evacuation was traumatic for Nelly, she concluded, “I think my worst time was after Katrina.”

*“He went through a lot of stuff.”*

Although both women used words to convey sadness and Nelly shed tears when speaking of their own losses, the body language they displayed when discussing the grief their loved ones experienced was profoundly emotional. Yvonne discussed her son and his struggles and video footage showed that she shook her head, looking down while she spoke, in sharp contrast to the standard enthusiastic stance she maintained throughout most of the interviews. Nelly cried when reflecting on her loss of her husband but when she spoke of his death in terms of what he lost, she covered her face with her hands and at one point had to stop speaking to take a break.

Yvonne spoke quietly, lowering her voice so that her son who was studying in his bedroom might not hear her, when she said, “My son went through a lot of stuff” and Nelly concurred, “Yes he did.” In addition to losing all of his belongings, including letters and cards from a father who rarely keeps in touch, Yvonne’s son Grant was forced to give up his school and friends. Prior to the storm, they lived in an area known as New Orleans East. The evacuation resulted in two moves to two different cities within a month for the teenager and his mother, and eventually their return to New Orleans found them in Uptown, some 20 miles from their old neighborhood. Additionally, many of Grant’s friends left New Orleans and did not return. Yvonne described one of the most challenging components of the recovery for Grant to be the transitions in and out of different school districts. She said, “He had to repeat a grade, he had to end up going up through it all over again here and that was tough for him.” However, she was

adamant that he develop an attitude similar to her own and revealed how she attempted to motivate him to maintain positivity – “Like I told him, it’s a year. It’s just a year. You know, you graduate when you 18 just like anybody else when they graduate. And he did wonderful in school this year.”

As Nelly recalled the progression of her husband’s illness she described the challenges it created for him to lay dying in a city fighting for rebirth. In addition to the challenge created by the couple’s lack of health insurance, many hospitals in New Orleans did not reopen following the storm. Nelly and her husband moved into an apartment close to the hospital and she ended up finding work, “a block from the hospital” so that during his chemotherapy she could visit him on her breaks. Because the couple was significantly impacted by his inability to work, Nelly worked overtime and double shifts to pay their bills. However, this left him “alone” fighting cancer. She expressed her regret over his isolation and described how she tried to keep him company in other ways – “I got that dog-gone dog because of my husband. He needed something to keep him out of bed, keep him going. The dog is even traumatized now.” However, she did take pride in her ability to provide him with the care he needed based on her training as a nurse. She said, “I knew what to do, I knew the things he needed, and I gave those people Holy Hell [to get it for him.]” Although his losses were immeasurable, Nelly thought that his grief was mediated by her loving attention and his close relationship with his dog.

#### *“Get to Know Me as a Person”*

Personal relationships and interactions throughout the recovery process were a substantial theme within Nelly and Yvonne’s interviews. The women described supportive and meaningful interchanges, often with random strangers, which have profoundly influenced their recoveries in positive ways. However, they also spoke in anger of the people and agencies they

feel let them down. This dialogue interspersed throughout the interviews and intertwined in their answers to every major question demonstrated the significance of interpersonal relationships for both Nelly and Yvonne and the influence these relationships have on their lives. Underlying all of the descriptions of developing relationships was Nelly's assertion that meaningful contact evolves when someone will, "get to know me as a person." It was this intimacy that gave meaning to the positive relationships the women described and its lack that contributed to their negative interpersonal experiences. Within this theme, three subthemes are present; the first discusses the people who displayed kindness in the face of devastation, the second details the painful interchanges the women had with individuals unwilling or unable to help, and the third explores the women's thoughts and feelings about other hurricane survivors' behavior and the impact of those actions on the way they believe the world perceived them.

*"Sympathetic to the plight."*

Nelly's artifact clearly demonstrated the impact the kindness of strangers has had on her throughout her recovery. She brought a business card, worn on the corners from frequent use but well preserved in the integrity of its form, bearing the name of an attorney she referred to as "my savior." The man she referred to as "Duke" was one of the first people to help her following the hurricane and has remained a powerful force coming to her aid as she has encountered new challenges in the rebuilding of her life. Nelly met Duke in a Baton Rouge parking lot where she sat stranded and penniless and without a plan:

He was a volunteer with his church and his job was to bring people to bus stations and the airport. So, he brought me to the airport. Like I told you, I didn't have any money or whatever – and he gave me 20 dollars from his wallet.

Although she had no other possessions, Nelly held on to his business card throughout her evacuation to Atlanta and her return to New Orleans, having no idea he would enter her life again. After her husband died, his insurance company refused to pay his life insurance and Nelly had no idea how to fight the decision. She remembered his card and gave him a call:

I said, I need an attorney. And he was my attorney. The card was with me... I just laid it all out to him... and he did all the leg work. I eventually had to get another attorney because he is in Baton Rouge, but he had already had everything done, all of the paperwork... So this is my savior twice.

When asked to describe what characteristics stood out as those of the people who were most helpful and provided the most support, neither Nelly nor Yvonne hesitated. They stated that the people who were most influential in turning their experience into a positive one were, “helpful – and they just listened. We all have a story – everybody have they story” (Yvonne). Nelly concurred, saying, “They keep an open mind.” This experience of conscientious people coming to their aid defined both women’s evacuation stories. Nelly told of a woman she met in an Atlanta drug store where she was buying underwear. The woman said, “Please, let me buy those for you” and paid for all of the clothing Nelly had picked out. As she recalled this incident, she said,

I need to say too, I heard a lot of people talking about they went somewhere and they didn’t get a good welcome. Everywhere I went, I mean just arms open... So I ran into nothing – nothing but kindness the entire time I was gone.

Yvonne also experienced an overwhelming welcome and acceptance in Shreveport. She described the scene as she prepared to finally leave Shreveport and return to New Orleans:



When I got ready to leave there it was kinda hard because they didn't understand that I needed to come home. So, [My work] had a big party for me. They had a lady who worked there for 20 years and she came over to me and said your party is bigger than my party. So they gave me a big old party.

Artifact data demonstrated the emotional support Yvonne experienced from the recognition of people in Shreveport that she had suffered a traumatic experience. In addition to the birthday cards she presented, she also brought a brochure from a project she and many of her family members took part in recognizing the victims of Katrina. While in Shreveport, Yvonne was approached to participate in the project in which a large mural entitled, "The Faces of Katrina" showed photographs of evacuees. In addition to participation, the local museum held a night "just for us" where they hosted the Katrina victims and presented the mural. Yvonne took care to point out all of her family member names listed in the brochure and repeated three times, "They did it just for us."

Even when discussing their interactions with FEMA representatives on the phone, Nelly and Yvonne identified people who were very helpful. For those who were not helpful, Nelly offered understanding – "It was not only difficult for us, but it was difficult for a lot of other people too... They had to sit and listen to us complain about things that weren't right, so it was difficult for them." However, Yvonne recalled a particular FEMA worker who assisted her when she got her federal loan. He sat on the phone with her at length, making sure she had considered all of the expenses she might have – "You gonna need a car? You got clothes for work?" – and took the time to make sure she had all of her paperwork correctly filled out. These experiences with people who went beyond expectations to assist them in their time of need contributed to a sense for these women that humanity is kind and good.

*“Had it thrown in our face.”*

Although many people were overly helpful in their times of crisis, the women also experienced people, primarily agency representatives, who were dismissive and uncaring. While Nelly in particular took care to classify these incidents as deviations from the norm, the interchanges shaped their experience none the less. While Yvonne spoke of feeling unwelcome in her first evacuation stop in New Rose, saying, “We had it thrown in our face [that we were from New Orleans,]” Nelly felt that it was primarily people from outside Louisiana who were uncaring. She stated, “You had more problems with big people coming in than you had from local stuff.”

The women limited their examples of people who were unhelpful or blatantly opportunistic to insurance company and FEMA representatives. Nelly’s husband died within a year following the storm and, still reeling from the loss of her job and the cost of reestablishing a home, she anticipated receiving his life insurance check. She told a lengthy story that illustrated the frustration and pain she experienced as the insurance company denied her claim:

My husband and I got married and I got life insurance on him, right? Touro decides they’re not going to continue to give it to us. O,K. Called Jefferson Pilot – I want to continue life insurance on myself and my husband... Boom, premium every month, I’m paying, I’m paying, I’m paying... My husband passes, I file the claim. They tell me my husband wasn’t covered. You’ve TAKEN my money EVERY MONTH. Well, we sent you a letter. How can you send me a letter? We had NO MAIL SERVICE here in the city of New Orleans!... It’s not a frivolous claim. I didn’t tell you my roof blew off and really it didn’t. This is a death! So now I’m suing them.

For Nelly, this was an extremely painful experience. In addition to the fact that she desperately needed money, she experienced feelings of profound abandonment by the company she had relied on to provide for her in her time of need. She described the emotional connection she had to the money by revealing one of her last conversations with her husband:

My husband, he said, I'm leaving you something. I can't work. I promised you I would take care of you, and I can't do it. I can't keep my promise – that's what he told me. But he said, at least you'll have this little bit.

At the time of the interviews, Nelly was still battling the insurance company, and she said, "So, little me against them. So, we're going to see how that's going to work out."

In addition to feeling overlooked and uncared for by insurance companies, Nelly and Yvonne discussed their ongoing fights with FEMA to get the money that they were promised following the storm. They recalled both helpful FEMA representatives and FEMA workers they felt spoke to them with ambivalence and, at times, "disgust." However, Nelly refused to give up her fight when she faced resistance. She instructed Yvonne to do the same, saying, "I would tell her, do NOT accept what they tell you... Keep writing as long as they tell you no – until they say do not send another letter!" Yvonne was not able to maintain the energy required to continue pursuing her claims, saying, "I kind of did give up." However, Nelly persevered and eventually got all of the money she believed was owed to her. She described her mindset when speaking with FEMA reps who were hostile or unhelpful – "A lot of people just got tired of being bothered by FEMA – but I said, I'M NOT! I'm not going to give up... And that's how I got that last 4000 dollars."

*"Painted with a broad brush."*

Nelly and Yvonne believe that in many cases where people did not take the time to get to know them as individuals, they were lumped in with what they saw as the irresponsible behavior of many of their fellow New Orleanians. Nelly explained her perception that others place her in the same category as all of the other evacuees, saying, “We’re painted with a broad brush down here.” Although the women assign blame to both sides, believing the helpers should take the time to get to know each person for who they are and also criticizing the evacuees who made poor decisions, they spoke at length about their feelings for the latter, revealing, “I think I got more disgusted [with them] than anything else” (Yvonne).

The primary criticism Nelly and Yvonne had of the behavior of other evacuees related to what they saw as irresponsible use of grant funds. Yvonne described the behavior she saw – “They went and got stomach tucks and Coach bags and get what they want – and a lot of them went to the jewelry store. You know what I’m saying? They did what they want with their money.” For her, this behavior showed a lack of foresight and motivation. She explained her personal frustration, saying, “I’d like a new Coach bag, too, but it’s not realistic... What’s going to happen the next day when all your money gone?” Additionally, both women spoke of the resentment they feel when other African Americans expect them to cooperate with an attitude of, “I need, you give” (Nelly). Yvonne described the behavior as, “You got it free, and now you trying to get it MORE free!” She described customers who come into her storage facility and ask for receipts for storage units they haven’t rented in order to submit the claims to FEMA and get additional funds. The women discussed this phenomenon between themselves:

I have the ones who say, you know, you believe in God? And I’m like – oh my God!

Where this come from? (Yvonne)

I know, I know! (Nelly)

Oh – and the other one – you gonna help a sister out? *Hearty laugh* (Yvonne)

Yeah! *Laugh*. We get that all the time! And I'm like, I'll get so fired up, and I'm like, you can only help the ones who help themselves (Nelly).

Yvonne in particular expressed anger and resentment at being associated with the people she perceives to be abusing the system and said, "I get kind of pissed off behind it. You can't get something for nothing... why you trying to milk it?"

*"You Know What to Do When You Don't Have Money"*

Nelly and Yvonne discussed at length their understanding of class and the ways in which status and finances impact their lives and shaped their recovery. The women jointly identified as "working middle class," distinguishing this category from "middle class" by the absolute reliance on each paycheck to survive. They described their financial status as tenuous and Nelly stated, "There been times in my life when I didn't have no money and you know what to do when you don't have no money. You can make a meal out of – well, we can anyway – out of anything." However, they also stressed a focus on remaining employed and Yvonne reported that she has worked "all my life." This theme investigates the relationship between the women's hurricane experience and their class status, which they view as primarily connected to finances and employment status. Within the theme, three subthemes are developed in which the women talk about their employment within the context of being "working middle class," discuss the challenges of operating outside of their class system immediately following the hurricane, and elaborate on their financial situation during and following the hurricane.

*"The work I do."*

When discussing what it means to be “working middle class,” Nelly and Yvonne elaborated on many advantages. Nelly included “the opportunity to get [the government sponsored hurricane relief] SBA loan” which required proof that she had maintained employment prior to the storm as a significant advantage. Yvonne described, “being able to come back and get a job,” as a benefit and Nelly added, “Being able to get back to normal.” Additionally, both women felt that their status change following the storm wherein they struggled to access resources “was temporary” and they have been able to achieve their pre-storm class status by continuing with employment. However, they also differentiated their status from “middle class” saying, “That ain’t no paycheck to paycheck deal” (Yvonne).

Within the context of being “working middle class,” the women stressed their connection to their jobs as a primary avenue to accessing the resources they need to survive. While both women described their work at the time of the interviews as supportive structures that provide meaning in their lives and “gives me something to do” (Nelly), their experiences with their pre-storm employers differed dramatically. Nelly felt abandoned by Touro when they first sent her into the flooded city to find her own way out and then cut her job and provided no severance package upon her return to the city. She described the emotions that surrounded the end of her relationship with the hospital:

I was really kind of throwed off with them because, you know, we STAYED there – through all of that. And you led us to believe that you had a place for us. And then at the LAST minute when they’re telling everybody they had to leave the city, you just throw us out. Put us on our own.

Her feelings of abandonment were exacerbated by the experience of losing her health insurance along with her job just prior to her husband falling ill. However, Nelly feels fulfilled at her new

position with a different, smaller hospital, citing her ability to “have much closer contact with patients” as a primary factor in her job satisfaction.

Yvonne’s employer was “very supportive” throughout the storm and short-term evacuation. Although she eventually found new work in Shreveport and is now with a different storage facility in New Orleans, she praised her previous employer for being “good to their employees.” When Yvonne and her son were forced to evacuate their on-site apartment, her employer offered to continue paying her for up to six months. She recalled, “I didn’t work immediately and they kept paying me. They took care of me, they really did.” Because there were no openings for her position with her employer in the Shreveport area, Yvonne eventually sought new employment because “even though they was paying me, I couldn’t just sit around and do nothing.” She worked for a retail company while living in Shreveport and again found a compassionate and accommodating environment. The management at her new job was understanding of her need to return to New Orleans “every three months or so,” and Yvonne recalled, “Whenever I wanted to come home she would let me... she worked with me.” For Yvonne, having a job has been a steady avenue for support throughout the process of rebuilding and recovering.

*“They showed me the drill.”*

“Working middle class” as defined by Nelly and Yvonne constitutes a social structure in which they are very comfortable operating. Following the hurricane, they experienced what they considered to be a temporary shift in their class standing wherein their lack of access to money forced reliance upon government agencies. Nelly explained the challenges in negotiating this new way of being and explained how she negotiated the system – “[My nieces] had been there since like that Friday, so they showed me the drill with the food stamps, what you need to do,

cause you need to sign up for unemployment.” However, she was uncomfortable with the process. She elaborated on the way in which she differed in class status from other evacuees applying for government aid:

Well, if I was able to talk game, I probably could have gotten a whole lot more than I got. But because I'm not used to having to talk game, I didn't get all of that. I didn't have nine, ten debit cards because I didn't know how to talk game, and the thought of talking game never entered my mind. So, class? Maybe right there.

In order to effectively access all of the financial support available to them, Nelly and Yvonne relied on the television, the internet, the radio, and they “just followed the people.” While the initial process was frustrating, Yvonne began to appreciate the extra income. She reflected on how her approach to free funding changed:

Just to sit down there with the people, it drove you crazy. You not used to that. We don't get food stamps. But, I mean don't get me wrong – you get co-dependent on it. These food stamps, we need 'em!

In addition to learning a new system to negotiate, the women applied for the grant funding the government offered and, based on the fact that they had previous employment, were rejected. Federal guidelines stipulated that individuals who were potentially able to make payments qualified for a low interest loan rather than being given a grant. Yvonne in particular struggled with feelings of anger and resentment over this, feeling that her low income job penalized her while simultaneously limiting her ability to functionally pay the loan back:

I kind of got disgusted when I found out I could almost qualify for the grant as opposed to the loan. I mean I'm just saying I was like, you go out here and you work hard and everything and they have people they don't work at all and they qualify for the grant.



And I understand you don't have income, but I got to pay. I'll be honest with you, I was so upset.

However, feeling trapped by her lack of access to the money necessary to begin the process of resuming her life in New Orleans, she took the loan – “You know, I was like, I'm a single mother. I mean, I don't get a lick of child support – this is my job. So, I'm just going to have to do this.”

Although both women took out a 30 year loan, they have struggled to make the payments and stay within the parameters of the loan. They described the “stipulations” that accompanied the approval which included the inability to make payments on a vehicle with loan money or to move out of the residence that is used to apply for the loan. Yvonne expressed her anger over these restrictions, saying, “You know, you gave it to me as a loan, but then you're going to tell me how I can spend it? If it was a grant, they gave it to you free up – no stipulations.”

Additionally, she felt resentment at being told where she could live:

They actually told me, to be honest with you, that I couldn't really move out of [my apartment in] Shreveport... But I said, I still have to pay it back, so why you gonna put the stipulations on where I gotta be at?

Both women have embraced the attitude “they're just going to get it when I get it” (Nelly) with regards to their loan payments and are “not going to stress out to give them something that [they] don't have” (Yvonne).

*“Having to evacuate and have no money.”*

Nelly and Yvonne detailed the dual struggle during the hurricane of having limited funds in the bank when evacuating and then being prevented from accessing even that small amount of money that they had. Both women described being unprepared for the lengthy delay in the

reopening of local banks and described the challenges that resulted in traveling with no money. Nelly recalled the first day of her evacuation when she had only twenty dollars and no access to any other money:

When I went to work that day I only took 20 dollars. I had left my debit card and checkbook at home because when I went to work food was free. But having to evacuate and have NO MONEY. I had no money.

Yvonne had a similar experience in that her bank only operated in New Orleans and, following the storm, shut down for weeks. She remembered the frustration of having money in the bank that she was unable to access – “That happened to me too, ‘cause I was banking with Riverland, I wasn’t banking with no big bank... I got a work check and went to check-cash that check ‘cause that was the only moneys that I had.”

In addition to evacuating without money, Nelly spoke about the challenges of not having health insurance for the first time in her life. She described this lack of protection as “the hardest thing for me” and recalled being sick in Atlanta, “green stuff coming out of my body,” and being unable to see a doctor. She also described the long-lasting effects of being unable to buy medicine for her high blood pressure and the impact having no insurance had on her husband’s cancer treatment. Video observation data demonstrated that Nelly shook her head side to side and cast her gaze down to the table when she stated, “I think that affected me more than anything.”

When the women established their joint household in New Orleans, they again were pressed to maintain financial stability. Although they were able to combine incomes to pay bills and buy groceries, the additional expenses of moving into a new home and buying the furniture and appliances was at times crippling. Nelly went “six weeks without pay” and then had to have

surgery. Just as the women were thinking they were not going to be able to pay their rent, the last of Nelly's FEMA money was deposited in her account. Yvonne said, "I mean it really did come at a good time for us because I had just started working again." Nelly reflected on these challenges and the way in which they intersected with social class. She concluded, "In some ways it might have been harder for those of the upper middle class than us who didn't have as much to lose." Eventually, as they were able to maintain their new jobs and receive regular pay, they began to accumulate possessions such as furniture and a washer and dryer. In retrospect, Yvonne asserted, "It wasn't too long. We made it."

### *"Trying to Rebuild My Life"*

Both Nelly and Yvonne presented their lives since the hurricane as a winding path ultimately leading to this new construction of family. Both women have reflected a great deal on who they are now when compared to their pre-storm selves and also on how they have gotten to the point they are now in their life journey. This theme investigates the discussions throughout the interviews surrounding these women as individuals and within the context of their relationship with one another, specifically relating to their growth following the storm. Nelly described the process that led her to where she is as a journey in which she is simply, "trying to rebuild [her] life." Within this theme, three subthemes delineate the separate components contributing to this personal and relational development. The first subtheme contained the most data of any subtheme in Nelly and Yvonne's interviews and discusses the emphasis they both place on family connections. Within the second subtheme, the women's reflections on how their own thought processes related to the storm and recovery are discussed. The third subtheme reveals the strategies and tools both participants used to carry them through their journey to their eventual resolution in a home together.

*“Able to be around some family.”*

Nelly and Yvonne’s evacuation from the storm centered around a connection to family. Nelly began her journey alone, without her husband, and she stated, “I was a bloody mess.” However, while she still longed for his companionship when she reached Atlanta, she found solace in the family compound that grew with the addition of each evacuating family member. She listed the names of the relatives who stayed in the house, initially adding up to eight and then pausing later in the interview to add two more to reach a total of 10. Additionally, Yvonne’s evacuation was marked by her separation from and then connection with family. She explained the importance of that reconnection, saying, “All of us went to one house... [It was] just as big as this house, four bedrooms, so we was able to bring almost anybody that would need it.” Through this camaraderie, Yvonne reported, “I got stronger.”

In addition to the relationships they maintained with their extended family, Nelly and Yvonne spoke about the connection they had with their husband and son, respectively. Nelly explained her initial anxiety saying, “Having not heard from my husband, I didn’t know what condition he was in.” It was both her love for New Orleans and her need to see him that resulted in her imminent return. For Yvonne, her connection with her son dictated the course of her evacuation and continues to be the driving force in her life. Initially when Yvonne and her mother decided Grant should go to Shreveport so that he could enroll in school, she planned to stay back in New Orleans and look for work. However, she couldn’t stay apart from him – “We stuck to the hip, man!” – and so she moved to Shreveport to find a job. The women both spoke about how they continue to move forward three years after the storm because of their obligations to the men they love. Yvonne described her mission in life – “Just to take care of me and him. That’s all... I have to take care of him. That’s a big thing for me.” Nelly concurred, nodding

outside to the one remaining piece of her husband she holds on to – “Yeah, mine is outside. Now I have to take care of the dog.”

Additionally, Nelly and Yvonne discussed their relationship with one another. Both women had recently lost relationships prior to their moving in together and they sought comfort in the security of a non-romantic relationship on which to build a family. Yvonne looked to Nelly when she said, “We were so grateful when my aunt opened her home to us.” Initially, the threesome lived in Nelly’s one bedroom apartment but they quickly realized they needed more space. Yvonne declared, “It was like a miracle finding this house” and Nelly concurred, stating, “It was like divine intervention.” The women’s relationship drew closer through the shared experience of unveiling the Hurricane Katrina narrative to one another. As they spent increasing time and comingled their bills and resources, they began to develop a shared need for one another. Nelly described how heavily she now relies on Yvonne for support, stating that during her surgery, “I definitely would not have been able to keep [my husband’s dog] Lex without them.” During video observation, I noted the obvious closeness of the women as they sat relaxed and close to one another, moving their chairs closer to share their stories surrounding the artifacts they each brought to the table. Nelly’s eyes welled up with tears as she discussed their familiarity with one another, saying, “They say two women can’t live in the same house. We haven’t had any problems. None. And if it wouldn’t be for them...”

*“A much better attitude.”*

Nelly and Yvonne discussed the ways in which they have changed their thinking as a result of the storm. They dissected the ways in which they make sense of what has happened, evaluating their meaning making systems post-Katrina relative to their old patterns of thought, as Nelly explained, “judging things pre and post Katrina.” While they described making changes in

pragmatic ways, such as Nelly's assertion that she now "saves pictures on my hard drive and my phone" and has "all of my [doctor's reports and] tests on discs," they primarily discussed changes in their life philosophies. Yvonne described how she approaches people and problems in a new way:

Its changed me. I'm a little bit more willing now – I do whatever I can... More willing now to go the extra mile than I was before the storm... I just have a much better attitude since the hurricane, just like with customers in general at my work... and just people.

They acquiesce that they still feel sadness related to the hurricane and their losses. However, they seem to have reached a peace with their grief that has come from acceptance. Yvonne explained her own evolution, saying:

At one time I could really sit down and cry about it, but not no more... You know a lot of people I know are still depressed from it. Sometimes I guess we all get in our little depressions, but on the same note, I always try to pull myself up, too.

Nelly agreed with a succinct thought – "I'm still upset sometimes. But it's good."

In addition to a change in their personal shifts in expectations, both women discussed comparing their own journeys to others' and feeling "blessed" because "a lot of people went through worse." Nelly discussed the relative advantages she had financially and how this realization has given her reason to be thankful – "It was the end of the month, right before check time. So, like me having to leave here having no money, but I had money coming or whatever. Those who didn't... how did they get their checks?" Additionally, in the recovery and rebuilding, the people who still have no home are regular reminders for her of how much she has. She admitted, "It's hard to pass down Claiborne and see the people under the bridges." The

women regularly remind one another of their blessings and good fortune as a way to maintain their changed “attitudes.”

*“Get my life back.”*

As the two women discussed with one another the ways in which they draw the strength to maintain a positive attitude through their ongoing recovery, they settled on the two primary themes of helping others and maintaining an internal motivation. For Yvonne, helping has meant providing financial assistance to relatives in hard times and continuing to inspire her son to embrace life. She spoke of her relationship with her son, saying, “I just keep trying to lift him up a little and let him know it’s not that bad.” The money she gave to relatives to evacuate was also a crucial piece in her identity as a helping agent. Despite the fact that she provided a cousin, her husband, and her new baby with the money to evacuate, Yvonne still worried that she had not done enough – “I started crying even more when I found out they had flooded ‘cause I felt like I hadn’t given them enough money... They out there and they don’t have any money.” Nelly’s primary identity as a helper was connected to her work as a nurse. She detailed the strength she gained from giving back:

The job was like, I needed it and it needed me. It was like a perfect fit – the most perfect fit... It kept me from thinking about a lot of stuff... and its helping – seeing the patients and doing whatever I can for them.

The ability to serve her community and assist the most troubled and helpless of the New Orleans community is “therapeutic” for her and is a motivation to move forward.

Additionally, Nelly and Yvonne referenced internal strength and drive as a primary reason they have achieved a semblance of pre-Katrina peace. Nelly argued, “It’s the way we were raised... We never had anybody to give us anything.” As such, they saw it as a family trait

to put one foot in front of the other in the face of hardship. Yvonne reflected on the first days following the storm and said, "It took a while. Don't get me wrong, it took a while because I didn't do it right off-hand." However, as she focused on "taking care of [her] son," she reflected on the fact that "we lived on our own for so long, nobody else, so it was nobody but me but I still I can go and do it." Nelly echoed this belief in self and focus on internal motivation. She stated, "There's always going to be something, but we can't let it get to us... That doesn't mean nothing happened to me – I just chose to come home and get my life back." While the women did not dismiss the hardship of the situation, saying, "It's unfortunate, but it changed everything," they similarly did not fail to recognize their own contribution to their recovery. Nelly said, "After that first month I knew I was coming back home. I knew what I needed to do – you did it for yourself."

#### *SCWM Analysis*

A primary component of an analysis of Nelly and Yvonne's experiences from a Social Class Worldview Model perspective is investigation of the marginalizing influence of power structures on their attempts to recover from the hurricane. For both women, the power wielded by FEMA and insurance agencies had a profound impact on their ability to reform their devastated lives. Nelly's struggle to gain recognition of the validity of her life insurance claim following her husband's death impacted her life both financially and emotionally. While the money that she paid into the insurance policy was withheld from her in the form of a payout, she lost the ability to autonomously govern her spending and subsequently to purchase the necessities she needed for sustaining employment. She spoke of being unable to purchase a car with air conditioning – "I wanted to take some of the money and put it on a car... I didn't have air conditioning... That's suicide in New Orleans" – and of being unable to initiate that purchase



because the insurance company would not pay. She illustrated the power differential with descriptive words, identifying herself as “little old me” and stressing that the problems she had with agencies such as insurance and FEMA came about when the “big people” were in charge.

The women’s class values appear to derive primarily from their referent peer group. When asked about the class status of other family members, Nelly stated, “We’re all the same.” The values identified as paramount for this group include a focus on family togetherness, maintained employment, and fiscal responsibility. Throughout the hurricane, extended family members checked in with, lived with, and relied on one another. This communal living was perceived to be both emotionally sound and fiscally responsible, as they were able to share the burden of the crisis with one another. Additionally, although the women distinguished their class status as being lower than “middle class” because of their inability to save significant amounts of money, they stressed planning and thinking ahead as a crucial component of responsible living. Yvonne was openly critical of wasteful spending and a lack of self-motivated employment. She spoke to the New Orleanians she felt failed to embrace an opportunity to invest their FEMA funds in themselves, saying, “You know, get on your feet. Learn how to do. Take a trade.”

Within the discussions surrounding personal financial responsibility with Nelly and Yvonne were expressions of downward and lateral classism. Both participants distinguished themselves from individuals they believed to have spent their FEMA money irresponsibly. The women vacillated between speaking about people they would have identified as in a lower class status even prior to the storm, as when Yvonne said, “If you didn’t have a job and were living in a housing project, how would you get back here... FEMA got to take care of them,” and people they were dismayed to see embrace frivolous spending. Nelly discussed sharing FEMA money stories with her co-workers and being shocked to hear that a known associate and co-workers’

cousin were involved in a fight “over a Coach bag” bought with hurricane relief funds. Both women shook their head in disapproval as Nelly told the story, revealing their attempts to convey a message that “working middle class” individuals should be discouraged from such irresponsible behavior.

### *Reuben and Cherise*

Reuben and Cherise welcomed me into the living room of their home for our series of interviews. At the time of the study, they lived in a government subsidized housing development on the Westbank of New Orleans in a small, stand-alone one-story house. Neither participant was in good health, Reuben having suffered a series of strokes and Cherise facing on-going heart problems and having been recently fitted with a pace maker. Despite her health challenges, Cherise is the primary breadwinner in the home, working twelve hour days at two different local retail stores within walking distance from their home. Reuben was under doctor’s orders not to work, but we rescheduled two interviews because he had picked up odd jobs to make extra money. While both participants presented with a racial identity as possibly African American, neither participant chose this label to self-identify. Cherise described herself as a 45 year old “American” and Reuben stated that he was 55 years old, addressing his racial identity by saying, “Well, my mother’s side is Korean, so I’m half Korean. I’m Korean.” Together they have two sons, ages five and eight, and at the time of the interviews had been married for two years.

Throughout the interviews, Reuben was the primary vocal representative for the family and engaged in dialogue freely. Cherise was reluctant to answer questions, often giving only one word answers when addressed directly. Additionally, on the occasions she did begin to speak at length, Reuben often interrupted her and completed the answer by himself. This seemed to be representative of the couple’s manner of communicating with the outside world in that they

appeared comfortable with this pattern and Cherise would smile at Reuben and sit back into the couch and listen as he spoke. However, the entire family was very welcoming and showed us around their home, revealing more personal belongings and family mementos as the interviews went on. The children were curious about both me and my camera man and frequently came in to look at us or investigate our recording equipment and both parents were tolerant and answered the boys' questions regardless of when they asked them. While the interviews with this couple produced four distinct themes, each theme contained references to both the importance of family and the couple's connection with God, and these underlying values were the driving force behind each topic we explored. The themes that emerged from our discussions are as follows:

Themes	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2	Subtheme 3
<b>"And the people"</b>	"Get out of harm's way"	"Home to me"	
<b>"What we get in a month, it's not much"</b>			
<b>"You gotta go on"</b>	"We've been blessed by God"	"Put my prayers to other families"	"Gotta keep each other up"
<b>"It made us realize"</b>	"The storm – that brought a lot of things down"	"It's just all of us together, close"	

### *"And the People"*

As Reuben and Cherise described their experiences evacuating from the hurricane, living in Irving Texas for almost a year, and ultimately returning to New Orleans, their recollections and emotions focused on the people that they encountered during each phase of their journey. The communities that sustained them – first their extended family with whom they evacuated, then the people of Irving, and now the New Orleans community they call home – were each

cherished. The couple was grateful for having made the decision to evacuate and have incorporated the importance of “getting out” into their family values. However, while they were enthusiastic about the opportunities and experiences they had while in Texas, their newly developed love for their evacuation community created a conflict that they did not previously have regarding whether New Orleans or Texas was closest to their heart. Although the family eventually returned to New Orleans to stay and do not entertain the possibility of a permanent return to Texas, their love for their hometown family and friends was mixed with sadness at having lost the relationships they developed while away. Within this theme exploring their hurricane experiences and the people that defined them, two subthemes developed. The first subtheme explores the family’s evacuation experience while the second investigates their ambivalence surrounding loyalty to the people of Texas or their long established network in New Orleans.

*“Get out of harm’s way.”*

Throughout the three interviews, Reuben and Cherise would find photographs they had in their home as a way to give voice to the thoughts and experiences we were discussing. Their evacuation story began with a snapshot of their former home, also located on the New Orleans Westbank, which they abandoned to evacuate from Katrina. Evacuating from an impending storm was not a new endeavor for the family, and Reuben explained how it was part of their family value set, saying, “If it’s coming, we’re gone. The first thing is to get out of harm’s way.” However, the magnitude of Katrina caused the couple concern for family members who do not typically evacuate, and they deviated from their traditional routine of evacuating with one of Cherise’s older siblings. Although Reuben’s little sister thought the couple should evacuate with their children – “my sister, when it come to these two boys, she say, get them out, I don’t care

what you think” – she was reluctant to evacuate herself. The couple explained their pressing need to convince his sister to evacuate and the subsequent dynamics of their evacuation travel:

We had to talk to her for a long time to get her to leave (Cherise).

Yeah, we had to convince her – let’s leave, let’s leave – but at the end she took a mind to say let’s get out... [We took] one car (Reuben)

It was tight! (Cherise)

Yeah, my sister, her friend, my niece, us four – there was like seven of us in one little car! (Reuben)

Cherise immediately was thankful for their joint decision when, upon arriving at their motel in Texas, she turned on the television and watched the devastation unfold. She said, “We watch the news and I could see the way it set in, and I could see why we left... I thank God that we left.”

Reuben explained the anxiety that still remains for their family when hurricane season arrives. For the couple, their positive evacuation experience provides comfort through the knowledge that they will always leave in the future when there is a threat of a storm. Reuben described his life-long history with hurricanes and how it shapes his current frame of mind:

I mean, I went through Hurricane Betsy, and I know how devastating that was. I been through Hurricane Camille, I went through each one of them major hurricanes, and now Katrina... So, every time in hurricane season I get a little jittery. But, we’ll go, so we in pretty good shape.

The comfort the couple takes in knowing they will evacuate has translated into a crucial piece of their parenting in that they consider stressing the importance of getting out of the way of an approaching storm to be an important life lesson they convey to their children. Cherise described how they stress the message to their boys – “We say, come on, when it’s coming, you got to go!”

Reuben elaborated, saying, “[I tell them] don’t play. If they say evacuate, get the heck on out... I think he realize every time that we wants to go and I think as he grow up he’ll know.”

*“Home to me.”*

The couple described their stay in Irving, Texas in nothing but positive terms. The Motel 6 in Irving became their home for a year simply because the family grew tired of driving and stopped, “about a mile from the Dallas airport,” when they saw a sign advertising a vacancy. They view the entire experience as having been “like a vacation” in the way it provided an atmosphere secluded from the devastation unfolding in New Orleans. Cherise said, “You forgot about it. Then you saw it on t.v.” Additionally, the couple described the amenities the children relished at the motel, including “a pool,” “ordering room service,” and the fact that the children, “got to ride in a limo while we was there!” However, the primary focus of discussion surrounding the family’s time in Irving centered on the people they met while there. Cherise explained how the children “loved they school” and the friends they made, so much so that “they didn’t want to leave.” Reuben described the couple’s social network at the hotel, stating, “At the hotel I had some people” and they welcomed the family with “open arms.” Although in no discussion did the couple speak about moving back to Texas, Reuben did say, “I’m going to make a trip up there to see them people one day.”

Reuben and Cherise demonstrated their familial love for Texas with the teddy bears they brought to their artifact interview. They presented two stuffed bears wearing complimentary camouflage uniforms and berets that came from a fair they attended while living in Irving. Cherise smiled down at the bears and blushed with pride when she said, “Everybody be wanting these bears.” Although the children do play with the stuffed animals, she lamented their status as playthings when she said, “The other day I told them – Please! Put the clothes back on so they

look better. That's our memory from the storm." In the artifact data notes, the bears were reported to be spotless and showed no signs of wear, revealing their exalted status within the family. Reuben described how he views the bears as both a future heirloom and a physical representation of their experiences, stating, "No way these is going to go anywhere as long as [the boys] live. I want them to remember."

Despite the family's appreciation for Texas, they ultimately decided to return to New Orleans and rebuild their lives. The decision was instigated by Reuben and he explained the process:

I insisted 'cause I love New Orleans. This is my home... So, I told my wife, come on baby, it's time for us to go back home, and she was like, o.k.... I been here 47 years and I was nine when I came here and I stayed, so this is home to me.

The primary reason Reuben wanted to return and Cherise agreed was their desire to again live in a community that encompassed all of their family and friends. Reuben said, "I have a lot of people around [New Orleans] and I missed them." However, the homecoming was bitter sweet. Their former house was also in government subsidized housing and had been rented to new tenants who discarded or destroyed their possessions. Cherise described the process of returning to their old house – "We were trying to see if we could pick up some of our stuff, but, oh! No." Additionally, many of their former friends did not return to the city after the storm. Cherise lamented, "The people, I miss them. I really miss my people" and Reuben explained, "A lot of the people we used to associate with, they just not here." However, the couple were given the opportunity to move into a vacant house "nicer than our old one" and embraced the opportunity to start again in New Orleans. Cherise described having been back in New Orleans and finally getting the opportunity to sleep in a home their family could call their own again:

It was so good. They said just go in the house right there and they gave us a key and we just laid on the floor. We didn't have nothing, we just wanted that peace of mind and cleanness. So it was a blessing. A gift.

*"What we Get in a Month, It's Not Much"*

While Cherise and Reuben described their social class status as "Lower Middle Class," they also revealed an oppressive inability to meet their financial obligations from month to month. This couple related social class status only to "money" and said that their status relative to finances has fallen following the storm. This theme emerged from the data in which the couple discussed the multiple ways money has influenced their attempts to recover from Katrina. While the content within this theme is charged with emotion, no significant subthemes emerged as pertinent. Rather, all of the data supporting this theme is closely connected and encompasses the ways in which the couple makes sense of their lives relative to social class.

Reuben compared their financial status pre and post Katrina:

Before the storm we had pretty decent jobs and was doing different things, you know.

I've always been hustling and working. Then, even after I caught my stroke, I tried to keep going. But after the storm a lot of stuff has changed.

The couple reflected on the reasons for their increase in financial challenges since the hurricane. Before the storm Cherise "was working – she's a beautician" but following her heart surgery, she has been unable to return to that line of work. In addition, prior to Reuben's strokes, he held a regular job. The couple's health crises hit their peak just prior to Katrina and the combination of their property and employment losses with their continuing health challenges resulted in a significant burden for the family. Reuben reflected again on the changes for the family since the



storm, saying, "What we get in a month, it's not much. When she was working [as a beautician] we had a little bit left over, but now..."

Despite the fact that both participants often work beyond their physical capabilities and Cherise reported, "right now I working two jobs," they stated that they are unable to regularly pay their bills, much less move toward the financial goals they have for themselves. Reuben's main desire is to one day be a property owner. He described this dream:

I wish, I'm hoping sooner or later one of these days I'd have my own house so my children would have that. Where that 700 and some dollars went toward my house note.

That's the main thing I want. But the good Lord going to take care of us in his way.

The recognition that without the contribution of his income this goal is very unlikely is difficult for Reuben, but he stresses that he prioritizes his health because he sees it as more important for his family, saying, "I wish I could work two jobs, but my health won't let me. That's what I need to do is keep my health for those two [boys] and I got to do what I got to do."

The stress of their limited income was supported in video observation data of the interchange between me and the participants following the third interview. The couple graciously invited me to come back to their home for a meal anytime I was in town and hugged both me and my camera man. However, when I handed Reuben the one hundred dollars as a thank you gift for study participation, Cherise began to sob. She attempted to wipe the tears from her eyes but was unable to stifle her emotions. She muttered quietly to me, "Thank you so much. You just, you have no idea how much..." and then stepped into the restroom to clean up before coming out with a smile to escort us to our car.

In addition to recognizing the challenges that they face financially, Reuben and Cherise discussed how their family is representative of the friends and family members they have in the

New Orleans community. Cherise described conversations around the neighborhood, saying, “Well, mostly I be talking to people, sometimes they’re having a really hard time. In fact, they be trying to get back to the way they was with the things they had and they can’t.” Reuben acknowledged that while it has been harder for their family since the storm, they are not alone because “it’s even hard for everybody.” However, he stressed that the loss of material possessions and the family’s inability to gain back the types of things they lost is not a priority. He spoke about the wish he has for his fellow citizens that they might embrace a sense of prudence and gratitude when he said:

Use it wisely. Do wise things with [your money.] I know we lost, what, a car? We lost a few things, but things, you don’t need. Don’t pay them no mind. Far as I can tell, me thinking about it, I feel like everybody should feel the way I feel.

*“You’ve Gotta Go On”*

Cherise and Reuben spent a great deal of their interviews elaborating on the ways in which they have gotten through the last three years. As with all of the themes representing their experiences, they spoke frequently of their devotion to God and their family as the foundation of their strength. However, evolving from those seminal forces were specific ways in which the family works at pushing each other forward through times of crisis. Essentially, they are motivated by a settled determinism that, “You’ve gotta go on” (Reuben). Within this thematic exploration of their stabilizing and motivating factors, three subthemes developed; a profound reliance on God and their Christian community, finding strength in their ability to give help to others, and a constant commitment to their family and one another.

*“We’ve been blessed by God.”*

While religion has always been a part of this family's life, Reuben revealed that the hurricane increased their spiritual awareness and "woke me up," turning their focus more completely to a worship of God. The family are members and regularly attend a nearby Baptist Church which provides a great deal of their social interactions. Reuben described the way in which being a part of a church community and a believer in God shapes the way their family functions:

God is good! If you don't believe in God, goodness! If you don't believe in nothing then you're not going to get anything. God, put trust in God – that's what I tell them boys... and if they see I'm getting angry, then you know, we gets along but we might have a little words, I tell them, lets hold hands and lets pray.

Throughout the interview both Reuben and Cherise referenced God as they spoke, saying things such as, "I give myself to God and he just do what he have to" (Reuben), "We been blessed by God" (Reuben), "I thank God we are here" (Cherise), and "We blessed" (Both). Their focus on spirituality pervaded their discussions and clearly is a dominant force in their lives.

In addition to belonging to a church, Reuben and Cherise pride themselves on socializing with people of similar faith, saying, "The people we're around, they're all Christian people" (Reuben). They spoke highly of their pastor as both a spiritual guiding force and a source for concrete aid when needed. Reuben stated that he respects his pastor for his commitment to the community, stating, "He's a good person. He stayed down here the whole time through the storm and had opened up his place." Additionally, they see the pastor as someone who they can approach during times of financial hardship – "The pastor we have, I having to go to him for money [and] he always hand it over."

Another source of Christian strength for the couple are the members of their extended family, all of whom share their faith. Cherise has a network of twelve siblings while Reuben has just one sister, but they stated that everyone lives in the immediate area and they all socialize on a regular basis. During the evacuation to Texas, Reuben's little sister provided the initial financial support for his family until FEMA funds became available. Video observation of Reuben as he discussed his sister's generosity showed that his eyes crinkled and at one point his voice cracked. He said:

We were fortunate that my sister, she have something, she have more money than I have... She just said, don't worry about no money, nothing, let's just get out of here... She said, that's my two little nephews, I'm not going to let nothing happen to them. I'm going to make sure they eat, they drink.

Additionally, the couple identified their landlord as family, although Reuben later explained, "I don't have no mother and father now and when I lost them, she stepped in." She frequently subsidizes the family's income with rent reductions and free meals. Reuben described the nature of their relationship, saying, "I'll go to her and tell her I don't have nothing to eat and she'll say, I don't know why you're telling me this now. You should have been coming to me. That's the kind of person she is." Reuben relies on her as emotional support as well and reported that she "pushes me to make sure that I take care of my boys." Through her generosity and that of other members of their Christian network, the family receives both pragmatic and psychological support.

*"Put my prayers to other families."*

In addition to drawing support from their surrounding community, Reuben spoke of how he maintains inner strength when he "put[s] my prayers to other families." This encompasses

both their efforts at providing practical assistance to people in need and their recognition of their own good fortunes in their prayers that God will help those who have struggled more. Reuben described how he attempts to mirror the generosity of his church in an effort to give back the blessings he receives:

Let's put it this way – I'm an offspring of the church. They do good to us and by us doing good to other people, God going to bless us... If somebody have less than us and they need, they come here. If I don't have nothing, I'll get up and help.

He sees this as a divine mission, stating, "God had called me, now I'm gonna give back." By providing to those in greater need, Reuben works toward his own inner peace. He explained a recent revelation calling him to feed the homeless in a local tent community:

I laid in the bed and I thought about that and I said, supposing I did go over the river to the people there and bring them something. I know how they feel because they lost even more than I lost. So, I figure if I could do that, I think I'd feel better.

The couple recalled cooking for people in the neighborhood, sharing their home with friends in need, donating an extra car to a local homeless shelter, and giving a man from their church one of their television sets as examples of ways they have given to the less fortunate. Additionally, Reuben stressed that this is a family endeavor, saying, "That's just the type of person we are. I been like this all my life and she been like this all her life. If you take care of other people, he'll take care of you."

In addition to providing for others, the couple discussed how they offer prayers for people who were less fortunate in the storm. Both Reuben and Cherise stated that they compare their situation to those who lost more and feel grateful. Reuben explained his thinking, "I

understand there's so many people in worse shape than us." Additionally, Cherise discussed how realizing her good fortune gives her motivation to carry on:

I thank God that we here because some people, they got into the flood and the water be up on top their roof, so I know. I can speak about it; you know it's hard... But you have to pick your life back up... You have to, you know, be strong.

While the couple is grateful for having not lost as much as some, they simultaneously spend spiritual and physical energy to offer assistance to those who have lost more. Cherise explained, "I put my prayers to other families and if I could do anything to help they inconveniency, you know I'd do it."

*"Gotta keep each other up."*

Finally, Reuben and Cherise stressed the heavy reliance they place on each other to "stay strong... stay positive." In order to maintain this upbeat approach to recovery, Cherise explained the importance she places on maintaining an outwardly positive demeanor, saying, "I mean, sometimes you might go in your little corner of your house and say, whew – man. But you around other people you just stay positive." In order to do this, she described both leaning on her husband and looking inward for strength. She described her method:

I just try to keep myself focused and make sure I be positive and just keep saying thank you. Don't let your mind drag down to sadness. Sometimes I just say things and talk to myself – don't slip, it's easy to slip... And then we come to each other – we gotta keep each other up.

The couple reminds one another of the need their children have for strong parents – "We just gotta do it for the kids" – and they both described the ways they then internalize this

message. Cherise said, "You just had to try to not be sad because you had kids there," while

Reuben explained:

I'm not gonna let those two there sleeping under a bridge. If they eat, if my wife eat, then I don't need nothing. That's my motto... My father's motto, too – take care of your family... The single most important thing is family sticking together.

Observation of their interactions on video indicates that the family is close and relies on one another. Although Cherise and Reuben did not physically touch each other often during the interview, they smiled at one another frequently and Cherise listened intently while Reuben spoke. Additionally, they operated as a cohesive unit, asking one another for help finding things, moving things, or even to help answer a question.

As the family described this togetherness, they hypothesized about the way their family would most effectively receive external help. Reuben spoke of the respect they have for one another and imagined that this is what enables them to be so effective in their efforts at family support. He called on others to demonstrate the same respect when helping families recovering from natural disaster:

Sure, come down here and help us... just don't come down here with pity or nothing.

Help us do things, show us how to improve ourselves... And if somebody come down here and work beside us, help us out, I'd be glad to be right there!

*"It Made us Realize"*

The hurricane brought about many changes for Reuben and Cherise and their family. Primarily, they spoke of the positive ways in which the storm inspired their personal growth and connection to one another. However, they also spoke about the hardships they endured that were different than but connected to their financial burden. For both Reuben and Cherise the

deterioration of their physical health immediately following the hurricane had a profound impact on how they live their lives. Still, Cherise believes that the storm “made us realize” the importance of family connection and appreciating life to its fullest every day. This theme details the ways in which the couple changed as a result of the storm and the impact those changes have had on their family. Within the theme are two subthemes in which they speak to the impact on their family of their independent physical challenges and then where they detail the ways in which their family has grown as a result of their experiences.

*“The storm – that brought a lot of things down.”*

Despite the fact that Reuben suffered a series of strokes just prior to the storm, the peak of the couple’s health deterioration coincided directly with the beginning of their recovery effort. Reuben acknowledged that his health began to fail just before the hurricane hit, but said, “I really had problems but then, the storm, that brought a lot of things down on me. It didn’t help nothing.” In addition to creating challenges when parenting two young children, the couple discussed the significant impact their health changes have had on their ability to earn a living. While their inability to work in their preferred fields would have impacted their lives regardless of the storm, Reuben described the combination of the hardship of recovery with failing health as “too much.”

In reflecting on their pre-Katrina lives, Reuben lamented, “She was in a way kind of healthy before the storm, but the storm took a lot of stress out on her... now it’s getting harder.” They each spoke in an effort to explain the impact Cherise’s heart problems have had on her career:

Since the storm she done had her operation with a pace-maker in her chest where she can’t work like she used to... (Reuben)



I was a beautician then, and the money was really good – really, really good. But with the chemicals, with the smell, I can't do that anymore. I can't take it on my heart but I really, really miss that (Cherise).

Additionally, the impact of the stress of the evacuation and the physical labor required by their multiple moves created exacerbated health problems for Reuben. He described how his role as an employee and breadwinner has shifted as a result:

Me, I can't stand the heat too much, so it's pretty hard. And the kind of jobs that I had like cooking in a restaurant or something like that, I can't do that like I want to. And I can't work outside in that New Orleans sun, no.

Reuben described the overall impact as, "a lot of wear and tear" and, imagining the cumulative effect another hurricane could have on their bodies, said, "I just don't know if we'd make it through the next one." However, while both participants acknowledged the significant effect on their physical health, they argued that they are in a better place psychologically than before the storm. When asked if their family has changed as a result of the storm, Reuben replied, "Physically, yes. But mentally, we just got stronger."

*"It's just all of us together, close."*

While the couple described their family as having always been "close," saying, "We don't have no quarrels... We communicate very well," they both insisted that the hurricane recovery instigated an increased bonding within both their immediate family and their extended family. Cherise discussed her relationship with her siblings and their families three years post Katrina and concluded, "It's more wonderful, it's good. I mean, they might not show up because they trying to get they house in order, you know, but I'm talking with them. We're closer."

Reuben suggested that theirs was not a singular phenomenon and surmised, "I think the storm

made a lot of families a little closer than what they was before.” However, he also discussed the disintegration of some families as a result of the stress while distinguishing his family as decidedly together – “I seen this documentary thing and I see how families separated. It just made us stronger.” Although the couple did not officially present their family photos as artifact data, they regularly interjected pictures throughout the interviews. Frequently, they showed us family photos unrelated to the hurricane, including pictures that pre-dated the storm by years. For Reuben and Cherise, these albums demonstrated the importance of togetherness for their family. Reuben explained that while they feel an increased sense of bonding, they have always had an intimate connection and continue to appreciate the blessings that they have:

I feel whatever I have, prior to what I had before, prior to what I have now, it doesn't matter to me. I'm going to struggle – I was struggling then and I'm struggling now. I'm struggling a little bit harder now, but we happy, we eat, my children got clothes, I have a life, I have a roof.

The couple also spoke of the influence of storm recovery on their parenting. They described a daily existence centered on family time, with brothers who “everything together.” The parents spoke with pride of their sons' accomplishments, revealing that “they like to read” and they are “honor roll students.” In my video observation, I noted that while the parents would remind the boys to calm down, they never once instructed them to stop asking questions or leave the room. Reuben described his approach to parenting and the ways in which the storm has solidified his belief in a strong family system:

You got to have strong parents, then you're gonna come out alright. That's what I want to do for them... I much rather them inside and playing computer than running around out there on those streets... And I think what I seen when I was in Irving, Texas, them kids

running up and down the halls, no family guidance, their mother and father ain't there – don't care... I have a way with kids, I talk to them... I think after the storm the whole thing is, it's just all of us together, close.

### *SCWM Analysis*

Power is a primary force driving the lives of Reuben and Cherise. Due to their membership in the “lower middle class” and their inability to secure regular and profitable employment, the couple struggles to maintain control over their events that unfold before them. They maintain an external locus of control as a defense against this powerlessness, creating a value system that elevates God as an omnipresent force above all others. Through his practice wherein he “just give[s] himself to God,” Reuben is able to relinquish guilt associated with an inability to achieve a climb in social class. His fatalistic acceptance of his placement in a stratum that will never change is evident in his remark, “I was struggling then and I’m struggling now” but by placing the authority in God’s hands, he is able to avoid addressing any marginalizing power structures in the secular community. However, for Reuben and Cherise, this giving over of their lives is not evasion of their subjugation, but rather a way to reclaim dignity.

In addition to their unfaltering belief in omniscient control, their focus on family is a method in which they may usurp the oppressive forces in their lives in future generations. The couple exudes pride when discussing their children’s scholastic abilities, indicating belief in the ability of education to transcend oppressive classism. They focus all of their energies on raising their children “right” and providing a home full of loving security. Reuben embraces the television and internet as a means of escape for his children, preferring that they engage in referent peer groups in the virtual world rather than those available in their neighborhood. While they never expressed indications that they would transcend their class status, their lives in the

wake of the hurricane are focused on providing a life most likely to produce children whose values embrace both their Christian values and the tools for achieving higher levels of financial security than their parents.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Cross Case Analysis

#### *Introduction*

Chapter four unveiled the case specific themes for each of the participant families and presented their constructed narratives as they emerged within the space between the researcher and the participants. These themes were presented in an effort to best illuminate the constructs that are most relevant for each of the cases surrounding their experiences as a family recovering from Hurricane Katrina. Chapter five presents the results of the salient themes that have evolved from these merged narratives as representative of the broader experiences for these participants. While the within case themes of chapter four were each labeled in the participants' own voices, the themes of chapter five have surfaced through my subjective analysis as a researcher and, as such, are titled in words that most represent the themes as I saw them develop across the cases. Moreover, within each thematic presentation is an inherent social constructionist and Social Class Worldview Model analysis. Finally, this chapter concludes with a presentation of the data that is relevant to the action research paradigm in which it is centered and a subsequent analysis of the effects of this paradigm on participant experiences.

#### *Cross Case Themes*

Across the cases there are thematic similarities that, while not generalizable to a larger population, are generalizable to theory as well as being representative of the collective experience of study participants. Within each of the five cross-case themes, all participant families discussed each topic. However, since each family operates from a uniquely constructed worldview, themes often incorporate conflicting experiences and interpretations between

families. The first theme, *Relationship to Community*, encompasses participants' perceptions of their place within their community and how the evacuation experience has altered their relationship with New Orleans. The second theme, *Family Structure*, describes the ways in which family relationships were central to the participants' recovery experience. *Constructions of Class* is the third theme and investigates the connections between the families' notions of the impact of class on their family and their hurricane recoveries. The fourth theme is *People Outside the Family System* and focuses on the interactions with and perceptions of other individuals that have shaped these participants' constructions. Finally, *Growing and Changing* elaborates on the cross case experience of individual change and the impact of that change on intimate relationships. In addition to the evidence provided by artifact data, video observation data, and community observation data, these themes are supported by the within case themes and subthemes of each of the seven cases. The following table illustrates the emergent process of cross-case theme development. Titles in standard font are within case themes and titles in italic font are within case subthemes.

Cross-Case Themes	Relationship to Community	Family Structure	Constructions of Class	People Outside of the Family System	Growing and Changing
Case Study					
Claude and Monique	<p>"Everything was destroyed"</p> <p><i>"Evacuee, class, race, all that stuff"</i></p> <p><i>"They share the same experiences I do"</i></p>	<p><i>"The strength – that was through my family"</i></p>	<p>"Someone who is undesirable"</p> <p><i>"A way to get back was to get a job"</i></p>	<p><i>"Having to depend on other people"</i></p> <p><i>"They share the same experience that I do"</i></p>	<p>"Now I can understand"</p>

Danielle and Greg	“Devastating to have to up and leave”	“The good thing is we all still together”	“As long as everything is paid and a roof’s over our head”	“It was a whole new beginning” “Texas was real, real nice” “People are so different now”	“The Blessed Class” “I have a family to take care of” “We’re closer I think”
Edgar and Susan	“Running from the hurricane” “Lacking a lot around here”	“We talk”	“We don’t have money” “Money is useless”	“This is America. What happened?” “Everybody’s doing their own thing”	“What I am now”
Elvis and Ann Margaret	“It was all consuming”	“We were a couple”	“Working our tails off to get what we need”	“We all spent our hurricane experience together” “Our releases”	“Part of the acceptance and moving on” “We were a couple”
James and Helen	“You still like the pie”	“Lucky to have that kind of support” “It was like a fortress”	“It’s pretty middle class – having a hard work ethic” “It’s changed completely – it’s a whole weird spider now”	“Take responsibility” “It’s changed completely – it’s a whole weird spider now”	“Suffering from post-traumatic stress”
Nelly and Yvonne	“I was a mess”	“Able to be around some family”	“You know what to do when you don’t have money”	“Get to know me as a person”	“What I had to go through” “A much better attitude” “Get my life back”

Reuben and Cherise	<i>"Home to me"</i>	<i>"It's just all of us together close"</i>  <i>"Gotta keep each other up"</i>	<i>"What we get in a month, it's not much"</i>	<i>"Put my prayers to other families"</i>  <i>"Home to me"</i>	<i>"It made us realize"</i>  <i>"We've been blessed by God"</i>
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While the participants in each case addressed all of the larger cross-case themes, within each theme distinct subthemes emerged specific to the participants' areas of focus and diverse emotional and behavioral responses. The following table illustrates the subthemes that emerged within each broad theme:

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Subtheme 1</b>	<b>Subtheme 2</b>	<b>Subtheme 3</b>
<b>Relationship to Community</b>	A Changing Hometown	A Foreign Community	
<b>Family Structure</b>	Immediate Family	Extended Family	
<b>Constructions of Class</b>	Family Class Status	Employment and Class	
<b>People Outside of the Family System</b>	Volunteers, Helpers and Relief Workers	Other Hurricane Katrina Evacuees	
<b>Growing and Changing</b>	The Strength to Grow	Personal Changes	Relational Changes

Following this thematic exploration of data, *Emancipatory Experiences* evaluates the ways in which this study – situated in an action research paradigm and designed to be explicitly emancipatory – has impacted the participants. Cross-case data is provided to illustrate the participant responses to questions regarding their experiences of marginalization and the impact of study participation on their worldview. This chapter's presentation of a cross-case analysis reveals the multiple layers of connected threads that run through study family narratives and



informs understanding of the broad representation constructed through this multiple-case study design.

### *Relationship to Community*

For all of the families participating in the study, their changed relationship with the community that envelops them had a profound impact on the way in which they perceive their family in relationship to both context and community. This theme is characterized by the marked ambivalence all participants expressed about their relationship to New Orleans. Additionally, while everyone spoke of their experiences of attempting to adjust and blend into the new community in their evacuation city, for the participants who stayed away from New Orleans for periods longer than a few months this was a pervasive theme, while for those who returned to the city more quickly, the reflections on their host communities were less conflicted and primarily embodied negative perceptions. Within this theme exploring the participant thoughts and emotions related to their connection with the larger community, two subthemes illustrate the two focal points of reflection within the interviews; *A Changing Hometown* explores the multifaceted perceptions of participants regarding their shifting places within the New Orleans community while *A Foreign Community* reveals the conflict and ambivalence or focused distrust families shared regarding their experiences living in an alternate community.

#### *A Changing Hometown*

The intensity of connection to New Orleans was varied for participants. While some participants had spent all of their lives in New Orleans and were surrounded by life-long networks of family and friends prior to the storm, other participants were transplants to the city

who had come in search of establishing a new home and a fresh start. However, every family spoke to the intensity of emotions that arose as they unexpectedly were forced to evacuate their home and neighborhoods and then ultimately to return home to a city and people forever changed in the wake of the flood. Each family constructed their experience within the context of their own unique worldview and there were elements of class consciousness as well as socially constructed messages throughout our dialogues. While every case presented an independent narrative detailing relationally constructed notions of community and family, there were threads crossing through each story revealing intensely ambivalent associations with a traumatized and restructured hometown.

The initial experience of evacuating from New Orleans was expressly discussed by all families. However, for four participant families, particularly strong emotions were connected to the lack of physical and mental preparation associated with unexpected escape from natural disaster. Both Elvis and Helen described the feeling of being ineffectively unprepared for what lie ahead. Elvis explained that he and Ann Margaret believed this experience to be “business as usual” in a city accustomed to hurricanes. Having only been community members for a very brief time prior to the storm, they were unable to rely on intimate familiarity with the tenor in the city and as such were left to face the storm without communal support, feeling as if they were “the only two people left in the city.” Although Helen was a life-long New Orleans resident, she too stated that she “didn’t really have a plan” and sought out assistance from others in the community. Ultimately, Helen evacuated with her father because she was unable to garner support from friends or community agencies because she wanted to bring her cat along in the escape. For both participants, their encounters with the immediate impact of the storm were substantially affected by this inability to rely on the support of a local network of people.

Nelly and Yvonne and Greg and Danielle also reflected on thoughts and feelings associated with abruptly leaving home. All four participants are New Orleanians by birth and they discussed the pressure to evacuate with intensity unmatched by families with a more tenuous connection to the city. Greg and Danielle disclosed ambivalence about their home community that existed prior to the storm. Greg recalled that they were “contemplating about getting ready to get out of here” in the months before the hurricane. However, when the forced and immediate evacuation occurred, the couple struggled with what they wanted from a community. Greg alternately said that leaving New Orleans “didn’t really bother me” yet later stated that it was “devastating.” Although they sought opportunities beyond the borders of the city, they also felt a fixed bond to the people who had been their support for so many years. Nelly and Yvonne together spoke of their frustration with New Orleanians who refused to leave. The women described their friends and neighbors who stayed behind as “stubborn” and as indoctrinated with the belief that “it never going to happen.” This resulted in feelings of disappointment and anger for the women and Nelly recounted, “That’s how a lot of fatalities down there were.”

The experience of leaving their community was shaped by a pervasive love for the city for all participants. Although discussions occasionally touched on aspects of pre-Katrina New Orleans that some participants disliked, every person who participated in the study engaged in discussion with me about their intense reverence for the culture embodied by the New Orleans population. For Greg and Daphne, their love for the city evolved in a parental fashion and they described how they were raised with a strong reverence for their local people and customs. Both participants discussed being “born and raised” in New Orleans and focused on the importance of being surrounded by “the people I grew up with.” Additionally, two participants provided

artifacts that specifically spoke to their love of their “former life” (Claude) in the city. Greg’s artifact “Little Man” overtly represented his connection with the people and customs of New Orleans. He stated, “Being a musician, [this artifact] was real personal for me” and described the intimate connection between the people of New Orleans and jazz music. Moreover, Claude’s water-logged sketchbooks told of his sorrowful process of letting go of the New Orleans he was a part of prior to the storm. His “sentimental” attachment to his pre-Katrina possessions serves as a reminder of the environment he once called home. Furthermore, Claude believes that the shift away from his beloved former city to a new New Orleans corresponds with his perceived dip in social class status and he reveres the former city within the context of his lost stature.

Three families discussed the exuberant feelings they experienced when they were able to return to New Orleans and begin the process of reestablishing their lives within a comfortable community. Ann Margaret said simply, “It was wonderful [to be back.] I am just in love with this place.” For Reuben and Cherise, the return was necessary because as Reuben explained, “This is home to me.” They conveyed a sense of overwhelming comfort in the familiarity of New Orleans, saying, “It was so good... the peace of mind.” The families constructed their identities within the context of the city and described their families, or in the case of Ann Margaret, their selves, as indistinguishable from their status as a resident of the city. The profound result of this relationship between family and community was a sense of completion as they merged once again with the other part of their whole. Nelly and Yvonne spoke most vividly about the importance of being “at home.” Nelly described conversations with the people in Atlanta wherein she said, “Y’all just don’t understand! I don’t care – whatever it is [like there] – I want to go HOME. There was no place like home.”

While all of the families described this love for the city, two families tempered their discussions of home and familiarity with the ambivalence that pervaded discussions for many participants about other aspects of their connection to community. Edgar described his complicated emotions encompassing his evolving relationship with the people of New Orleans when he said, "I used to love it and really like it and, now, it's a lot strange." James and Helen used an analogy to explain the complicated nature of their connection to the city by comparing being a New Orleans resident to being "the last kid who doesn't get as much pie." Although the couple feels that New Orleans is one of the only places they "would like to live in this world," they expressed resentment at the inability of the city and community to regain the former identity of the town they call home. Additionally, during field observation, I recorded a conversation in a local mall between two New Orleanians who wondered how they were now perceived post-Katrina by the rest of the world. One middle aged man asked another, "What are people in the rest of the country saying about us now? What do they say about the way things are still such a mess?"

In contrast with their love for the city, many participants discussed the changed structure of the city following the storm as being connected to feelings of fear and uncertainty. Elvis described his community's lack of readiness for the coming changes by saying, "We were completely unprepared" and Claude echoed the sentiment, stating, "It was a unique situation and no one was really prepared for it." As we discussed the experience of reentering the city and absorbing the devastation, Edgar epitomized the sentiment of many families when he said, "it overwhelms you, I guess." The families experienced tremendous sadness as they internalized the loss of a community that had sustained them. Throughout the conversations, participants used grotesque terms to describe the physical destruction such as "horrible" "shit" and "disgusting"

and the constructed meanings derived from the devastation often were feelings that their own lives had become irreparably chaotic. Monique conveyed the bleak emotions of many participants when she described the desolate feel of a city that was “pretty much empty for a year.”

One component of the impact of New Orleans’ shifting structure that evoked fear for many participants was a perceived increase in imposed authority. Edgar described how the community was indoctrinated into a sense of desperation by the constant media messages, saying, “We heard a lot of bad things about the city on the news and shit.” The chaos of the immediate aftermath of the storm was evident in the tactile examples families used to describe the scene enveloping the community. Susan referred to a “house alarm going off for five days” as “insane” and she and Edgar both discussed the imposition of “security guys and curfews” which Elvis described as evoking the sense of being under “Martial law.” Additionally, Ann Margaret spoke specifically to the anxiety the military presence created within her – “There were just always guns pointing at you and that was just – very unnerving.” Class constructs collided with the encumbrance of the armed presence and participants stressed a need for the order of free-will that had provided them the opportunity to follow the laws willfully prior to the storm.

Further, families longed for the stability of within community neighborhoods along with the services and institutions that were hallmarks of the city prior to the storm. James and Helen conveyed an anxiety of uncertainty as they discussed the shifting demographics of New Orleans neighborhoods. Helen detailed different regions within the city and how they have changed, describing areas as having “changed completely,” having “exploded,” or now being “biased” in favor of formerly underrepresented ethnic minorities. In contrast, both Edgar and Claude discussed their internalized depression as they witnessed entire neighborhoods’ failure to rebuild.

Edgar alluded to absorbing the destruction of his fellow New Orleanians' homes, saying, "It's really sad because although it may be really disgusting debris and trash and whatnot, it's actually, its people's memories," while Claude concurred, "Their homes were just completely demolished. That is an unfair thing." Additionally, fundamental community establishments such as universities, schools, and pumping stations as no longer functioning to capacity, creating the sense of need conveyed in Susan's statement, "They're still lacking a lot around here that we could really use." While the overwhelming majority of participants belied reports that the city is effectively accomplishing revitalization, Claude was the only person to approve of the progress, reporting, "I think the recovery effort has been going pretty well for the most part."

In addition to discussing the evolved structure of the city, all of the participants discussed the changes in the people who make up their New Orleans community. Many families referenced the pain and suffering of their fellow evacuees and described their own empathic responses. Edgar experienced the loss of his co-worker as a personal tragedy and described his friend's suffering – "His cousin lived down the street from him, but now he's dead and his mom lives in Houston. I mean, I guess that's a pretty big change." Reuben described watching the hurricane unfold on television and how he could "tell how other people got trapped" with an emotion-warn face. The pictorial representations of community loss punctuated this cross-case sense of shared grief in Ann Margaret's scrapbook artifact littered with photos of trapped children on roof tops surrounded by water. Moreover, the community felt a loss with the failure of many former citizens to return and Ann Margaret, James, Greg and Cherise all lamented this change, evidenced in Ann Margaret's statement, "I think that's a major difference." Cherise looked at me with eyes brimming with tears when she said, "The people, I miss them. I really miss the people." In addition to the personal loss this community reduction created, Greg conveyed the

feeling of emptiness that pervaded the city as a result, saying, “You have all those generations that’s stuck somewhere else now and now, there’s nothing.”

One of the ways in which the community felt altered was the increase in criminal activities by the residents. Ann Margaret explained how formerly law abiding citizens returned to New Orleans and changed the culture by engaging in increased criminal activity – “They have very little to begin with and now they have nothing, so desperation sets in.” While many participants touched on the increase in crime in their interviews, this change in the community appeared to have the most profound impact on Elvis and Ann Margaret as well as Edgar and Susan. Elvis, Edgar and Susan in particular experienced heightened fear and anxiety and, of all the participants, have most completely distanced themselves from the New Orleans community as a result. They used words such as “creepy,” “scary,” “freaky,” and “hellish” to describe the vulnerability of living in a crime-ridden city. Edgar expressed defeated acceptance when speaking about his interactions with police who have been unable to stem the violence, saying, “There’s nothing they can do. It’s hard.”

While Elvis focused on the negative changes of the people in his community, his partner Ann Margaret embraced the positive relationships that she developed as a result of the storm. This divisive perception paralleled the totality of contrasting experiences the former couple had in the wake of the storm. Two examples Ann Margaret provided illustrate her increased sense of connectivity. She recalled finding other New Orleans natives wishing to return home from their evacuation shelter who provided her and Elvis with transportation, saying, “We owe them a lot.” Additionally, she recalled the feeling of camaraderie – “hundreds of us out there” – that developed as she and Elvis shared the ham they looted with the many stranded residents outside of the Convention Center. Claude and Monique also developed a closer community network



following the storm and attributed this to their shared experiences. Claude reported feeling “more connected now” and enthusiastically reported that his ability to speak with others about the hurricane “makes [him] feel better.”

Finally, for four of the study families, the possibility of cyclical doom has profoundly affected their relationship with their hometown of New Orleans. Greg and Danielle emphatically asserted that their return to the city is tenuous in that, “If another storm came and messed this place up again, I don’t think I would ever come back.” Additionally, Reuben and Cherise experience increasing anxiety with the onslaught of hurricane season, reporting, “You know, you can feel it when it’s storm season.” For Claude and Monique, the expansion of their family has taken precedence over their connection to a newfound community of evacuees and they agreed that they would abandon the peer relationships they have established if faced with another storm, stating that they too would, “not come back.” Susan and Edgar chose not to wait for the destruction, opting instead to “get out of here soon” rather than face another storm and the resulting community changes. Although many participants expressed renewed love for New Orleans and many positive components of the recovery were identified, the sense of unrest that these four families conveyed has forever altered the previously secure relationship they had with their community. Danielle expressed the feeling underlying these families’ readiness to abandon New Orleans rather than experience another natural disaster – “I was really content. I thought everything was going to be fine... Just never set your hopes up on that. Always expect the unexpected, really.”

In addition to the study families, this construct of fear was evidenced in observation field notes of community interactions. In a McDonalds located in Uptown New Orleans, patrons set eating their food and casually entertaining the news broadcasting from a large flat screen

television on the wall. When the weather came on, the weather broadcaster announced the presence of a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico. Suddenly, adults and children alike turned their eyes to the screen and conversation in the restaurant audibly halted. Many people put their food down on their table to focus full attention on the report of the incoming storm. Next to me, a pre-adolescent girl rested her head on her mother's shoulder as the weather man began the discussion about the possibility of the storm making a path for Louisiana.

### *A Foreign Community*

In addition to detailing the complicated relationships with New Orleans that have grown out of their storm experiences, all participants too referenced the challenge of integrating into a new community. While the level of complicating emotions connected with submerging into a foreign community varied for participants based on how long they stayed away from the city, each participant discussed their time as an "evacuee" with emotive intensity. Two predominant constructions related to the experience of living in a host town emerged. For Reuben, Cherise, Greg and Danielle, the long-term stay in their respective Texas communities was riddled with ambivalent appreciation for new opportunities contrasted with a reverence for their hometown. Yvonne, who also stayed away from the city for more than a year, too expressed a connection with her evacuation city, although her conflicted feelings were not as intense and she maintained a preference to return to New Orleans. With the exception of Monique, the remainder of the participants both stayed away from New Orleans for brief periods of time and discussed their time in host communities with disdain. Monique was the only participant whose longer stay did not result in feelings of attachment for a new community, having stayed away from New Orleans a year all the while maintaining her desire to return home.

Many participants overtly discussed the tugging of conflicted emotions that arose when they compared living in a new town to returning to New Orleans. Observation field notes from a New Orleans blog illustrated the community-wide sentiment of conflicted longing when a blogger posted, "I was born and raised in New Orleans, and evacuated for Katrina. For a long time, I was ambivalent about how I felt about being uprooted like that. Now, I've decided that I miss New Orleans, but I'm not homesick. That way, I can acknowledge the longing, but still stay open to the great things that have unfolded in my life in Austin." Of the study participants, Yvonne most concretely illustrated the challenge of establishing a new life within a new community while simultaneously longing for a return home. While she described the people of Shreveport as "welcoming" and relayed stories of intimate bonds she established with her employer and co-workers, she regularly traveled to New Orleans throughout her 18 month stay in Northeastern Louisiana. Nelly stated that Yvonne was constantly "back and forth" between the two towns and Yvonne concurred, saying, "I would come home almost every three months."

Other participants who described similar feelings of ambivalence returned to New Orleans only once or twice prior to their move back, but recalled experiencing conflicting thoughts and feelings while living away but reflecting on home. During the portion of the interview where he told me of all of the benefits for his family of their move to Irving, Texas, Reuben said, "At the hotel I had some people but it still wasn't the same as being here." The pull of life-long friendships and geographically close family members created a strong sense of conflict for Reuben and his family. Additionally, Greg and Danielle contrasted their developing relationships with friends and neighbors in Houston with the comfort of living in a well-established community network. Danielle reported, "It was nice, but we missed home. We wanted to come back but we wasn't able to."

Participant ambivalence was heightened when study families returned to the city they longed for and found a home that was profoundly changed. For Sarah, her evacuation to Texas provided the opportunity to reconnect with her family who provided her shelter from Katrina. However, despite the support of living with her father she longed to get back to New Orleans and “get back to normal.” Yet when she arrived and engaged in the community process of rebuilding she doubted her love for the city and its people, saying, “It feels better, but then it feels worse, too.” Greg and Danielle also maintained ambivalent constructions of which location provided their preferred community upon their return to the city. Danielle expressed the conflict when she said, “He want to stay here... I don’t know. I think eventually we’ll move out there” to which Greg replied, “You never know.”

The two families who felt the strongest bond with their evacuation city spoke throughout all three interviews of their fondness for the communities that embraced them. Danielle and Greg and Cherise and Reuben detailed many different aspects of their Texas towns that collectively created a feeling of welcome for their families. While James was the one participant who did not indicate a sense of connection to his evacuation community but did express fondness for the town itself, his comments of praise were limited in contrast to the other two families. He reported that his experience with Houston was that the town was “chill” and he enjoyed the opportunity to become part of the community of Houston volunteers who provided assistance to evacuees at the Astrodome. Yet, the other two couples spoke at length for their love of the structure of the cities where they stayed. Greg described the area as “bigger” than New Orleans and he appreciated the opportunity to “go different places” and “travel more” than when he was in Louisiana. Reuben’s love of Irving was connected to the many opportunities for community-funded family outings which he felt contrasted his experiences in New Orleans. He provided the examples of a local

fair that was held while they were there and a “little park” within walking distance of their hotel that had new playground equipment and “real nice” play areas for his children as examples of the amenities he felt are lacking in his Westbank community.

Another aspect of the host communities that the couples both felt was superior to New Orleans was the local school system. Reuben and Cherise stressed their children’s interest in academics, stating that they are “honor roll” students, and as such, placed a great deal of importance on the high quality education they believed their boys received in Texas. In addition, they expressed regret about having to leave the area because the children “didn’t want to go.” They believed that their older son in particular very much enjoyed his new school and Cherise responded to the member check, “He liked that school?” with an emphatic, “Yeah he did. He really, really did.” While Greg and Danielle’s children intensely desired a return to Louisiana to the point that the oldest daughter returned on her own to graduate with her New Orleans high school class, they spoke on three different occasions about the enhanced academic offerings of the Houston schools their children attended. Greg described the high school programs as being “like colleges” and suggested that there was no question that the educative value superseded that in New Orleans, saying, “Schools in Texas... it’s just a lot more – a lot more opportunities in their schools than here.”

In addition to the institutional offerings provided by their host cities, both families expressed a fondness for the physical homes they resided in. Reuben and Cherise stayed in the motel they checked into the first night away from home for the entire year they were in Texas. Although they shared a room with Reuben’s sister, they viewed the opportunity to share their lives as a benefit. Additionally, they were afforded many amenities including a pool and premium cable channels that they do not have access to at home. Danielle and Greg enjoyed their

neighborhood and home as well as their initial shelter respite, frequently complimenting both the physical conditions and the people who contributed to their experiences in each. Danielle described the shelter saying, "We had a nice room. We was on the second floor... and we had a air mattress." These physical amenities were important to both families and afforded the opportunity for more comfortable living environments than they were accustomed to in New Orleans.

Artifact data for both Greg and Danielle and Reuben and Cherise provided a second level of support for the theme illuminating these families' connection to their evacuation communities. Danielle described her Remax bag as being important because it came from Greg's job in Texas which afforded the family the financial security to establish a home there. Additionally, the bag contained paperwork from Texas including a phone book "with everyone I met out there's number" that she uses to maintain the friendships she established. The stuffed teddy bears that Reuben and Cherise brought as artifacts also represented a love for Texas for their family. Moreover, the family albums that constituted unofficial artifact data for these participants were filled with photographs that created a visual narrative of the family's time in Irving. Reuben showed me the album with the pictures from Texas as a response to my member checking question, "It sounds like this was a time that was fun for your family, is that right?" He replied, "Oh! We had such a great time! Where is our album with our pictures of Texas, boys?"

Although Danielle and Greg spoke passionately about their love for Texas, they also lamented the cultural differences from New Orleans. In describing the differences between Louisiana and Texas they described the more stringent alcohol laws of the latter to be a strain on their ability to recreate the relaxed and party-friendly atmosphere they prefer. Yet, their criticisms were limited in comparison to the other families who disliked the areas where they

temporarily resided. While Claude and Monique and Edgar and Susan experienced evacuation cities they perceived as less than ideal, their criticisms were fairly limited in quantity. Claude was uncomfortable in Lafayette with the label of “evacuee” and Monique spoke of not knowing anyone, but they generally refrained from broad criticisms of the community. Susan too disliked being in the more conservative town where she was raised and Edgar’s evacuation city was essentially New Orleans so his critiques were relative to his relationship with his hometown.

For three study families, their discomfort with the communities that provided them a temporary residence was palpable. James experienced generalized feelings of a lack of understanding by the communities he traveled through on his evacuation odyssey, and illustrated these emotions with stories of strangers who criticized his requests for evacuee assistance. For Helen, the experience of losing her job because of what she perceived to be the hyper-conservative “redneck” moral code of Lafayette was traumatic and eventually contributed to her decision to seek counseling once back in New Orleans. Elvis and Ann Margaret described their time in the Cajun Dome shelter as “scary” due to their physical proximity to people they considered to be in lower social classes and described as “thugs.” Nelly and Yvonne also spoke of their discomfort in communities where they did not have a broad social network. Yvonne expressed her internal discomfort, saying she felt “lost” while away from her home, and recalled that her choice to stay in Shreveport rather than North Carolina was due to the few family members she would be near and the fact that “I don’t know nobody [in North Carolina.]” Nelly also referred to her desire to return to the city where her friends and family would be while simultaneously offering external criticisms of the city of Atlanta, asserting, “I don’t like Atlanta!” The diverse responses the families gave regarding their time away from New Orleans

were characterized by the underlying ambivalence they shared to varying degrees when reflecting on their engagement in juxtaposed communities.



### *Family Structure*

The second cross-case theme that emerged illustrates the focus for all participants on gathering strength from and providing support to their families. Levels of reliance upon family members during the hurricane recovery varied from participant to participant and some families discussed both the challenges and benefits of depending upon other family members. For other families, both giving and receiving support was an energizing process and contributed to their families' relational strength. This thematic analysis is focused on the specific ways participants discussed their family structure and the level to which support was given or expected of them. Within this discussion, two subthemes divide the presentation of data – *Immediate Family* and *Extended Family* – and illustrate the ways these separate components of family structure impacted the participants' hurricane experience.

#### *Immediate Family*

All participants spent significant portions of time during their interview discussing the importance of their immediate family during the hurricane as well as in the three years since. Our conversations surrounding the influence of family were an amalgam of both the responsibility that parents felt to support and provide strength to their children and the ways in which they gathered strength and “got through the day” (Nelly) by relying on one another. The overwhelming majority of study participants described both their duties as parents and their ability to rely on their partners in very positive terms, indicating that these were significant contributions to their ability to establish a resilient family system. However, for Elvis and Ann Margaret there were expressions of ambivalence when they explored their ability to rely on each other throughout their times of struggle. Still, regardless of the characterization of the immediate

family structure and how effectively it was able to provide the strength participants needed, all participants focused their discussions on their family throughout the interview.

The study families that had children in the home all spoke of the impact of having children to take care of throughout the recovery process. Participants frequently took care in describing their daily life with their children and illustrating the ways their family functions. Danielle and Greg stressed their children's commitment to academics as well as their involvement in sports as a significant variable for the family. The children's activities provided respite from the anxiety of recovering from the storm, as Danielle explained – "Then we had the kids. They was always into sports or had some kind of play. I know we always was busy with them." In addition to the focused distraction, the couple described how their children provided support to them by virtue of their outgoing personalities. The family engaged in social events as a result of their son's "happy-go-lucky" attitude and ability to make friends "wherever he go." For Reuben and Cherise, their children contribute to the structured routine functioning of their family's daily schedule. The family is frequently together when schedules permit and the boys were described as both close to one another – "Everything they do they do together" – and appreciative of their parents – "They like to do stuff with dad or mom."

Children were described throughout the interviews as critical components in the decision making process for parents throughout the hurricane recovery. The close relationship described above by Reuben inspires within him a fierce devotion to his role as protector, and he discussed how every choice he makes is under the umbrella-thought of providing for and protecting his children, saying, "I'm not gonna let those two there sleeping under a bridge." Yvonne also discussed how influential her role as mother was in guiding her decisions throughout the storm. Although she wanted to return to New Orleans, her son's need for education brought the family

to Shreveport. She recalled, "When [Hurricane] Rita came, I had already shipped him off but – we just stuck to the hip, man! So, I was like – I couldn't just come here and work and leave him out there!" Yvonne spoke of her artifact data birthday cards that she had saved for her son as representative of her devotion to him. She mentioned the many items of his she had collected over the years, including "all his baby teeth," that were lost in the storm, and felt it was appropriate that the only item she removed from the home was a memento that would remind her of their relationship during a particular place in time.

In addition to making practical decisions based on children's needs such as food, shelter, and education, the parents also described a generalized motivation driving their lives that comes from their desire to provide for their kids. Danielle and Greg described their drive to maintain employment as deriving from a need to provide for their family. Additionally, Cherise revealed how she and Reuben worked to maintain a positive attitude in order to be a source of inspiration for their children – "I was a little sad – he seen it in me – but just wanted to make sure the kids was happy... You just had to try to not be sad because you had kids there." Reuben concurred stating that "you got to have strong parents" and stressed their focus as a couple on providing that emotional fortitude for their boys. Yvonne too described how her role as a mother has been all encompassing in the hurricane recovery process as well as her life, saying, "That's all I know – I have to take care of him." While parents characterized their connection to their children as a responsibility to provide support, they also indicated that they drew strength from the cohesion of their familial units.

While not all study participants had children in their homes, every family did discuss the relationship between the adults in the family. For the majority of participants, this relationship was a significant source of support. However, for Elvis and Ann Margaret, there were struggles

with their interpersonal relationship related to their ability to effectively respond to one another in a manner that felt supportive for each partner. As the only couple who experienced a significantly negative structural change in their relationship following the storm, Elvis and Ann Margaret demonstrated ambivalence toward one another that distinguished their relationship from those of the other study participants. Despite the fact that they characterize themselves as current “best friends” (Elvis), they also discussed the emotional distance that prevented them from forming an effective support network for one another. Elvis stated that he lost emotional trust in Ann Margaret when she left the shelter they were staying in to visit her children. He experienced “feelings of abandonment” and felt as if he had to “deal with the whole thing alone” resulting in his inability to convey his deepest emotions to her upon her return. This distance that developed between the couple in the immediate aftermath of the storm was evident in observation of their interactions on video. Although Ann Margaret attempted eye contact while Elvis was speaking and frequently smiled at him as he talked, he stared down or away from her for the majority of the interview. Additionally, when he discussed his resentment of her leaving while in the shelter, he looked down at his former engagement ring – now a “best friend ring” – and twisted it in a methodical clockwise spin. The couple sat far apart physically while they conducted the interviews and only moved close together during the presentation of artifact data.

For the majority of participants, the two adults in the household had a shared sense of responsibility for supporting one another through recovery times of high anxiety or stress. Danielle described her relationship with Greg as “all good,” James stated that Helen was “the exact right person” for him, and both Claude and Monique used the term “positive relationship” to describe their connection with one another. Additionally, three participants described specific examples of the way in which the other adult has provided concrete support during challenging

times. Although Elvis and Ann Margaret evidenced the strongest disconnect of all the couples, Elvis also gave an example of how, in her role as “best friend” Ann Margaret is providing crucial support by “splitting the money” from study participation with him in order to “help me out.” Nelly felt that she would not have been able to keep her dog Lex without the support of Yvonne financially, practically, and emotionally. Finally, Yvonne, too, explicitly described how Nelly provided both a home and a family when she “opened up her one bedroom apartment to us.”

In addition to discussing how their partners have provided support to them, many participants discussed how their families are cohesive units. All participants who spoke of a strong bond also indicated they generated personal resilience throughout the recovery from the strength of this connection. Nelly and Yvonne’s non-romantic relationship was defined as a “sisterhood” and the women stated that they “haven’t had any problems,” ultimately describing themselves as “together.” Claude and Monique jointly concluded that they “keep each other going” and that they have been able to rely on one another through stressful times because when “there’s something bothering us, we talk” (Monique). Additionally, Reuben and Cherise stressed the importance of communication within their family, saying that, “any problem that [we] have, we sit down and try to talk it over” and concluded that their family gets along “very well.” Danielle and Greg also looked to their relationship as a foundational source of strength, saying that as long as they are together, “everything’s fine.” While the aforementioned families stressed positive interactions resulting in a strong family unit, two families discussed strength as coming out of bonding in the face of challenge. Elvis stated that he and Ann Margaret, “stuck to ourselves with the whole getting through it.” Although there were multiple dimensions within their relationship, they did report this cohesion as being a critical component of their making it through the initial evacuation from the city. Additionally, Edgar and Susan felt challenged to

verbally share their trauma with each other but ultimately found strength through their discussions. Susan stated, "I don't think [we] just ever in conversation mentioned Katrina. This is not something we talk about pleasantly... But we talked about a lot of stuff... and it was good."

This pervasive theme of finding strength through their closest adult relationships was demonstrated across cases in artifact and video observation data. Observation notes for James and Helen, Nelly and Yvonne, Claude and Monique, Reuben and Cherise, and Danielle and Greg on body language and interactions between participants were characterized by descriptions of light touches, smiles to one another, eye contact, and touching feet under the table. Additionally, observation of artifact interviews showed that Reuben and Cherise, Nelly and Yvonne, and Claude and Monique each took care to share the handling of the artifacts, sitting close and carefully handing the objects to one another. Finally, for three families, the artifacts themselves were metaphorically connected to the relationship between the participants. Elvis and Ann Margaret's scrapbook was started years before the storm when they were a couple and included headlines with descriptions using the term "We" whereas later in the book in the end of the Katrina section, headlines began to use Elvis' name within captions, distinguishing him as removed from the former "We." Edgar provided pants that he had worn throughout the storm. However, he spent time reflecting on a particular paint stain on the pants that he stated reminded him of "our apartment – our home." Finally, although Reuben and Cherise's photo albums were not presented as their official artifact, they were shown with great pride. Although the conversation was not directly related to the hurricane, Reuben specifically found the couple's wedding album and family pictures to show the growth of the family and the importance of their connections to one another.

*Extended Family*

While all participants spoke about their families as primary factors in their recovery experiences, there was often a distinction between immediate household family and extended family that may or may not have evacuated with the participants. Members of the participants' extended family contributed to their support networks as well as exacerbated their stress levels and required the participants to extend measures of support. Within this subtheme, the participants discuss both the positive and negative influence of their extended family networks on their recovery experience.

One way that families distinguished the influence of their extended kin from that of their immediate family was by discussing the stress related to missing extended family members as a result of the storm. While Nelly was the singular participant who did not evacuate with her immediate family and she discussed the anxiety and stress associated with not being with her husband or knowing "what condition he was in," the remainder of the participants who had separation concerns developed them from a lack of closeness to their extended family. Although each participant family was separated from their larger familial network in a unique way, they shared the worry that accompanied that separation.

Reuben and Cherise and Greg and Danielle described the typical Katrina scenario of being separated physically from loved ones and being unable to locate them in the immediate days and weeks following the storm. Cherise had two siblings the couple could not find just after the storm; a sister who evacuated at the last minute and a brother who stayed through the hurricane. The couple described the "worry" that came with not knowing how to locate these relatives and the relief they experienced when they "got in touch with us." Additionally, Danielle and Greg were temporarily unable to locate Greg's mother after they evacuated to Texas. Greg

stated that the experience was “devastating,” particularly because his mother lives alone. While the Red Cross was eventually able to help the couple locate her, the added stress during their already anxiety-filled evacuation created a substantial burden on the couple.

Other participants discussed less typical separations they experienced during their hurricane recovery period. Although Ann Margaret had planned to move her children from Las Vegas to live with her and Elvis once they were established in their home in New Orleans, the hurricane changed the family plans. She stated, “I just turned my house over in Vegas to my mom so they had a place to stay and I went back all of the time.” However, the unexpected separation from her children which coincided with their evolution as adults resulted in sadness and longing for the mom who was without her children for the first time in their lives. For James, his evacuation from New Orleans overlapped with his father and grandmother’s forced evacuation from Hurricane Rita. He had hoped to have the opportunity to visit them during his own evacuation to Texas but, because of Rita, was unable. He described this experience as “aggravating” and said, “I’m like – I had one chance to see my dad!” Finally, in addition to their traumatic experience of temporarily losing a relative in the hurricane, Danielle and Greg struggled when their oldest daughter returned to New Orleans a year prior to their own return home. Greg reported that it was particularly hard for Danielle, saying, “she really be missing them when they gone.” For each of these participants, the additional stress of missing their family and in some cases, worrying about their well being, had a significant impact on the families’ recovery experiences.

While there was a significant impact on many participants from the structural changes within their family which altered their proximity to extended family members, most participants discussed both getting and giving support to large kinship networks as a significant component



of their hurricane experience. Many families discussed the value they place on maintaining close relationships with extended family, although some families did not stress this as a priority.

Reuben described connected familial relationships as “the single most important thing” and spoke specifically to their relationships with siblings, saying, “My sister and I, we are close. Her brothers and sisters, they all close.” Yvonne also described their family’s ability to bring many members together following the storm as a crucial factor in their resiliency. She explained their philosophy – “We had to pick up ourselves. So, like, we just had to get all us together living in one house... [We] got blessed.” However, Elvis was unable to rely on any extended family, describing himself as a “former 16 year old runaway.” Additionally, while James did spend time with his younger brother during the evacuation, he relied heavily on the support of the families of his friends rather than from his own extended family.

For those families who did give and get support from their family networks, giving assistance was often described as being equally rewarding to the experience of getting aid. Helen described taking a new role in her family system by taking charge of the task of finding her grandmother a suitable nursing home in their evacuation city. She reflected on the experience as being “pretty middle class” in that their family supported one another. She also described feeling “really, really lucky” to be a part of an interconnected family, stating that her engagement in solving family challenges is “just what you do.” Nelly and Yvonne also discussed the satisfaction they received being able to help their family by aiding in the care of a nephew who “was three months old.” While the women recognized their own efforts in contributing, they portrayed their family as being a singular unit, particularly following the storm when there were “10 people in that house.” Reuben and Cherise also spoke about feeling energized and connected

by being able to provide the evacuation transportation resulting in “seven of us in one little car,” three of whom were extended family.

In addition to gathering strength from the process of giving, many participants spoke about how essential their ability to rely on family members for support was in the process of their recovery. Claude and Michelle both defined their evacuation experiences by being able to rely on extended family for practical amenities like shelter and food, as well as intangible support with things like blending in to their new communities, saying, “I pretty much relied on my family” (Monique). Reuben and Cherise also relied heavily on the financial and emotional support of their extended family during their evacuation to Texas, particularly Reuben’s “sister and [Cherise’s] oldest sister,” who the couple reported provided monetary support to ensure the wellbeing of their children. Greg and Danielle also discussed reliance on extended family. Despite the fact that they evacuated to Texas without any of the family they lived near in New Orleans, Greg was able to meet a half brother for the first time and establish a relationship. Having not gone through the hurricane, the brother was able to assist Greg in maintaining employment while in Texas and helped the couple to establish a new social network. Greg reflected on “the coolest guy I ever met” and the comfort and assistance he provided their family, saying, “He’s a remarkable person.” Finally, Nelly and Yvonne spoke most extensively about the integration of extended family members into their lives post-Katrina and detailed examples as to how their relatives provided them with support. Yvonne relied on in-laws and siblings to get her son to the places he needed to be in order to continue with his education. Additionally, Nelly’s sister provided her with financial assistance out of New Orleans and then with an open home when she needed one. I asked Nelly, “what got you through those really tough days?” and she responded emphatically, “It was family.” While participant responses varied in regards to the

benefits or challenges of relationships with extended family, Nelly's comment is reflective of the pervasive influence participant families had in their hurricane experience.

### *Constructions of Class*

The second interview each family participated in was designed to illicit conversations surrounding the families' construction of social class and the ways in which their perceptions of their own class status impacts their family functioning and, specifically, their journey of recovery from Hurricane Katrina. As such, families spoke at length about the impact class has had on their lives and the influence it continues to have on their attempts to rebuild. However, families infused topics related to social class into their dialogues throughout the interview process, demonstrating the importance of this topic for all of the participants. Within this exploration of cross-case conversations about social class, two distinct subthemes emerged – *Family Class Status* and *Employment and Class*. While families constructed markedly differing definitions of class and explanations of the impact of their social standing on their experiences, all participants addressed both of these subthemes to varying degrees. As with our conversations regarding the second theme of *Family Structure*, ambiguity was a pervasive force in families' discussions about social class. Within each of these subthemes, participants explored benefits and disadvantages that exist in their constructions of what it means to be a member of their particular class and emotions ranged, even within case, from anger and resentment to thankfulness and appreciation.

#### *Family Class Status*

When asked to reflect on the influence of social class status on their lives, participant responses were broadly encompassing but focused heavily on their own family's position within

society. Discussions ranged from concrete to abstract and included the label they believed best described their family status as well as descriptions of the characteristics they consider to be relative to one's class standing. The intersection of the hurricane experience and the client's social class worldview resulted in echoing reflections on the social upheaval that resulted from a perceived fluidity in social classes immediately following the storm and the impact of this shift on their families. Additionally, all participants spoke of the various ways their social class has impacted their lives before, during and after the storm. This sub-theme reveals both the similarities and variations that developed as participants attempted to verbalize their constructions of their family's class status.

During the pre-interview telephone screening, all participants stated that they believe themselves to be a member of a marginalized class feeling that their family has "struggled" or "been kept down" (telephone screening terminology) in some way because of their social standing. In response to my prefacing comments during our interviews describing the wide variety in terminology to describe one's social class status and the ways in which people interpret what constitutes class, followed by the question, "How would you describe your social class status?," participants gave a range of labels to self-identify. Edgar and Susan struggled with the way they define themselves, agreeing upon the term "lower class" but tempering the label with Susan's comment, "I would really want to say college students because both of us are young. We're trying to get back to school and work at the same time." Other participants expressed less shared ambiguity, as when Claude and Monique stated that their "family's together" when it comes to their status as "poor working class." Greg and Danielle initially described themselves as "working class" but Greg modified that label when he reflected on the their ability to maintain "a roof over our head" and described the family as being in the "blessed

class.” Reuben and Cherise shared terminology with Elvis in that all three participants considered themselves to be “lower middle class.” However, Elvis and Ann Margaret were the only participants to disagree on their class label, and Ann Margaret responded to Elvis’ term by retorting, “Fuck you, I’m not lower class!” Finally, Nelly, Yvonne, James and Helen used labels that did not express an overt connection to the marginalizing experiences they reported. Nelly and Yvonne agreed that they were both “working middle class” while James and Helen asserted that at the time of the interviews they were “middle class.”

Similar to the variety evidenced by the family-specific labels, participants discussed widely varied but often overlapping characteristics which indicate class status. As a result, while each identified component of class was agreed upon by a minimum of two families, no family shared the same complete list of factors that identify or contribute to social class standing. Most participants did discuss their relationship with and ability to access money during their explanation of their class. While both Ann Margaret and Cherise responded to the prompt, “What comes to mind when you think of social class?” with the direct response, “money,” responses also included the impact of money on their lives. James mused, “Money – it’s such a strange concept” and Elvis and Ann Margaret described themselves as, “the least money driven people ever,” while Edgar and Susan detailed the ramifications they experience from limited finances, saying, “We don’t have money to do anything at all.”

Aside from financial stability, participants included social network and family, employment status, property ownership, personal characteristics / values and education level as being indicative of or being influenced by their social class. While Helen and Claude both reflected on the role of family as being a values-based indicator of class, Claude and Edgar stated that social connections were directly tied to their ability to access resources. Claude summarized

this thought by stating, "A lot of things in life is who you know." Employment was significant for Helen, who believed that "having a hard work ethic" is an indicator of being middle class, while Ann Margaret and Reuben explained the demands placed upon them by having to work in low-paying, physically demanding, "awful job[s]" (Ann Margaret). James cited his "house payment" as evidence of his social climb and Reuben concurred that owning property was an elusive dream of the lower middle class. Personal characteristics and values were considered by Nelly, Yvonne, Greg, and Danielle to be strong indices of social class. While Nelly stressed that she and Yvonne do not "talk game" like people they perceive as being in classes lower than their own, Greg discussed the philosophy he and Danielle share with his mother that mimicking the dress of those in higher classes can enable you to fool others about your social standing and result in achieving the status reserved for privileged classes. Finally, both Claude and Edgar believed that "education plays a big role" (Edgar) in constituting their social class. Claude ambiguously discussed his "two years of college," revealing the resulting limitations when he stated, "I don't have no Ph.D." then indicating the benefits his education has afforded him when he said, "I had two years of college and am about in the middle pay rate of what my field pays." This amalgam of characteristics demonstrates the divergent constructions of class that were unique to each participant family.

In addition to discussing what constitutes class, five families also specifically connected class status to current contextual situations in their lives. Although there were threads of connection between the stories relating to experiences of being restricted or disadvantaged in the process of recovery as well as examples of the advantages created by membership in their particular classes, the influence of class within the context of the hurricane was evidenced by the unique details of each family's story. All four families felt limited in certain ways as a result of

their marginalized class status. Elvis and Ann Margaret discussed pragmatic details that illustrate their continued struggle such as the fact that they “need more affordable housing” in the emerging New Orleans. Additionally, Claude and Monique shared the challenges she has had in attempting to get identification and the results of her inability to do so, such as not being able to “get WIC for my baby or for myself.” The double bind of having insufficient money to self-fund a hurricane recovery but having an employment history that prevented qualifying for a grant was a primary class-related impact of the storm for Nelly and Yvonne. Yvonne in particular discussed her resentment at being required to pay back the federal aid she received despite her assertion, “I’m a single mother... I don’t get a lick of child support.” Additionally, the women felt constricted by their class-based values that had previously discouraged their accessing federal support. In the wake of the hurricane when they decided to apply for federal programs such as food stamps, they believed they were at a disadvantage because, “I’m not used to having to talk game” (Nelly). Finally, James and Helen felt a powerful connection between the disadvantaged class status of their youth and current health concerns, including a diet established in the corner stores of their childhood that James states is now “killing me.” Observation field notes supported this connection between added struggles and lower class status. Notes included a conversation between employees in a local thrift store wherein the women first jovially discussed the fact that most thrift items are relatively new because everything old was lost in the storm. However, this light-hearted conversation turned ominous as one woman noted that both shoppers and employees of thrift stores could suffer significantly if there were another storm because the thrift industry “would be wiped out for good [in New Orleans.]”

While Edgar suggested that those in the upper classes “recovered quicker,” Nelly noted that she observed disadvantages for those in the upper middle class who were unprepared for

their loss of resources and “didn’t know how to make it and how to cope.” The personally experienced influence of class on recovery was mentioned as partially beneficial for Nelly and Yvonne and James and Helen. These two families, who self-identify using labels that are not connected to overt oppression, revealed ways in which they felt they garnered advantages because of their class status. Nelly’s ability to speak and write with a cohesive and persuasive style afforded her the ability to successfully argue her case with FEMA representatives.

Additionally, she believed that her work history earned her respect, and said, “It was helpful I think when I had to deal with people like FEMA because they were kind of looking for the people who were looking for something for nothing. But if they saw you had a job, that you worked, then they helped you.” James and Helen were able to purchase their first home as a result of the plummeting real estate prices that followed the storm. For the couple, property ownership signified their acceptance within the ranks of the middle class.

In addition to discussing perceived family class status and the hurricane-related implications, five of the seven families discussed a sense that their family class changed either temporarily or permanently as a result of the storm. Claude described how the entire population of New Orleans experienced a change directly following the storm:

You look at class and I think it has shifted after the hurricane. Because even the wealthiest person in New Orleans is still considered a hurricane victim or evacuee, and that’s the truth. The wealthiest person still has that label and that puts them in a class.

For three participant families, this immediate change in class status was perceived to be temporary. Elvis and Ann Margaret enthusiastically recalled the period immediately following the storm when they felt no struggle to find employment and were inundated with a flood of community funds. Although their initial stay in the shelter was characterized by a marked



decrease in ability to access money, their return home was “euphoric” because they “made a fortune.” The couple implemented a copious lifestyle and took advantage of the surplus of money. However, Ann Margaret stated that “all the work around here died down a little bit and businesses slowed down a little bit” and the couple felt that they returned to “normal.” Edgar and Susan too recalled a surge of employment and discretionary funds. Yet Susan too indicated that the wealth and perceived elevation in status was fleeting, saying, “There was a lot of money that really stayed here, but it only lasted maybe two or three months after the storm.”

In contrast to a perceived increase in access to resources and social class status, Nelly and Yvonne described a temporary experience of feeling diminished in their social standing. While the women related this partially to their inability to access funds from their bank accounts held by local banks, they primarily referenced their sudden reliance on government aid as an indicator of slipping social class. Nelly mentioned signing up for “food stamps” as well as “unemployment” for the first time in her life and she described standing in line with other applicants feeling as if her social standing had fallen. Both women stated that they had “always worked” and felt discomfort with a need to rely on others for financial support. This resulted in anxiety for both participants, particularly Nelly who explained her discomfort and inadequacy in successfully negotiating the new system – “You had to know exactly what to say and what not to say in order to get something from the state or from the government... So you have to get in that mindset.” However, Nelly described the changes as “very temporary” and Yvonne stated, “I mean, we never really live bad so we living about the same.”

For Claude, Monique, Reuben and Cherise, the hurricane and long-term recovery process resulted in lasting changes to their perceived class status. While Claude acknowledged the dramatic but temporary shift felt by the majority of evacuees, saying, “When you’re in a

situation like that you don't really think about class. I mean, what does class mean?... Everybody was just feeling like they was a drifter in a way," he and Monique reported a lasting decline in their family social standing. They have maintained engagement in activities they previously considered to be indicative of lower classes such as eating at "homeless shelters" and accessing "federal government aid of all types" and believe they have moved down on the social ladder as a result. Additionally, Reuben and Cherise lost their jobs, possessions, and suffered declining health in the wake of the storm and have been unable to rebuild their life to the standards they held before Katrina. Reuben surmised, "Before the storm we had pretty decent jobs and was doing different things... after the storm a lot of stuff has changed."

### *Employment and Class*

Many families described employment status as a significant indicator of social class level. Although not all participants explicitly made this connection, every family discussed the relationship between their occupations and the hurricane. The family stories about the influence of their employment on their evacuation and recovery experiences and vice versa contribute to a broader understanding of the participants' constructions of class and the framework in which they situate themselves when considering the implications of social status. Discussions revolving around employment focused on the influence of pre-Katrina jobs on participant evacuations and the impact of the hurricane on their ability to reestablish careers following the storm.

Strong emotions arose for participants who reflected upon the influence of their pre-storm occupations on the outcome of their recovery experiences. Yvonne was the only study participant to receive financial and emotional support from her employer throughout her evacuation and up until she found a new job. She described both the company that employed her and her direct supervisor as "very supportive for me" and felt respected and well-treated when her storage

company site closed and she was forced to relocate. Contrasting her experience with those of her family members, she stated, “Actually, they was even looking for me to get me my check.” Further, when Nelly spoke of her negative experiences with her employer, Yvonne retorted, “Well, I was helped so I can’t speak to that.”

Despite Yvonne’s positive experiences with the storage company that employed her, Nelly, Helen and Claude each described negative associations with the jobs they held prior to the hurricane. Nelly felt abandoned by the hospital where she worked as a psychiatric nurse for many reasons. She was considered “essential staff” and was required to report to work during the storm, and was “under the impression the hospital had someplace for us to stay.” However, her employer did not honor their promise and forced employees to evacuate on their own into a flooded and abandoned city. Further, when she returned to the city, her position was no longer available and “they wasn’t giving people a lot of severance packages” meaning that she and her ailing husband no longer had health insurance. Although Helen had no complaints about her direct employer prior to the storm, she equated her profession with the trauma she experienced when she was fired from a position she acquired in her evacuation city. She maintains passion for teaching and despite the frustration with the “censorship” she experienced in Lafayette at the hands of the school board, James stated, “She’s been a teacher straight through.” Finally, Claude discussed the challenges he experienced with trying to obtain the paycheck he was owed prior to the storm. In desperate need of pay, his paycheck “wasn’t sent” despite the fact that he had contacted his employer and provided his parents address in Lafayette. He recalled the ordeal he went through to get the money – “I had to get myself to Baton Rouge just to pick up my paycheck from my last employers.”

Although not everyone discussed the connection between employment and evacuation, all families reflected upon the influence of the storm on their post-Katrina jobs. Unlike the solidarity of Yvonne's positive experience with an employer prior to the storm, participant emotions regarding post-hurricane jobs spanned the gamut of emotions, at times even within the reflections of a single participant. In observation field notes, the dominant social discourse surrounding the struggle to regain employment post-Katrina was evident. At a local coffee house, unemployed patrons sat and discussed their inability to maintain regular employment since the storm. While their conversations focused primarily on the lack of work as opposed to the storm itself, the phrases "Before Katrina" and "After Katrina" were the singular time markers in the dialogue and demarcated the patrons' lives into categories wherein they were able to find stable employment before the hurricane and the three years since when they were not able to find and hold a job.

Reuben and Cherise were the only participants who expressed singularly negative feelings about their post-storm work lives. The combination of exacerbated health issues, limited training and education and declining community economics has created hardship for the couple. Cherise has been unable to return to the field of cosmetology – the only career for which she has training – due to the chemicals in salons that put a strain on her heart. However, she also believes that even if she were able to resume practice she would realize marginal success, stating, "A lot of people around in town, they just aren't going to do their hair now." Additionally, Reuben's series of strokes have resulted in limited physical capacities and he stated that he is unable to maintain significant employment because "my health won't let me."

Greg, Helen and James and Edgar and Susan all reported ambivalent feelings about the current state of their employment. While Greg was appreciative of his employer's willingness to

take him back after a two and a half year absence, he said, "I came back to my old job but I just recently got laid off. That sucks." For Helen, her reliance on art and teaching as a source of income resulted in the necessity of her initially taking "odd jobs" including painting houses and housecleaning during her initial return to the city. While this was frustrating, the couple's post-hurricane careers were most significantly influenced within the context of their art. The storm resulted in profoundly damaging implications for their artistic work while it simultaneously created opportunities for new work and increased exposure. Helen suffered deep sadness upon realizing the depth of loss within her collection, stating, "I lost about half... and did I have insurance? Noooooo." However, the couple used their artifact data to demonstrate how they have embraced opportunity, bringing artwork that rose out of the storm wreckage and, for Helen, was featured at the New Orleans Museum of Art. In comparison, Edgar and Susan expressed some feelings of resentment at the impact of the storm on their careers but primarily discussed how the hurricane resulted in increased opportunity to establish their careers and make money. Susan resented her loss of a low-paying but career-advancing position in the music industry while also stating that her position as "a cocktail waitress at a restaurant" now affords her more time to focus on earning money. Similarly, Edgar lamented the fact that he often works only part-time because "I could use all the work I can get," but reported that his involvement in the rebuilding of the city through work in construction has allowed him to establish a career by "pick[ing] up a lot of training" while also achieving personal satisfaction by assisting people in "rebuilding their lives."

The families who described solely positive associations with the development of their careers post-Katrina included Nelly and Yvonne and Ann Margaret and Elvis. Nelly described a revitalization of her enthusiasm for her professional identity when she began a new job in a

significantly smaller hospital. Although she left her old job unwillingly, she stated, "The type of work I do now as opposed to what I did then... Now I have much closer contact with my patients. I'm able to do a lot more." Yvonne spoke highly of her temporary employment in Shreveport, stating, "My manager – I would even go to her for advice" and additionally cherished her return to the storage business although it is with a different company than had employed her prior to the storm. The women directly connected finding satisfying positions after the hurricane with their social proximity to the solidly middle class, stating that their social class most affected their recovery in that they were "able to come back and get a job." Ann Margaret also offered only praise for her post-storm employers and the "family," consisting of her coworkers and superiors, that she relies on for emotional support. Finally, even Elvis, who exhibited primarily negative responses to the hurricane experience in totality, littered our discussions on his post-Katrina jobs with positive opportunities and enthusiasm for his employment future. While describing the increasingly profitable work he engaged in immediately after the couple's return to the city, he demonstrated feelings of empowerment when he was able to advocate for himself on-site. He recalled the experience:

They were still stuck with the same idea that help will come and go, when that wasn't the case [with me.] It was like, there are only a few of us here and if you're going to keep treating me like dirt then I CAN go someplace else!

Additionally, despite the personal and relational losses he believes he has incurred as a result of the hurricane, he spoke passionately when describing his preparations to return to Las Vegas as an Elvis impersonator, which he recognized would not have happened without the trauma of the hurricane. The discrepancy between Elvis' overall hurricane reflections and his positive associations with the storm's influence on his potential career illustrates the intricate relationship

between class, employment and hurricane recovery and the resulting conflicted emotions that are representative of these families' experiences.

### *People Outside of the Family System*

While the theme *Relationship to Community* revealed participant struggles with reconstructing their identity relative to their larger communities and *Family Structure* discussed the ways in which family members influenced participant hurricane and recovery experiences, *People Outside of the Family System* explores the perceptions that study families had regarding the individuals outside of the family who were a part of their hurricane related experiences. The social constructionist frame guiding the study informed the development of this theme through the assertion that individual worldviews are continuously constructed through the interchange of dialogue and interactions that families have with one another as well as with other people in the community. Each distinct interaction serves to guide an individual's understanding of the events that unfold within their lives. Although none of the pre-established interview questions were designed to elicit discussion regarding participant perception of people outside of the family who impacted their experiences, all study families discussed this topic at length, revealing both distinct experiences shaping their worldview and interpretations or assumptions that they developed as a result. This theme is broken into two subthemes – *Volunteers, Helpers and Relief Workers* and *Other Hurricane Katrina Evacuees* – which uncover the two distinct conversations that evolved through exploration of this topic.

#### *Volunteers, Helpers and Relief Workers*

When participants discussed the assistance they received from individuals and organizations, many used words and exhibited body language that demonstrated palpable

emotion. Claude described the importance of the people involved in his hurricane recovery by saying, "We had to rely on other people for food, money, everything." Each family spoke from their experience of being dependent upon others and vacillated between expressions of gratitude and frustrations with what they perceived to be ineffectual aid. Those who impacted participant recovery while attempting to provide assistance were identified as following into three primary categories – volunteer workers who assisted in the initial evacuation as well as the rebuilding process, "helpers" (Danielle) who consisted of independent citizens not directly impacted by the hurricane who offered aid to New Orleanians, and employees of relief organizations working with the population affected by Hurricane Katrina. Within each of these categories, families spoke of both positive and negative experiences that ultimately contributed to their perceptions of themselves as well as other human beings.

Of all participants, Danielle and Greg spoke most frequently in a positive manner of the volunteers that assisted them during their initial evacuation. They described the church shelter where they spent their early days as evacuees as having "everything you need." Additionally, they commended the workers who "remembered us" and provided them with a wide range of necessities, including "clothes and hair products... whatever you need," in addition to cooking regular meals – "We ate three times a day." Additionally, Greg disputed the comments he heard by other evacuees implying racist behavior by volunteers, stating, "There was more white people helping [us] than blacks."

While other participants did not directly praise volunteers as frequently as Greg and Danielle, three families mentioned positive interactions with volunteers that contributed to their recovery. Helen stated, "It's really cool [when] you have some volunteer worker from somewhere else... They want to help you." Moreover, Edgar observed the attitude of volunteers



that resulted in the most profound responses from New Orleanians and captured its essence when he explained, “Go[ing] up to someone and say[ing] I’ll do whatever you need me to do for your home. Just provide me with whatever you want done.” Finally, Nelly displayed tears of gratitude when she discussed the attorney from Baton Rouge – “my savior” – who gave her 20 dollars, a ride to the airport and free legal services.

In addition to positive recollections of volunteers, participants discussed “helpers” (Danielle), or citizens unaffiliated with any specific organization, who gave their time or money to families evacuating from the hurricane. Danielle and Greg listed many such individuals who gave them food, supplies and money and often established interpersonal relationships with the evacuees. Danielle recalled a woman they met in Walgreens who assisted their family and Greg stated, “That’s just straight up people being nice.” Another woman who the couple spoke of fondly was “a church member” who offered friendship and support to the family while they stayed in the shelter. Although she was not officially a shelter volunteer, Danielle in particular formed a relationship with her. She recalled, “I kept in touch with Mary for the longest. I have to call Mary. She was in love with the kids.” Additionally, the couple was grateful for people who shared knowledge as a courtesy. While trying to enroll their children in the local schools, Danielle and Greg wanted information about where their children could receive the best education. Danielle remembered a local school bus driver who told them about the different schools and then gave them a ride to enroll the children – “She had different information because she worked for the school system out there so she knew where to go.” Ann Margaret and Nelly too emphasized the people they met who provided assistance. Ann Margaret spoke of the practical aid she received, saying, “We got a lot of money from people, too.” Nelly recalled a woman she encountered in a store who offered help:

I was trying to buy some underwear because you know, you have nothing, and the lady said, please let me buy those for you. I haven't done anything yet and I'm so sorry for what happened. And she actually paid for our undergarments!

She stated that this encounter was representative of her experiences with other people outside of Louisiana, saying, "I ran into nothing but kindness the entire time I was gone."

Participants also experienced kindness from relief workers or members of corporate organizations and discussed the gratitude they felt from a systematic and empathetic approach to aid. Nelly, James and Helen and Elvis and Ann Margaret each detailed experiences with Red Cross or FEMA volunteers that seemed to rise above the call of duty. These interactions were marked by a respect for the humanity of the participants and resulted in feelings of relief and thankfulness. Nelly described the feeling of being "painted with a broad brush" and lumped into a category of evacuees who were trying to "milk it" by FEMA representatives until she encountered "Duke." She said, "You know what it was? He did everything he could. It wasn't that much money, but he said, what about your car, this that and the other. You SURE? Cause I could give you such and such." James and Helen also encountered FEMA representatives who provided much needed assistance during the most challenging times of the clean-up process. In addition to the food and water provided by "FEMA trucks," the couple received "kits" with tools to remove debris and black mold. This practical assistance was appreciated, but the couple stated that it was the workers who took the time to explain how to use the kits and listen to their stories of devastation that were meaningful. For Elvis and Ann Margaret, the Red Cross workers epitomized humanitarian aid. When asked to describe why these workers stood out above others, they pointed to the "personal connection" established in their interactions with the Red Cross as opposed to other organizations. Elvis explained, "They would remember you when you asked for

something... they'd say, we don't have any right now but check back with us. But before we got a chance to check back with them they were there for us." Video observation data of Elvis showed that he shook his head back and forth as he said, "God bless the Red Cross."

In addition to the workers with organizations dedicated to relief efforts, participants also listed the contributions of corporate employees who stepped in to provide assistance. Helen recalled Walmart workers from around the country who came into New Orleans to hand out gift cards, merging corporate donations with the interpersonal connections of face to face contact. Additionally, Ann Margaret spoke of the chefs from "gourmet restaurants" in Lafayette who came into the shelter to deliver donated food. She said, "We really couldn't want for much." Helen too discussed the generosity of restaurateurs, specifically pointing to Al Copeland, a New Orleans native and owner of the Popeye's franchise. She described his generosity, saying, "He fed everybody. He was like – all this is going to go bad anyway. He fed, fed, fed. He fed police, he fed civilians, he fed whoever." Helen also felt gratitude during the later parts of the recovery process from employees of national organizations who came in to local schools to assist in the psychological component of the recovery. She described the impact on her students when workers came in and infused a sense of renewed energy, excitement and hope into her classroom:

It was fantastic. There's a group called YAYA – Young Audiences, Young Aspiration.

And I had two African-American males come in. They were young. They were hot. They were good. They were intelligent. They were talented, And all these little boys and girls were like, 'I want to be like you!'

Although participants recognized that these employees were "just doing their job" (Elvis), they identified the workers who created a connection and expressed interest and empathy as significantly impacting their recoveries in positive ways.

Despite the many expressions of gratitude families offered throughout the interviews, there were also many discussions in which participants revealed feeling profoundly disappointed or hurt by negative interactions with volunteers, helpers and relief workers. Elvis spoke at length about the negative interactions he had with non-Red Cross volunteers at the Cajun Dome shelter. Although he stated, “they meant well,” he also concluded, “they had no idea what they were doing.” Interactions classified as particularly hurtful were those in which he believed the volunteers did not convey empathic understanding of the magnitude of his anxiety and grief. He felt that volunteers were unable to maintain a positive and helpful attitude, saying, “They were like – SIGH – every time you asked them for something.” One interaction with a young volunteer illustrated his frustrations:

I was tired when we first got to the Cajun Dome... and I'm laying on my back and spacing off 'cause I'm dead tired and I'm wearing this Johnny Cash t-shirt. This stupid college chick volunteer comes up and flips me off, and I was like, what? And she said, didn't you ever see that picture? Johnny Cash flipping off the camera? And I was like, oh – I get it, THANKS. We just didn't need that shit, you know?

Additionally, Ann Margaret and Helen emphasized the negative impact volunteers had when they appeared to push a value-laden agenda through their work. Ann Margaret recalled the religious preaching of volunteers at the Cajun Dome and how she was influenced by their views – “[They would say] this is God's punishment! And when you keep hearing that, you're stuck in a confined place like that and you hear that kind of shit over and over again, you kind of start to believe it.” Helen had similar experiences working with teachers who came in from across the nation to volunteer their services in the struggling New Orleans schools. She discussed the unwillingness of many volunteers to recognize and value the culture of New Orleans, its' people,

and its' teachers, and complained, "We had so many people who came in from other places and wanted to teach – and it's like, oh, yeah! Come in, teach anything! But then step back! Don't take over... I need someone [the students] can identify with."

While the majority of participants discussed "helpers" and independent citizens in positive terms, Elvis, James and Helen were critical of people they perceived to be either seeking fulfillment by engaging in the crisis for self-gratification, intolerant or ambivalent of evacuee suffering, or gawking at the devastation for entertainment. Elvis demonstrated anger and resentment through his exaggerated body language when he described a woman who offered him help and then demanded a great deal from him in return. He believed her motivation was to have, "somebody to tote around town and show what a great charity giver she is." Additionally, he recalled an experience on a Lafayette bus where a local citizen demonstrated hostility at having to host evacuees:

I remember being on a bus to go to Walmart – just to get out of there for God's sake – and some guy stood up and said, 'Bus driver, when these people gonna get the hell out of our city? Don't they know we don't want them here no more?' It was like a whole bus of evacuees just trying to get on with their life... and this guy had no compassion at all.

James and Helen too became visibly agitated when they spoke of tourists coming in to New Orleans and taking bus tours of the city to see the damage caused by the hurricane. James described watching a tour bus pass in front of his house while he worked to rebuild and feeling as if he were "in a zoo." He recalled the anger demonstrated by other New Orleanians while attempting to stop the busses, "Some of the nuttier and more entertaining Quarter people stayed out there and laid in front [of the busses.] That's just awesome that that happened. It's hilarious."

All three participants conveyed a sense of being exploited in the midst of the “worst hour of [their] life” (Elvis) by other Americans.

The majority of negative interpretations of other people in helping roles were in the context of participant interactions with relief or organizational workers. Families discussed their frustration as they observed individuals who they considered to be in opportune places to offer assistance fail to offer it. Elvis recalled that the businesses who had initially donated items by sending in employees to the Cajun Dome suddenly stopped coming – “It was just like, OK, we’re done.” James and Helen also believed that the media had the opportunity to provide aid but used their ability to access New Orleans for personal gain rather than as an opportunity to help. James remembered his frustration watching the media helicopters circle as New Orleans struggled with the initial recovery effort, rhetorically asking, “It’s like, just circle ten times and take pictures and not help?” For Claude, it was the failure of helping professionals to convey empathy that was the most disappointing – “Professionals in those kind of fields have to approach this kind of situation with a lot of compassion and an open mind... Some cases though... you lose some compassion.”

Two participant families also spoke directly of being disappointed by specific government officials. Claude was further traumatized during his evacuation by the unwelcoming response of the Lafayette mayor to his presence as an evacuee. He stated, “The mayor of Lafayette did not want evacuees in his city... he did not allow FEMA to set up centers for evacuees so we could obtain information... It was an uncomfortable feeling.” Additionally, James and Helen criticized the plans for revitalization proposed by New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin and once again spoke of a sense that their culture as New Orleanians was not being valued. James called the mayor a “dumb ass” and Helen explained, “He was talking about

turning Canal Street into partnering with Disneyland... Canning and serving Jazz is not the answer for anyone!" As they expressed their disappointment, they conveyed the sense that they believe that politicians are charged with protecting their citizens and the failure of these two Louisiana mayors to do so left their families feeling victimized.

In addition to revealing negative experiences with and perceptions of corporate or government workers, four families were affected by the lack of support they received from FEMA officials. Susan recalled her feelings of abandonment by the relief organization, stating, "I don't remember seeing FEMA set up the whole time I was in Gulfport. It was about three days after the storm until they were giving us water... but we didn't have a place to complain to FEMA." Nelly echoed Susan's sentiment that the voices of evacuees were often not heard when she contrasted her positive experience with Duke to her interactions with other FEMA workers, saying, "You had other people who just did not take the time [to listen to you.]" Additionally, Helen's frustrations were similar in that she felt FEMA conveyed a lack of recognition of the challenges inherent in hurricane recovery, including limited free time. In a phone survey to New Orleans residents asking for an assessment of FEMA's services following the storm, Helen participated for 35 minutes before hanging up because of the imposition. She said, "I was like, 'I have to work. You ate up my whole lunch hour! You could at least tell someone how long its going to take.'" The ongoing demands of maintaining employment and rebuilding destroyed property defined Helen's life for the "first year" following the hurricane and she implied that FEMA could communicate empathy by recognizing her struggles and limitations. Finally, although Danielle and Greg perceived their interactions with other people outside of their family to be overwhelmingly positive and supportive, they specifically criticized the FEMA representative charged with their care. Although the home they had lived in prior to the storm did

not accumulate water and was still standing, the destruction of the surrounding community made their return impossible. However, FEMA unceremoniously denied their claim for assistance. Danielle recalled that the worker, “was like, ‘Oh, we can’t do anything for you because it’s nothing happened to the house.’” Again, this lack of compassion for the totality of their family’s experiences was emotionally devastating.

### *Other Hurricane Katrina Evacuees*

Participant reflections on their perceptions of people who existed as part of their hurricane experience evolved into two threads. The associations they made between the role of people involved in the hurricane through their desire to provide assistance and their own recovery produced conversations distinct from the subtheme *Other Hurricane Katrina Evacuees*, in which families reflected upon the attitudes and behaviors of New Orleanians who also went through the hurricane. While some participants revealed positive encounters with and perceptions of other evacuees, discussions were primarily centered on criticisms of other citizens. These conversations were often class-bound and, when evaluated with a Social Class Worldview Model lens, consisted of expressions of upward, downward and lateral classism wherein participant families framed their own behaviors as apposite in contrast to the behaviors of other evacuees. While the language used to convey these assertions was ripe with frustration, these beliefs ultimately serve the participants by solidifying their beliefs in the appropriateness of their class-based values and behaviors.

Some families did describe positive interactions with and impressions of other New Orleanians throughout the hurricane recovery. Elvis and Ann Margaret and Edgar and Susan discussed experiences of being helped by others who were themselves struggling. Ann Margaret sat next to a woman while waiting outside of the New Orleans Convention Center who, despite



her own desperation, shared freely with the couple – “There was this old black lady... She’s in rags and carrying this plastic bag holding a couple of her shirts... but she had a bottle of water and we had half.” Additionally, Ann Margaret reformulated her assumptions about other people as she and Elvis sat through the storm in their apartment building with “our absolute worst neighbors that we hated” who they ended up forming friendships with – “We wined up riding out the storm with [them] and holding each other together.” Susan captured this sense that people were willing to reach out to one another when she said, “The public, as people, they’ve tried to help each other. I’ve seen a lot of that.” She and Reuben each discussed the gratitude they felt when other evacuees who had more resources than they did were willing to share. Susan’s landlord provided her with a ride out of the city as well as food and shelter in Gulfport while Reuben drew strength from the generosity of his pastor. He described the pastor’s charitable attitude throughout the storm – “Pretty much he said, go up here. You need money? Here. You need food? Here.”

Despite the occasional reports of positive reactions some participants had to other New Orleanians’ attitudes and behaviors, the overwhelming majority of interview discussions focusing on other evacuees were strikingly negative. Criticisms were not limited to specific types of behavior but, rather, ranged from the lack of compassion from those with more resources to anger and resentment at the lawless and imprudent behavior of people with a lack of means. Both Helen and James attempted to capture the overall impact of what they perceived to be the disappointing behavior of people under the extreme stress of hurricane recovery; Helen stated, “This is what happens to people when they lose their minds!” while James spoke in more numinous terms, saying, “[It was] the devil’s work.”

Although the majority of participant critiques centered on people they considered to be in lower social classes, some participant families discussed the differences between their hurricane recovery and those they observed of people with higher socio-economic status. Observation field notes included a conversation between financially stable men who complained about the surprising evolution of disdain for rules by their fellow upper-class neighbors who, while prior to the storm followed neighborhood guidelines, now refused to adhere to the binding local covenants preventing certain types of landscaping in their yards. Edgar encapsulated the sentiment of all three participant families who discussed those with access to significant resources when he stated, "Their lives got back to normal a lot faster than like the average person, or the average lower class person that is." His perception was that people with more resources were insulated to varying degrees from the struggles associated with rebuilding. When discussing his own struggle with internalizing the devastation around him, he said, "They probably didn't see as much [as us.]" Claude and Ann Margaret each observed changes in the approaches toward interpersonal relationships of people with significant financial resources. Claude reflected on how these shifts in people he considered to have more social power affected him personally, recalling, "There have been shifts in economics and people's attitudes have changed... I felt that I had to be more on my p's and q's and walk a straight line." Ann Margaret stated, "The richer the people, the nastier they were." She and Elvis offered their interactions with their pre-Katrina landlord upon their return to the city as evidence of this statement. Ann Margaret rolled her eyes and dramatically increased her hand gestures as they told their story:

She said that the 2000 dollars we received from FEMA was intended to go to the landlords to help fix the property, so she was keeping our money (Ann Margaret).

And, she owns half of Esplanade Avenue, you know – all of these beautiful houses...

(Elvis)

And she didn't fix any of those houses until she fixed hers. It was classic (Ann Margaret).

The frustration these participants felt at the disparity between their experiences and their perception of the limited trials of the upper class was evident through our discourse.

While only three participants discussed the behavior of "richer" (Ann Margaret) people, all participants revealed opinions on the actions of people with limited finances. While every family differentiated their behavior from that of the people they criticized, some participants considered themselves to be of similar class status to these other people and utilized lateral classism to distinguish their values as superior, while other participants separated their identified class from these evacuees by engaging in downward classism. Families commented on this topic in a range of ways, from criticizing specific actions and attitudes to speaking broadly about the values of large groups of people.

Elvis and Ann Margaret captured the frustration of many participants when they discussed their disdain for individuals who chose to loot what they considered to be luxury items in the midst of the hurricane. Ann Margaret recalled sitting outside of the Convention Center watching people enter and exit a nearby shopping mall and said, "They were coming out 50 to 100 people at a time with huge rolling suitcases. Like, that would be their first stop in the looting process. They'd get the enormous rolling suitcases and just crammed it with everything." The couple's frustration with this behavior was evidenced by the entire two page spread of newspaper pictures in their artifact scrapbook of people photographed looting. Additionally, Elvis related looting behavior to the opportunistic actions he observed while in their evacuation shelter, saying, "There were just a bunch of jerks and people with their hands out."

James and Helen also addressed looting, stating, "If you need food and water, that's fantastic. Clothes, diapers, fine. But if there's no electricity, you don't need a flat screen television set" (Helen). However, they also expanded their criticisms to many forms of opportunistic behavior. Helen stated, "People are manipulating the situation for their own gain. Like, on all levels – that's what's going on." James recalled fights over food during the first days back in the city and stated, "People were rats. Total rats." Helen even criticized other New Orleans artists for using the storm to create career opportunities, revealing her frustrations when she said, "I'm like, 'What? You took a picture and got a show?' They're like, 'Yeah.' I said, 'Don't ever call me again!'"

For three participant families, the most abhorrent behavior was that following the storm wherein, like Helen's opportunistic artists, participants believed that other individuals abused the aid they were offered. Edgar and Susan addressed this notion that people used the crisis to their own advantage but limited their assertions to people who manipulated FEMA and relief aids. Edgar imagined the impact this behavior would have on all New Orleanians – "When it was brought to everybody's attention that they'd used addresses and all this stuff to get recovery money, like falsified, I was thinking – Wow! This is really going to be bad." Nelly and Yvonne spoke primarily of the misuse of FEMA funds by evacuees, listing the numerous superfluous items they knew evacuees to purchase with their relief money. Yvonne stated, "They went and got stomach tucks and Coach bags and get what they want. And a lot of them went to the jewelry store; you know what I'm saying? They did what they want with their money." Finally, Greg and Danielle discussed their co-residents at the shelter who they felt failed to show appreciation for the aid they received, in addition to manipulating the volunteers in an effort to obtain increasingly extravagant material goods. Greg recalled that he frequently heard evacuees saying,

“I don’t want that stuff” and revealed his reactions to that behavior – “It just kind of like pissed me off because a lot of people was, they were talking down about the people helping us.”

In addition to critically evaluating specific behaviors, participants addressed the dynamics of the groups embodied by these particular New Orleanians. Claude offered the most lenient judgment when he stated that he was more tolerant now of the actions of “homeless people” and “those types” than he was prior to the storm as a result of his perceived demotion in class status. Additionally, Reuben expressed only mild criticism through the suggestion that other evacuees ought to “use [aid money] wisely, do wise things with it.” However, the remainder of participants roundly criticized behaviors, values and social connectivity.

Three families disdainfully discussed the continued reliance of many evacuees on FEMA for living assistance. Susan stated, “They lived off the government for a good long while, still a lot of them getting all kinds of assistance for them, wherever they got relocated to.” Additionally, Nelly and Yvonne surmised that people who had always lived off of government funds are continuing to do so with FEMA now and they speculated on what the outcome will be when the hurricane relief ends:

If you didn’t have a job and you left here with no job and were living in one of the housing projects, then how would you get back here? You needed someone again to pay your rent. So, that’s why they have this large population of people in Texas... (Nelly)

How long FEMA going to take care of them, we don’t know. They still going to be in the situation once they stop though (Yvonne).

Danielle directly echoed this sentiment, saying, “So these people is, wherever they are, they live off of FEMA. But what you going to do when they stop paying your rent and stuff?” Greg offered his perspective on why this situation arose and why he believes it will not change – “You

could bring a horse to water but you can't make him drink. People that left here living in them projects and had that project mentality, that's what they took with them." This frustration with reliance upon the government was also noted in observation field notes. Two women in a New Orleans restaurant engaged in a lengthy conversation in which they criticized individuals they felt had failed to "pull themselves up" and instead relied heavily on government and charitable organizations. As proof that this was an avoidable situation, they discussed many specific examples of people they had heard about or seen on television who had very limited means but were able to establish a successful life following Katrina.

In addition to evaluating behavior, families addressed specific values they felt to be representative of those who would abuse the system. While Greg and Danielle stated, "I mean, you could see it, homosexuality's running rampant," James and Helen focused on what they believed to be the poor parenting practices and family values of many evacuees. Helen discussed her students, saying, "At one time they might have had aunties or grandmothers or something, but since the storm they're gone. They're all different places." She called upon social services to address the adolescents she sees living on their own while sarcastically addressing the children's parents who are still living in evacuation states as "wonderful parents." For Edgar, the most disappointing behavior of those in his community is a lack of focus on togetherness. He lamented the resulting isolationism for many residents, saying, "Everybody's doing their own thing." Participants made statements conveying these value judgments throughout the interviews while simultaneously explaining the ways in which their families differed in actions and attitudes, supporting their belief in the rightness of their approach to devastation.

### *Growing and Changing*

The fifth theme illuminates the conversations peppered throughout the interviews regarding the ways in which the storm and recovery have served as a catalyst for change for participant families. Every family discussed the impact of the hurricane on their individual and relational processes in both positive and negative terms. As the discussions deepened, many families acknowledged that the interviews constituted for them an inaugural concrete conceptualization of the specific ways they have changed. As a result, some families moved from initial statements such as, “We didn’t change much – you can’t change us” (Reuben) to recognition of profound shifts both individually and relationally, epitomized by Helen’s assertion, “I mean I think that right after the storm, we all changed.” This theme begins with an overview of data wherein participants began to broadly conceptualize these changes and then is divided into three subthemes. The first subtheme, *The Strength to Grow*, presents the process by which participants engaged with their progressive changes and attempted to maintain an active connection to their personal and relational evolution. The second theme, *Personal Changes*, delves into the ways in which participants spoke of changing as individuals and explores the ambiguous and at times contradictory assertions of positive and negative growth. The third and final subtheme, *Relational Changes*, explores the impact of the storm and recovery on the interpersonal relationships that are central to participant lives.

Families began their conversations about the effect of Katrina in vague terms that conveyed recognition of the intensity of their experiences but revealed an uncertainty about the specific ways in which they have been impacted. When I summarized a thread of one of my initial conversations with Nelly by asking, “So people’s lives are marked and will be marked by this event?” she declared, “Oh my God! Yes!” Additionally, in observation field notes there were many instances throughout the study where I noted community members referencing time by

speaking of life as being before or after Katrina. Susan attempted to communicate the pervasive influence the storm has had by saying:

We are reminded of it every day. Even if we don't talk about it, we think about it every day. We're reminded of it every day – of everything everybody went through, from the lowest poor person – you had to – I mean – that's really all I can think about every day. Even if we don't talk about it, it's there.

Moreover, Claude revealed his conception of the storm as a profound life-marker for New Orleanians, saying, "It's something that I think is going to be in American history for some time... Just like 9/11... will always be remembered in that way by New Yorkers, ours was Katrina."

While participants confidently expressed the significance of the storm, conversations surrounding the specifics of their own changes began with marked ambiguity. Nelly questioned, "Katrina didn't – I don't know – it didn't help. Did it hurt? I don't know." Greg and Danielle reported a life perspective in which they embrace an uncertainty that parallels this undefined conception of the storm's influence on their lives and when first challenged to reflect on how their family has changed, stated simply, "Well, for me, I don't make any plans. I'm just where God wants me to be" (Greg). Edgar too struggled to verbalize the totality of the influence of the storm, musing, "It's kind of – just like, it's a long journey," and captured his own hazy conceptions of the results of the "journey" by stating, "Like, the effects I have from Katrina, I don't know. They kind of – they shaped me." As conversations pressed on and participants honed their understanding of these shifts, Cherise began to formulate how the ambiguity resulted in a disconnect between her inner and outer self. She explained, "I mean, it hit us, but we didn't try to let you know it." Yvonne revealed how this conflict between grief and her search for



internal strength inspired the beginning of her movement toward personal growth – “It was traumatizing at first, at the beginning of it. But, I mean, I had to pick myself up.” Over the course of the three interviews, families revisited this theme over and over, each time working toward clarity. The resulting data reveals concrete revelations about the ways in which the families engaged in their process of growing and changing and ultimately morphed both as individuals and within the context of their intimate relationships.

### *The Strength to Grow*

In the process of unfolding their journeys of change, participants often turned to discussions revealing the ways in which they engaged in the progression of personal growth. In addition to the unique techniques that some participants had for gathering strength and moving forward, there was also overlap between some participants who relied on an optimistic attitude, prayer, creativity, or love for animals as a way to channel positive personal and relational movement. Additionally, every family spoke specifically of focusing on other people as a way to moderate their own grief and reengage in the process of healing. While these discussions included the participants’ recounting of supporting family members as a means to garnering their own strength as discussed in the theme *Family Structure*, in this context it is a broader conceptualization of what a focus on others included.

The importance of maintaining a positive attitude in the face of challenge was central for Reuben and Cherise as well as Nelly and Yvonne. Cherise verbalized this tenet of familial strength:

I just try to keep myself focused and make sure I be positive and just keep saying thank you. Just keep on with it, don’t let your mind drag down to sadness. Sometimes I just say things and talk to myself – don’t slip – it’s easy to slip – be happy!

She viewed this as essential to her family's eventual movement out of negativity and emphasized the importance of maintaining this disposition externally even when she was struggling internally, saying, "Sometimes you might go in your little corner of your house and say, whew – man! But when you around other people, you just – stay positive." For Nelly and Yvonne, progress was maintained by both "thinking positive" (Yvonne) and continuing to intentionally carry on despite the desire to give up. The women spoke in tandem on the subject with Nelly saying, "There's always going to be something," and Yvonne completing the thought – "Right. But we can't let it get to us." Nelly concluded, "We got up and we did what we needed to do... you did it for yourself."

For some families, a relationship with God was another pillar of strength supporting their forward progress. While Helen openly rejected what she saw as a community reliance on spirituality, saying, "I'm not talking about God, but I'll breathe," Reuben and Cherise and Greg and Danielle revealed an increasingly intimate connection to God that developed throughout their hurricane journey and served as an essential tool for personal and relational development. Greg discussed an unfaltering belief in God's plan for his family and his devotion to that plan through prayer – "We just was praying every day... That's where he put us at so I just went day by day." While Reuben and Cherise stated that they have always focused on spirituality, they stressed that the hurricane called upon them to be more devout Christians and their devotion was rewarded by the ability to continue to grow. Reuben stated that the hurricane "woke me up. I know that there is a God." This faith allowed the family to give thanks for good fortune and provided hope in times of desperation. In her darkest moments, Cherise sought the positive and credited God – "We got down, but you know I thank God that we're not sleeping under a bridge."

In contrast to a reliance on internal characteristics as a means to engage in movement toward growth and change, Claude and Monique, Elvis and Ann Margaret and James and Helen discussed external releases. Both Claude and Elvis specified artistic creation as an outlet for stress and a method for centering themselves in increasingly positive spaces. Claude demonstrated his commitment to painting and drawing with his artifact sketch book. The pleasure he experiences from creating art was captured during video observation of the artifact interview. Notes on Claude's physical responses to the conversation reveal that he exhibited expressions consistent with feelings of pride as he displayed his drawings for the camera. Elvis described playing the guitar to be a significant source of strength. He said, "I taught myself how to play guitar... nothing fancy... just putting my feelings to music... It could all suck, but it was my therapy." Additionally, both Elvis and Helen discussed caring for animals as a way that they generate positive feelings about themselves. Helen spoke of tending to strays in the early aftermath of the storm, saying, "Whatever food we couldn't eat we were feeding the stray animals." While she described the situation as "really, really sad," she also contrasted her role as a helper to animals to those of people who abandoned their pets in the storm, criticizing the latter mightily. Elvis also described taking care of animals as a connection to tranquility, stating, "I walk my dogs. I love those guys. I've got an Alaskan Husky and a Basset Hound that are my best friends."

In addition to the varied techniques outlined above, all participants discussed focusing on other people as a means to maintaining movement toward positive change. Within this focus there were two distinct ways in which families related to others – the first being a comparison between themselves and those who suffered or lost a great deal more, the second being active involvement in assisting others who were struggling. While participant dedication to providing

support to family members is explored in *Family Structure*, within the context of this subtheme, participants spoke about gaining strength from dedication to people outside of the family who they felt were in need of more help than they were.

The gratitude families felt when they compared their lives post-Katrina to those of other New Orleanians they felt had suffered more served to energize the participants to embrace their good fortune and continue moving forward. Reuben and Cherise contrasted their experiences to those of others within two different contexts related to the storm. They appreciated their ability to evacuate and recognized the struggles of those who could not, saying, “I understand there’s so many people in worse shape than us, and when I see that, I thank God [for what we have.]” Additionally, Reuben compared his physical challenges with those of other people facing recovery with physical disabilities – “I done seen many people out there that caught a stroke and they in a lot worse shape than I am. I think I’m blessed.”

Some participants considered their continuing existence to be evidence of their minimal suffering. James and Helen compared the depth of their losses to those of others. James stated, “I just feel like, whatever I lost or whatever my friends lost – it’s localized. I mean, there are people who died; there are all different kinds of devastation... It’s just like, o.k. – I lost some paperwork.” Claude and Monique too reflected on their comparatively mild losses and found gratitude – “I mean, a large number of people lost their lives and aren’t even able to speak about it, so just for me to be alive here and have this conversation and be part of this recovery experience, I’m grateful” (Claude).

Other participants implied that losing touch with family members would have been an unimaginable challenge and expressed gratitude that they did not suffer such a fate, whereas other participants discussed the pragmatic challenges facing some evacuees and contrasted their

own struggles as relatively limited. Elvis and Ann Margaret demonstrated the empathy they had for separated families when discussing their scrapbook artifact. Ann Margaret discussed a picture of a mother in tears unable to find her child and said, "God. Can you imagine?" Susan also compared her experiences with those of splintered families. She stated, "I mean, it could have been a lot worse for me – not being able to get in contact with my family or whatever." In contrast, Danielle and Greg focused on their access to material resources and said, "At least we had somewhere – well, we had this house to come to and some people, living in those FEMA trailers and they never got any assistance" (Danielle). Nelly and Yvonne also juxtaposed their recovery to those with less access to resources. Yvonne said, "A lot of people went through worse" and Nelly concurred, "Even though what I went through and everything, there are people [I see working in the mental health field] who go through SO much more!"

For three families, their ability to reach out and physically assist the people they perceived to be less fortunate was a crucial method for building self worth throughout their recovery. Nelly and Yvonne both discussed being able to help people within the context of their jobs as "therapeutic." Yvonne told of customers who rent storage spaces and are in danger of losing their remaining pre-Katrina belongings because of an inability to make full payments and said, "We can work with them and that feels good." For Nelly, the position she secured as a psychiatric nurse in a small patient-focused hospital has enabled her to increase her ability to help the less fortunate. She stated, "I've done most of my work since I've been back and that is helping [me] – just seeing the patients and doing whatever it is I can do for them."

Recounting stories of helping others was a central theme for James and Helen as well. James spoke of getting through the immediate aftermath of the storm by spending extra time helping people who had lost more than he had. His time as an evacuee in Houston was

distinguished in that he had the families of friends to stay with and, as a result, he donated time to assist the evacuees sheltered in the Houston Astrodome. He stated that he looked inside himself for inner resources and then declared, "I can do this. So, let's go do some Astrodome work." Additionally, he utilized his musical talents during the initial recovery to bring peace to a troubled crowd of people in the midst of undertaking the rebuilding process – "I would go under the bridge there and make sure those people were eating, and I would play my guitar – 'cause I play music – and I would just play." Helen sought fulfillment by reaching out to her students and developing interpersonal relationships deeper and more connected than those she had maintained before the hurricane. Observation of her body language while she spoke about developing these connections revealed a relaxed posture and a simple smile. She stated, "I call my kids all the time now... and anybody who has my number, it's like – call me!"

Finally, Reuben and Cherise define their family identity as being intricately connected to and dependent upon their ability to give to others who have less than they do. Reuben offered examples throughout all three interviews of the ways their family attempts to give back to their community by helping the less fortunate. In addition to describing this desire to help others as a life-long trait for both himself and Cherise, Reuben acknowledged that the hurricane profoundly influenced his drive by reaffirming it as a top priority for their family. When a neighbor struggled after the storm to find the money to buy a television and as a result was unable to learn about the progress of the city, Reuben and Cherise offered one of theirs. The story was presented in our interviews as an example of their dedication to being "good Christians," but also revealed how the family learned to value what they have by recognizing what others lack:

I say [to my neighbor], it's just over there, make yourself comfortable. We got him a television. I got five, six TVs in here, so I say take one of these and I share. The whole experience made me more see what other people had less than me.

For these families, the quiet strength they drew from understanding the good fortune in their lives compared to those of many others was tenuous until they were able to actively reach out and aid those whose lives provided them the comparison.

### *Personal Changes*

The examination of the ways that participants have changed personally as a result of the storm and subsequent experiences contained a broad range of responses. Families explored internal changes as well as practical changes, both impacting their lives significantly. The practical changes to participant lives came forth first in the interviews and contained the obvious shifts that resulted for families following the storm. A thorough investigation of internal changes was drawn out in a more hesitant but thoughtful way and resulted in discussions where participants revealed what they consider to be negative shifts in their thinking and feeling as well as positive changes that they described to be areas of personal growth.

When first presented with the question of how the storm has changed them, four families offered the obvious tactile differences in their lives now as opposed to prior to Katrina. Reuben and Cherise discussed their changing health status and wavered between believing in a direct correlation between the stress of the storm and their physical deterioration and uncertainty that there in fact is a connection. Following the storm, Reuben suffered "two mini-strokes" and he explained the physical changes for Cherise, reporting, "Since the storm she done had her operation with a pace maker in her chest." Cherise initially concluded that the storm "brought a lot of things down on me" which impacted her health and stated that while she was unsure about

the causal relationship between the hurricane and her heart problems, the trials of the evacuation, “didn’t help nothing.” Eventually, Reuben decided upon a definite connection, stating that the changes his family has felt have been a result of the interactions between their declining health as well as the constant stress of the hurricane recovery.

The material changes related to a change in social status were the first differences that Claude discussed. He stated that before the storm he “considered myself an audiophile” with a large collection of music, that he “used to think of myself as a fairly well dressed person,” and that in retrospect, “I guess I was a very materialistic person.” However, the financial challenges he and Monique have faced since the storm have prevented his re-acquisition of these material items. Additionally, the couple now make decisions about where to eat and where to live that are quite different from those they might have made pre-Katrina. Claude explained:

Whereas I would not have desired to go eat at a homeless shelter... that’s something I just would not have done before hurricane Katrina. But now, I see that the food is healthy at these places and the conditions aren’t so bad.

Items that were previously essential to Claude’s personal identity are now perceived as luxury goods, resulting in a shift in his construction of self and the way that he imagines his place in society.

Other participants addressed obvious yet perhaps less pervasive practical changes in their lives. Ann Margaret stated as her first response to a question about how she has changed, “I don’t like the 40 pounds I gained in the shelter and can’t get off!” Although she initially laughed as she made this statement, she did return two subsequent times in the interviews to the topic of her extra weight and identified it as a significant difference in her life. Nelly talked about how she now thinks in terms of preparation for future storms with material items that she would not



want to lose again. She said, “You make some changes. I save my pictures on my hard drive now... I have all of my [doctor and lab] tests on discs... Do I know what the hell I’m looking at? No! But I have it!” While these changes may not significantly restructure the participants’ identities, they are changes that have evolved out of their experiences with the storm.

As the conversations became more comfortable and participants had time to reflect in between interviews, discussions about change began to focus on their shifts in personality and thinking. Perceptions of negative changes focused primarily on fear, distrust and anxiety that arose with the storm and, for some families, have become a part of their systems of thinking and feeling. The participant who spoke most strongly of an infusion of negative emotions tied directly to experiences in the hurricane and the recovery process was Elvis. He noted the significant changes in his willingness to socialize, stating, “Now it’s a lot different. Now, it’s like I don’t even give anybody a chance.” Additionally, he spoke of how memories from the actual hurricane taint his perceptions. He described areas of the town he used to think of as “just a beautiful place to go, sit down and relax” now being clouded with his memories of the rising water and accompanying fear. He said, “Looking at all this stuff, it reminds me of all of it – of how horrible it was.” Additionally, he revealed a dependence on alcohol that increased exponentially following the storm. Reflecting on his drinking, he surmised that he has “taken it to a new level” and said, “I just got drunk and made things worse – just to be honest.” While Ann Margaret stated that she did have a temporary increase in fears and nightmares, she compared the pervasive negative changes in Elvis to her own changes and concluded, “I’m exactly the opposite.”

Susan and Edgar also revealed negative changes that outweighed positive growth in their lives. The anxiety and fear that the couple described was evidenced in Susan’s body language

throughout the interviews wherein she often nervously bounced her legs, rubbed her hands together, and smoked one cigarette after another. When asked directly if he had changed, Edgar replied, "Absolutely. I definitely don't trust anybody... It really opens your eyes up." Susan discussed the anxiety that she experienced in the immediate aftermath of the storm, saying, "It was a very frustrating, chaotic feeling." The couple also connected those initial feelings of uncertainty to their current emotional states, describing themselves as "suffocated" and "fearful" at the time of the interviews.

The dichotomous experience of positive changes and negative consequences described by some participants was striking for James and Helen. The couple spoke in contradictory terms when asked to describe their changes, comparing increasingly positive interpersonal relationships with the lingering anxieties associated with seeing the world from an altered perspective. When Helen reflected on her initial response to the tragedy and the emotions conveyed by her artifact self-portrait, she stated that the substance of the photo was "just sadness, honestly." This feeling of indefinable loss still exists for her – "I think we're all still suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome" – and is heightened by the disappointment and rejection she experienced when fired from her teaching position in Lafayette, which she said, "really still affects me – still hurts me." James too struggled with a shifting role in society wherein he no longer occupied the space he was formerly comfortable in. He spoke specifically of the sense that he is now expected through his status as a Katrina victim to speak for all New Orleanians when in conversations with outsiders. This weighs heavily on James. He stated, "I don't want to be the representation," and cast a downward glance to the table as Helen reached her hand out and placed it on his shoulder in a gesture of comfort.

For Claude and Monique, the changes also varied from positive to negative. When they spoke of the distress they have experienced, they focused on the differences within themselves that they do not like. Claude reflected on a change in his general outlook, stating, "I have found myself being more of a pessimist in life as opposed to an optimist, whereas before Hurricane Katrina I was still very optimistic about the future." Additionally, he captured feelings of longing and regret when he said, "You don't know what you had until it's gone." Being the less verbal of the two, Monique did not describe as many profound negative changes as Claude, but did say her recovery has been marked by both fear as a result of the hurricane and anxiety that has accompanied losing custody of two of her children and now being pregnant with a third child, concluding that her changes are "a mixture of both." However, despite the negative feelings that the couple did detail, Claude applied a positive frame in which he normalized their shifts, stating, "It brought out an emotional response that was natural to anybody having become an evacuee."

The three remaining families characterized their changes as primarily positive, although two did mention some unpleasant feelings that have lingered throughout the recovery. Nelly cried when she said, "It's still rough... My worst time was after Katrina." However, she alternated between distinguishing her grief over the loss of her husband from that associated with the storm and then speaking about the two experiences as inseparable. She stated that having "never been in that position before" to not have health insurance or stability left her with a remaining feeling of vulnerability. Yet, like Claude she normalized her emotions when she discussed how all New Orleanians were affected by the storm and recovery, saying, "The dog is even traumatized." Greg and Danielle only once spoke of negative personal changes when they revealed an increased reliance upon alcohol since the storm – "We used to drink – we still drink even more" – but immediately contrasted their increased alcohol use with that of other people,

saying, "A lot of people drank heavier... The people that stayed, they drink even more now" (Greg). In contrast, Reuben and Cherise did not perceive any significant negative personal changes, aside from increased physical struggles, following the storm.

While Elvis, Edgar and Susan did not describe any affirmative personal changes, the remainder of the participants did to varying degrees. In direct opposition to her former fiancé's profoundly negative personal changes, Ann Margaret described personal growth that has significantly improved her life. She stated, "I like most of my changes. I've never been more comfortable in the skin I'm in... Inside my head, I've never felt better about the person I am." In reflecting on the extreme difference between herself and Edgar, she concluded that her improved outcomes resulted from her intentional constructions of the experience – "I almost forget about the bad stuff, you know? I really do." While she remained enthusiastic in the interviews about her evolution, she maintained a degree of guilt, stating, "I feel bad saying that... It doesn't seem like you should ever have such good come out of bad things," but was resolute in her assertion, "I wouldn't change it for anything."

The families that vacillated distinctly between discussions of unpleasant changes and conversations about personal growth discussed the latter as including distinctly positive characteristics that have grown out of their experiences. Helen and James described feelings of "hope" for the future that were born out of their triumphs over the challenges of the storm. Additionally, Helen spoke of a change in perspective that has resulted in increased motivation to pursue the things in life she wants. She stated, "It was like, o.k., if I want these things I have to go after it. So that's what I did. That's how it affected me." Claude identified both positives and negatives within the same changes. While he stated that his loss of material possessions signified a demotion in social class status and perceived this as negative, he also stated, "I kinda sorta

almost like the person I am now more than the person I was then.” Specifically, he described himself as “a lot more accepting of people, places and things,” increasingly “compassionate,” and having changed his focus to “always think about other people now.” He embraced the struggle that led him to this new outlook – “You have to adapt and I guess, from that perspective I kind of like that challenge.” Also, despite the fact that Monique was more reserved throughout the interviews, she enthusiastically engaged in conversations about the positive changes she has seen in herself. She stated, “If anything, I got positive outcomes from it,” and identified her increasing comfort with other people as a major component of her personal growth – “At first I just really didn’t communicate with anybody – I was pretty much to myself. After the storm, I communicate a lot better. I get along with people more.”

Although Greg and Danielle focused primarily on positive growth, they situated their changes within relational contexts, while Nelly, Yvonne, Reuben and Cherise discussed both pleasing individual and familial changes. Yvonne identified strength as a primary personal component of her individual growth and surmised that without the challenges, that strength would have been less potent – “I mean trust me, I cried as much as I could. But I mean after that, I started just getting stronger.” Moreover, like Monique she spoke of improved interpersonal skills, saying, “I have a much better attitude since the hurricane – just, like, with customers at my work.” Nelly too described being “a little bit more willing now [with patients] to do whatever I can, whatever is necessary.” She also spoke of an increased fortitude in the face of challenges, big or small, revealing, “It’s changed me. I’m more willing now to go the extra mile than I was before the storm. Because you had to take it before, but now I’m willing to do whatever is necessary because it’s hard.”

Rather than the ambiguity between positive and negative individual changes that many participants expressed, Reuben and Cherise straddled the decision of whether their positive changes were primarily individual or relational. Reuben captured this attitude of gratitude when he stated succinctly, "We've been blessed by God." The focus of their revelations regarding how they have changed was appreciation for their intensified devotion to God and their church. They compared their current lives to their lives pre-storm:

It made us realize about a lot of things (Cherise).

Before the storm, we just did what we wanted to do, things like that (Reuben).

And that was wrong. We had to, you know, get back on the track (Cherise).

Within that return to spirituality, Reuben also described growing in his capacity to give, stating, "It make you appreciate more. It make you want to help other people more. We been blessed. The little bit that we do struggle to have, we been blessed." Additionally, Cherise found a renewed enthusiasm for life – "I'm enjoying everything now! We been through a hurricane!" Yet, while all of the changes outlined here are situated within an individual frame, participants discussed these independent shifts as the foundation for contextual changes within their intimate relationships.

### *Relational Changes*

Every family discussed the impact of the storm and recovery on their personal relationships. While Elvis and Ann Margaret suffered the end of their romantic involvement, the remainder of the families described either ambivalent or positive relational changes. Additionally, participants infused the structural changes their families have undergone into their discussions surrounding family change and struggled to identify how the storm played a part in these shifting structures. For four families, the hurricane directly influenced a profound family

system change in that it resulted in the adults coming together to form a new family. Claude and Monique, Edgar and Susan, and James and Helen all began their romantic relationships in the wake of the storm and its destruction. Additionally, Nelly and Yvonne restructured their previously separate families into one household as they looked for additional support in the process of rebuilding their lives. James captured the sentiment of each of these participants when he reflected on the impact of the storm and concluded that the ultimate result was positive, stating, "Well, I got her!"

In addition to the fusion of new family systems, many participants experienced other structural shifts throughout the recovery process. Greg and Danielle struggled with their decision to allow Greg's son and the youngest of the four children in their home to move in with his mother in Texas. Although the couple instigated the change when they located Baby's mother during their evacuation to Texas, Greg stated, "That's the one thing we miss. He's not around." In contrast, Claude and Monique were preparing at the time of the interviews for the addition of a child to their household. While for Monique this was a third child, she previously lost custody of her first two and she discussed the combined apprehension and excitement at getting another chance to raise a child, saying, "I'm going to make sure I do it right this time." The child would be a first for Claude and when asked how he is different now than before the storm, he replied, "In making steps to become a father – that's also a change in my life as well." Both families directly connected these changes to the hurricane. When discussing the decision to have Baby live with his mother, Greg said that they would not have known his mother was out of prison and available to care for him had they not evacuated to Texas. Claude too tied his impending fatherhood to the storm, stating that his relationship with Monique and their subsequent

pregnancy was a direct result of their shared experience of having gone through Katrina – “That’s brought us together for sure – definitely!”

Significant changes in structure also impacted Elvis and Ann Margaret and these were consistent with the couple’s interpretation that the hurricane ultimately had devastating consequences for their family. The dissolution of their romantic partnership has proved challenging for the couple, although they have negotiated the changes by remaining “best friends” and “roommates.” However, looming on the horizon at the time of the interviews was another significant change in Elvis’ planned move back to Las Vegas. Ann Margaret anticipated this would be an additional hardship, stating, “He’s about ready to leave. It’s hard for us when we haven’t not lived together in so long.” Occurring in tandem with the end of their romantic partnering were changes in the couple’s dynamics. Elvis hypothesized that these shifts began as the chaos of the hurricane began to settle. During the five days the couple remained in the city through the storm they “made a great team,” but then, “as soon as things started lightening up... that’s when we started getting edgy with each other.” Additionally, they began to spend time apart from one another and the community perception that they were always together began to fade. Elvis said, “People that we did know before the storm and right after – if there was one [of us] there was the other. But now, not so much.”

In contrast to Elvis and Ann Margaret, Reuben and Cherise and Greg and Danielle felt that the trials they have endured as a family throughout the three years of hurricane recovery have strengthened their bond. Reuben said of his union with Cherise, “It feels more closer... I see how families separated – It just made us stronger.” Cherise also spoke of their immediate family’s relationship with extended family, saying, “It’s more wonderful. It’s good.” The bears that they provided as artifact data were representative of the bond that the family built around



feelings of hope through positive attitudes. They spoke of how they obtained the bears during one of their happiest times when they were at a state fair in Irving, Texas and in our interview we discussed the parallel between their selection of an artifact from a positive memory and their familial focus on maintaining an optimistic view of life. Danielle and Greg too reported being, "closer" after the storm than before. When I asked, "What would you say brought you closer to each other?" Danielle responded, "Just being with him," and Greg added, "Just being together all the time. When you've got a friend – well... I would rather not deal with anybody else."

Yvonne and Nelly and James and Helen had less concrete revelations about their connections with one another but spoke of the impact of the recovery process on their relationships with their extended families. Yvonne and Nelly saw the storm as having had minimal impact on the very close bond their family network has shared for years. They stated that their family pulled together to support one another through the storm and then returned to being the geographically and emotionally close system they had been prior to Katrina. Nelly said, "Everybody's back now except for one sister," to which Yvonne replied, "Yeah – we basically about the same. I mean, we kinda living the same." James and Helen discussed, first with me, and then with one another, the development of Helen's relationship with her father since the storm. Like Yvonne and Nelly, Helen relied on her extended family during the evacuation for support, but unlike the two women, she and her father previously had a relationship that "wasn't exactly favorable." However, the time they spent sharing an apartment following their return to New Orleans resulted in a cohesive bond James described as being "really close." When asked, "Would you say that your relationship became closer?" Helen responded with a resounding, "Yes!" The changes that participant families discussed were extensions of the individual changes they revealed and paralleled the depth of their ability to

garner strength to grow through external and internal resources. While these shifts were unique for each individual and family, the threads that connected them underscored the significant impact of Katrina on the families in its wake.

### *Emancipatory Experiences*

The objective underlying the research agenda of this study was to engage participant families in a process of self-directed discovery with an aim to empower through the exploratory process. In addition to illuminating the within-case and cross-case themes that are relevant for these seven families, our interviews were constructed with an intentional focus on involving participants in the discovery process and the objective of stimulating new pervasive dialogues that would enable a shift within personal narratives. Ideally, these new life stories would incorporate the discourse constructed in the space between researcher and participant and serve to inspire marginalized families to reconstitute their understanding of power and oppression. The following excerpts of data demonstrate participant acknowledgement of this process and reveal the reflections generated by study families regarding the impact of this study on their conceptions of their intertwined constructions of class and trauma as they relate to their family narratives.

A foundational component of an effective action-based research study includes engaging the participants in the research by inspiring interest and reflection in the topic. While this does not require that participants enjoy the experience, engagement is evidenced by thoughtful reflection and recognition by the participants of the impact the study has had on their constructions. The majority of families in this study reported that participating in the study was in fact a positive experience and, for those who were ambivalent about their engagement, there were still reports of a shift in thinking throughout and at the culmination of the three part

interview series. Five families used descriptive words such as “positive” (Monique; Reuben), “pleasant” (Nelly), “enjoyable” (Susan) and “Good” (Claude; Yvonne) when asked “What was this interview like for you?” Additionally, Danielle described the experience as “enlightening.” As participants reflected on their perceptions of participation, they first expanded upon the therapeutic or “enlightening” thoughts that arose throughout participation.

In addition to describing a rewarding experience, some participants expanded upon the specific ways in which they believed they benefited by participating in the study. Reuben stated, “Just by talking about it make me feel good ‘cause it just brings back different things.” For this family, the interviews offered the opportunity to reengage with their upbeat perspective – “It just remind us of how blessed we are since then” (Reuben) while affording the opportunity to release unpleasant associations without feeling that they are engaging in a pessimistic view – “It feels good to talk about it. If you don’t talk to nobody about it and hold it in there, it’s going to hurt you.” Susan and Edgar believed that they had begun to incorporate a broader, less self-focused perspective into their thoughts about the recovery as a result of our conversations. While Edgar concluded, “It’s made me think more about the city... the more I thought about it – the more I rolled it around in my head – I’m just like, wow!” Sarah added, “I’ve been very focused on myself and I thought about everything else going on around me for the first time in a long time – a couple of years.”

Elvis and Ann Margaret conveyed an ambivalence regarding reengagement with their experiences of trauma during and following Katrina. Both participants were appreciative of the opportunity to participate and Ann Margaret stated, “It was fun – kind of therapeutic, actually,” while Elvis said, “I’m relieved that someone’s asking. That’s actually pretty cool to me.” However, reflecting on the significant impact the storm has had on his life also created some

anxieties for Elvis. While he appreciated, “being able to get stuff off of my chest that no one thinks to ask,” he also drank alcohol after the second interview for the first time in over a month. He believed this return to alcohol followed the interview because, “it kind of surfaced some memories and some stuff and it was kind of like reliving it all over again in my head.”

While Elvis was the only participant to report significantly negative behaviors following the interviews, many participants discussed how the conversations reignited thoughts about the storm that had been set aside for some time. Danielle and Greg both stressed this as a benefit to participating, saying, “We thought about stuff we hadn’t even thought about since we’ve been here” (Danielle). Greg described this as “subconsciously – it came back,” to which Danielle added, “I’m glad you asking because I missed it – thinking and talking about everything.” Susan too experienced the resurfacing of old ideas which, for her, only existed previously in a germinal stage but were revitalized and extended as she thought “about things I haven’t thought about too much.” Nelly concluded that through this shared dialogue, “you grow.”

Another primary focus of critical humanism is the objective of “creating a space for marginalized voices” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Participants in this study were marginalized both by their self-identified membership in a social class that has resulted in their feeling “kept down” (Interview screening guide) and by the sense of being silenced by a community in which all members were suffering their own trauma and subsequently were often unable to respond empathically. Elvis described the feeling that other New Orleanians felt like saying, “I don’t want to talk about my issues so please don’t tell me about yours.” Additionally, he recalled that immediately following the storm he and Ann Margaret “talked about it a lot” with other people but they felt that others “didn’t care enough to notice” the pain they were experiencing. Helen described struggling to find her voice – “It’s hard to talk about because we live it.”

The interviews and shared dialogues created a space wherein participants reported feeling “heard” (Edgar) and having the opportunity to engage in listening to their partner. Monique stated that the conversations, “helped me to get to know [Claude] a little bit better” and Danielle shared that “one of the things [Greg said] surprised me” and the disclosure “was nice.” For Reuben and Cherise, the interviews resulted in “conversations we ain’t had before” (Reuben) with one another, while they simultaneously sparked renewed discussions with extended family about the storm and the repercussions – “Let’s just say it’s, you know, bringing back to where we were when we left out of here. And then I talked to my sister and said, do you remember this part, what do you think about that part?” (Reuben). Reuben believed these new dialogues grew out of both the opportunity to participate in the study and his own engagement in the process and explained, “I tried to reflect on it as much as I could [for the interviews.]” The situation of the interviews in a window of time three years following the storm was an important component of this ability to reengage for Edgar and Susan because of the “time to heal” before processing feelings. Susan recalled, “It used to make me so angry if somebody – why are you bringing up the ‘K’ word?” However, during the processing component of the final interview, she and Edgar both described feeling surprisingly freed in their ability to discuss, analyze, reflect and feel the emotions they have that are associated with the storm and recovery. Susan stated, “I’ve been very frustrated and here I’ve talked about it a lot easier,” and Edgar agreed – “For sure, it’s definitely easier to talk about now.”

An additional component of the critical agenda within the study was to empower participants to move toward overcoming the power structures that have confined them. Given that people are “primarily socially embodied and culturally situated” (Halliwell & Mousley, 2003, p.9) and that their constructions of class evolve out of their engagement in the dominant

social discourse that surrounds them (Liu, et. al, 2004), a study aim was to empower participants to re-conceptualize their notions of class and to then engage in reshaping community perceptions based on new constructions. Achievement of this objective began with participants reflecting on how they construct class and what those thoughts mean in the context of their worldviews. James and Helen demonstrated a shift in thinking about social class when, during discussion between the first and second interviews, they debated with one another what constitutes class identifiers and concluded that they have achieved social class advancement. At the beginning of the second interview James relayed their discussion and conclusions, stating, "I think I might be middle class!" Edgar and Susan also shared their between-interview discussions that evolved into deeper reflections on the influence of class in society, stating, "[We talked about] how much is still being affected by social class and things like that."

Following personal reflection and the re-authoring of familial narratives surrounding class-based constructs, the study aim was to promote the extension of participant voices into the larger community with an ultimate goal of reshaping dominant discourse allowing participants to transcend the internalized societal messages that have suppressed them. Claude discussed the personal changes he has undergone since the storm and flirted with the idea of joining in communal conversations from his new perspective – "Whereas I might not have been the most compassionate person [before the storm], when the world – the economy – the sort of economic world that we have to live in – it needs my compassion... for the people in my community." While many participants grew, like Claude, toward a willingness to engage in conversations about class in broader contexts, Nelly enacted the process while still participating in the study. During the artifact interview which followed the second meeting wherein social class was the

focus of our conversation, Nelly relayed how she had brought ideas generated by our discussions to her co-workers:

Believe it or not, I was telling everybody at work about your study... I brought some of the questions to them and... we talked about it and I got to hear some of their experiences. I heard things I had never heard about before. And I got to tell them some of the ideas we talked about – especially the class thing, you know – and that had everybody thinking, ‘Well, do I feel I was mistreated because of my class?’.. So it was an interesting discussion... and all of them want to get in on [the study.]

An additional component of the action paradigm was to promote intentional valuing of participant beliefs regarding both their own experiences and the needs of their families and community. Through legitimizing their perspectives, a study objective was to confer power to the participants by creating dialogues that crystallized their thoughts while instilling the belief that their opinions are worthy of recognition. Ideally, the existence of the study itself would convey to participants that the experience of recovering from Katrina was profoundly significant and that their unique perspectives from within are a necessary component of broader healing.

Yvonne confirmed that she recognizes the intensity of the hurricane on the community, stating, “It changed everything.” Additionally, Edgar acknowledged that his immersion in the experience had detracted from his own recognition that the process of recovery remains ongoing and stated that study participation resulted in his reconstructing his understanding of the process “and how far away we really are from the end of it all.”

Many participants were comfortable by the third interview in sharing their perspectives regarding what they believe needs to be changed to promote growth for their families and communities. Helen declared, “We’re not on display” when discussing the changes she would

like to see in the way the larger nation responds to New Orleanians. While Claude felt “the recovery effort has been going pretty well for the most part,” he also tentatively suggested, “I mean, we would like to maybe have our federal government play a larger part in the recovery effort as well.” Additionally, Edgar and Susan declared a need for practical assistance in the rebuilding process including “work you could do with their house” or “money to pay for physical labor.” While these conversations were contained within the context of the interviews, Claude acknowledged increasing self-worth as a result of being able to share his personal insights about the process of recovery, indicating the first step toward readiness to engage in the larger Katrina dialogue. He stated, “To be able to explain [my recovery experience] to someone who hasn’t had that experience is very positive.”

Finally, the shared responsibility for study outcomes between researcher and participants is a hallmark of research situated in critical humanism. Through member checking and on-going discussions throughout the interviews about the experience of participation, this study was designed to intentionally convey shared power. However, an additional component designed to confer power to the participants included the infusion of the question, “If you had to speak to people who want to come in and help after a community wide trauma, what would you say is the most important thing that they should know or keep in the forefront of their mind?” The purpose of this question was twofold. First, it provides practical qualitative data for the audience of the study. However, the second aim was to allow the participants the opportunity to experience being the expert by virtue of their experiences and through the knowledge that their voices would be used to inform, teach, and contribute to scholarly inquiry. Participant responses were unique in some ways while sharing many underlying connections and evoked passionate responses with every answer.



A primary theme in the call for expert opinion on what is needed from helping professionals in a large-scale natural disaster was the demand for empathic assistance that was devoid of sympathy. Reuben declared, "Work with us, beside us – but don't feel sorry for us" while Claude stated, "Approach us with a lot of compassion and an open mind." Additionally, Elvis and Ann Margaret requested that they be valued as individuals rather than as opportunities to further an agenda, stating, "We don't need their shit pushed on us." Nelly and Yvonne also sought respect and said, "Be patient. Just listen – because we all have a story" which paralleled the statements by Greg and Danielle that asked that people both get to know them as individuals and, "share what's important about [them], too. What do you like? What things make you feel good?" This reciprocity was viewed by Greg to be a sign of respect as well as an opportunity to establish a human connection, "because you never know – you and that person may have a whole lot in common." For Edgar, Susan, James and Helen, the most essential component of helping relationships was genuinely listening and then responding to the specific needs of the people who are being helped. Edgar charged that often volunteers and aid workers in New Orleans offered blanket assistance to everyone, but he stated, "We're all different, man. If I need a roof and he needs clothes and she needs a friend, don't give us all a gallon of water." James agreed with the need for responsive listening, even when it means knowing when to step back, stating, "You can't force people to heal. That's just stupid." These thematic similarities share a call for respectful valuing of individuals and their strength and worth and they parallel the intention of the study and my objective to convey genuine respect for the unique perspectives of Katrina families.

*Chapter Summary*

This presentation of a cross-case analysis of multiple case studies situated in the path of hurricane Katrina and negotiating the challenges of long term trauma recovery demonstrates the interwoven fabric of lives that combine to construct a new template for understanding these processes. Themes were extrapolated from the unique narratives that represent each family's recovery journey. The structure of thematic presentation is designed to illuminate the developing intensity with which participants explored and engaged in the study questions, beginning first with a discussion of the situation of families within a larger community. As analysis uncovered increasingly emotional revelations by participants, themes related to the impact of family structure and then the influence of constructions of social class on the recovery process. Finally, the data revealed intensely personal themes in which families evaluated the behaviors of individuals within and outside of their community and how those behaviors mediated participant experiences and then participants spoke about the ways in which they have ultimately changed both personally and in the context of their intimate relationships as a result of the storm. Central to a presentation of cross-case themes is the inclusion of a discussion on the qualitative evidence of emancipatory results within this action research paradigm. The culmination of this data analysis reveals the conflicting yet intense emotional processes that have accompanied these families throughout their journeys of profound growth and change.

## CHAPTER SIX

## Conclusions and Implications

*Introduction*

In the preceding two chapters, data were constructed into thematic threads and presented with thick description to reveal the central tenets of participant perspectives regarding the study questions. Chapter four illuminated the family-specific narratives of each of the seven cases and demonstrated the unique constructions of participant experiences in the hurricane and recovery process. Following this exploration of familial worldviews, chapter five revealed an inductive analysis in which the themes that were salient across the families were explored within the context of multiple-case data. Chapter six will explore the conclusions that arise from these thematic grand narratives through a return to the original research agenda. First, this chapter will refocus on the central problem under investigation within this study as well as the purpose of the study design as a method to illuminating the answers that have been sought. Conclusions regarding each of the two broadly structured research questions will then be explored through data-specific analysis and a comparison to existing literature. Salient findings that extend beyond the scope of the research questions will be explored as equally relevant and connections to and deviations from current literature will again be constructed. Moreover, a specific analysis of the situation of the study within an action research paradigm will be analyzed and the thematic analysis that was presented in chapter five as evidence of emancipatory results will be explored for specific conclusions regarding the impact of this intended process of empowerment. The chapter will conclude with a presentation of the study limitations, suggestions for future research and the implications for the intended audience of the study.

*A Return to the Research Agenda*

The voluminous impact of Hurricane Katrina was felt throughout the nation as the largest scale natural disaster in United States history (Hurricane Katrina Community Advisory Group [HKCAG], 2006) unfolded the city of New Orleans and its residents. Scores of research has connected natural disasters to profound trauma processes and has investigated a multitude of variables that influence the intensity to which these responses shape lives. The connection between social class status and trauma response in the face of natural disaster has been repeatedly established through research that investigates these variables in multiplicity (Green, 1998; Morrow, 1999; Fothergill, Maestas & Darlington, 1999). Moreover, family systems literature (Figley & Barnes, 2005) has tentatively begun the process of expanding upon the substantial literature base within the field of individual counseling concerning the process of recovery from natural disaster trauma into understanding of the ways in which familial units are systemically impacted following events such as hurricanes.

Despite these singularly defined explorations into natural disaster, social class and family systems, the interconnected overlap between these distinct lines of research has to date been largely ignored. The three year period of on-going hurricane recovery within the city of New Orleans has produced families uniquely qualified to reveal their narratives regarding the influence of the intersection between marginalized social class status and long term natural disaster recovery on their family. While inferences about social class status upon the process of such recovery can be drawn from the established quantitative correlations between socio-economic status and indices of trauma recovery, depth of understanding will arise only from investigation into the ways in which families construct social class and the solicitation of qualitative exploration into family meaning making connecting these constructions to family

changes following long term trauma recovery of this nature. The knowledge claims framing this constructivist study demand recognition of the value inherent in these unique stories and the value of eliciting the foundations and resulting constructions from families as a template to form research-based understanding.

### *Study Purpose*

The intention of this study was to illuminate the impact of Hurricane Katrina on families situated in marginalized social classes while simultaneously investigating the ways in which these families construct a relationship between their class status and their hurricane recovery. The aim was not to quantify these experiences, but rather to elucidate the pervasive narratives that have been generated throughout the recovery process and ultimately both shaped and resulted from family constructions. Family changes were to be understood from familial perspectives with an investigation into the cognitive frameworks that support these subjective interpretations. Further, the goal of this study was to extend beyond mere understanding into the realm of immediate change. While research findings historically attempt to contribute to the evolution of dominant discourse by interjecting findings into the existing body of literature, research within the paradigm of critical humanism empowers study participants to engage in this process of change alongside the researcher. Thus, this study attempted to raise the consciousness of participants regarding the influence of pervasive power structures and to spark a change process that would inspire shifts in both participant constructions and the broader social discourse surrounding social class and family systems changes following Hurricane Katrina.

In order to effectively construct a study with the dualistic intention of addressing a significant gap in existing scholarly research and empowering participants to re-conceptualize their marginalized class status, this study embraced a qualitative tradition and incorporated the

supporting theoretical frames of critical humanism, social constructionism, and Social Class Worldview Model (SCWM). The assertion by Figley and Barnes (2005) that trauma study has rarely overlapped with family systems research suggests the need for an inductive investigation wherein study findings can evolve from participant construction and serve as a template for future scholarly study. Further, the use of a multiple-case study design allowed both independent family narratives and substantiated cross-case themes to evolve, supporting a stronger case for the relevance of findings as generalizable to theory (Yin, 1994). Research questions were intentionally broadly structured to allow participants the freedom to examine the vast contributions to their familial constructions. While each family was led in their discussions by interview guides in order to strengthen the multiple-case study design (Merriam, 1998), the conversations were afforded flexibility and ultimately guided by the autonomous reflections of study families. The following research questions framed the study:

- 1) How has the recovery from Hurricane Katrina impacted lower-class family systems in the New Orleans area?
- 2) How has social class status influenced this family recovery process?

The following discussion will utilize the data analysis presented in chapters four and five to address these two distinct questions. Further, the conclusions presented will then be situated within both the theoretical structure of the study and the existing research frame to highlight ways in which findings both support and contradict existing literature. Findings outside the scope of these two questions will also be illuminated and will draw comparisons to current research. Finally, an analysis of the theoretical foundation of critical humanism will be presented alongside the conclusions drawn from the data relating to the emancipatory agenda of the study.

*Research Question One*

*How has the recovery from Hurricane Katrina impacted lower-class family systems in the New Orleans area?*

An analysis of all the data that arose from interviews investigating families' unique social constructions of their hurricane experience ultimately revealed that for all seven families, the hurricane and subsequent recovery resulted in profound shifts in family identity. While families changed in unique ways and made sense of the particulars of their familial outcomes within the context of their class and frames of reference, every family described a process of reforming their sense of selves as a family unit. Within the broad context of reshaping family identity, families specifically grappled with their identity within the context of their community and juxtaposed to others, understanding new tools and methods within the family for survival, the definition of their family within terms related to the intensity of family connectivity, and the ways in which their individual contributions to the family shape the system in positive and negative ways. The presentation of cross-case themes was constructed around the central tenets of the participant conversations and while these specific components of family evolution evolved in tandem with the thematic analysis, they similarly recognize the interplay between themes as it relates specifically to family identity. While the multiple case study design allows for context specific thematic development between and within the seven families along with interpretation of the undertones coursing through the independent cross-case themes, each family is similarly understood within their own unique worldviews and the relationship between their resulting constructions of comprehension and the meaning of family outcomes.

The mandatory evacuation from New Orleans resulted in a necessary evaluation of family within the broader context of community. Additionally, as families struggled to understand their

place within new host communities and then upon their return to a dramatically changed hometown, they incorporated identification of their needs from a community as well as the ways in which they understood other community members into their understanding of their own place within society. Data within the first cross-case theme primarily informs these conclusions related to family and community fit, but is enhanced by an integration of data from theme four.

For some families, this uprooting and unexpected reflection upon family and community fit was particularly intense because of their long-standing identity as New Orleans residents. Claude and Monique, Danielle and Greg, Reuben and Cherise and Nelly and Yvonne had all spent the totality of their lives in and around the New Orleans community prior to their evacuation from the hurricane. Additionally, Helen was a life-long resident of the city and while James had moved to New Orleans in childhood, his geographically tumultuous upbringing resulted in his primary identification being that of a New Orleanian. These families were connected in their intense attachment to the city but varied regarding the contexts from which those attachments arose. The connection to extended family within the New Orleans community was a significant theme for three families and was diversified within the context of race. The three African American families who had lived in New Orleans their whole lives also described struggling to find a familial identity within a new community without the presence of the large kinship networks that had surrounded them in Louisiana. However, the two Caucasian families who identified New Orleans as their long-time home – James and Helen and Claude and Monique – both spoke more of a connection to the city itself and the struggles inherent in understanding the cultural expectations of a new city. Neither of these families has or had extensive familial networks that provided support locally.



The two families who had moved to New Orleans from other areas of the country – Elvis and Ann Margaret and Edgar and Susan – also discussed a need to re-conceptualize their family identity within the context of a shifted New Orleans community. However, for three of these four participants, the frustration and discomfort that developed throughout the three year post-hurricane struggle to reconnect with the New Orleans community and establish a cohesive bond between family and community ultimately resulted in a failure to accomplish this connection. Only Ann Margaret maintained an identity as a New Orleanian and constructed her definition of self positively within the context of being a Katrina survivor. The remaining three participants developed identities that distinguished themselves from their surrounding community in dramatic and profound ways. Elvis, Susan and Edgar each spoke about being ready to leave the city and described their anger at an inability to feel a part of a larger social network.

For all study participants, the formation of a new family identity within the context of community involved evaluation of the other people with whom they experienced the hurricane. With the exception of Claude and Monique and Reuben and Cherise, the study families described a changed community in the context of their perceptions of other people's behavior and ultimately a disappointment in the actions of their fellow community members. The descriptive accounts of a new New Orleans in which participants were not certain of how their family fit were heightened by the conversations in which they differentiated their own families from others who they perceived as alternately ungracious, opportunistic, and frightening. While Claude and Monique and Reuben and Cherise also struggled to structure their familial identity within the context of a changed city, these participants relied less on juxtaposition to others and reflected more on the ways in which their family had changed internally and as a result had to find new people within the New Orleans community with whom they could identify.

An additional component to the restructuring of family identity included the development of new understandings regarding the ways in which families were able to persevere in times of significant struggle. The cross-case theme *Perceptions of Others* infused with analysis from *Growth and Change* enjoins two distinct areas in which participants evaluated familial opportunities to ensure survival. This conceptualization of family strengths, and in some case weaknesses, challenged the participants to understand their families within the context of survival strategies and resulted in identities situated in a pervasively action oriented mode of operation as opposed to the passively constructed recounts of familial functioning prior to the storm. For many families, their ability to find effective methods of survival was seen as surprising. Participants demonstrated feelings of pride throughout their discussions of the various tools they identified within their familial systems to allow them to continue moving forward. These new tools became part of the ways in which families conceptualized themselves and resulted in primarily positive identity shifts that incorporated feelings of confidence and autonomy.

In conceptualizing the ways in which their family identities have shifted as a result of these new methods for persevering, participants readily discussed their ambivalent feelings related to the need to depend upon others for assistance. While most families offered both positive and negative reactions to the assistance of people in positions of power or authority, only Nelly and Yvonne and Danielle and Greg directly spoke of a perceived relationship between their autonomous decision making and the outcome of the level of aid they received from others. Nelly and Yvonne connected their personal strengths related to intelligence and perseverance to an ability to berate uncooperative authority figures into acquiescing and providing the help that they needed while Danielle and Greg saw their ability to be overly compliant and respectful as an

opportunity to attract help from others. However, the remainder of the participants spoke about the behavior of volunteers, helpers and aid workers as unrelated to their own actions and the result was conflicted feelings of gratitude for the help they received and anger at being left to constitute their own means of support. The result of these ambivalent feelings was a disconnect between families and overarching power structures. When assessed within the context of a shifting family identity, this detachment resulted in a necessary reliance upon independently generated avenues to strength.

While all families identified positive methods their family developed to counteract the stress and pressure of the hurricane recovery, some families sought internally embedded avenues to strength while others relied on the external application of individualized personal characteristics as a means to identify releases. Nelly and Yvonne, Reuben and Cherise and Greg and Danielle focused on maintaining a positive attitude in the face of stress or relying on the infusion of spiritual guidance into their daily decision making process while the remainder of the families turned to personal attributes such as a love for animals or artistic ability to enhance their struggle against sadness. However, all families incorporated a new component into their construction of family in which they contrasted their own experiences with those of other hurricane families and established an identity intimately founded on good fortune. The expressions of gratitude that arose out of these comparisons were central in participant ability to construct an identity as a family who was or would be triumphant over the trauma of the storm. Moreover, the families who most intensely contrasted their family with families who had lost or suffered more – Reuben and Cherise and Nelly and Yvonne – were the same families who most concretely expressed a belief in that ability to triumph.

Within the discussions surrounding family changes related to methods for gathering strength, all families explored shifts in the intensity of their family connections. The demand for new venues for garnering support that came with the hurricane recovery experience resulted in family investigation into their ability to both get and give support within the context of kinship networks. Additionally, connection between the feelings of isolation that resulted from a shift in within-community identity, increasing feelings of the inability of power structures to successfully support participants, and the call for intensified connections within the family resulted in changes in family dynamics that were directly addressed by participants. The second cross-case theme in which participants relied upon or offered support to family members is coupled with the theme five sub-theme *Relational Changes* to present a holistic understanding of family identity as it is related to connectivity.

While exploring the need to provide support to family members in times of challenge, the families who had children in the home during the hurricane and recovery process spoke most fervently about a positive attachment to being able to offer assistance. Danielle and Greg, Reuben and Cherise and Nelly and Yvonne all had minor children in their charge throughout the years post-Katrina. Each of these families constructed their duties as parents or parental figures as motivation to maintain positive movement forward. Additionally, each of these three families conveyed a sense of being ultimately optimistic about their family future. Thus, family identities were shaped in a positive light by the demand that the adults continue to offer guidance and support even in challenging times.

In contrast, the remaining four families who did not have children to care for spoke only about the need to provide assistance to the other adults in the family and, aside from Elvis and Ann Margaret, reported having adequately done so but ultimately had greater variation in their

post-storm outcomes. Out of all of the participants without minor children in the home, Ann Margaret was the only one who expressly conveyed an overtly optimistic perspective on her life at the time of the interviews. James, Helen, Claude and Monique provided familial support to one another during the recovery yet assessed their status three years following the storm with defined ambivalence. For Elvis, Edgar and Susan, the hurricane resulted in overwhelmingly negative constructions that have shaped their lives in primarily unpleasant ways.

An additional connection between family support and construction of outcome was the pre-storm relationship between participants and their extended kinship networks. Reuben and Cherise, Danielle and Greg and Nelly and Yvonne all were part of defined familial systems long rooted in the New Orleans area. These participants spoke with gratitude of their extended family members and the assistance, both emotional and financial, that they were able to offer throughout the hurricane and recovery. Although as an individual Ann Margaret perceived her post-Katrina existence as more rewarding than her life pre-storm, none of the family units who lacked significant extended family networks assessed their overall hurricane recovery in profoundly positive terms.

Within the context of family identity, the demands for giving and getting familial support throughout the recovery process correlated with a stronger immediate family system for all of the study families with the exception of Elvis and Ann Margaret. While some of these remaining six participant families discovered their connection with one another and constructed new family systems during the recovery time-frame, the others discovered a bond that was increasingly cohesive from pre-storm through the years of recovery and formed as the family looked inward for support in times of struggle. These six families were able to translate increasing isolation within the context of their family / community identity and feelings of being inadequately

supported by social power structures into a reliance upon and connection with one another that was repeatedly described as making both the immediate and the extended family stronger. However, for Elvis and Ann Margaret the disconnect between their perceptions regarding community support resulted in a separation from one another and eventually the dissolution of their romantic partnership.

Finally, family identities were reformed relative to the revelations participants had about their individual experiences of growth and change and the ways in which these personal alterations resulted in either positive or negative contributions to the family system. The fifth cross-case theme, *Growth and Change*, reveals participants' related constructions of the impact of the storm on these separate spheres and these conclusions are drawn from the interplay between personal and relational changes. Participants discussed individual growth and change within two contexts – practical changes and internal adjustments. While the relationship between practical changes and familial identity vacillated between being positive or negative, the internal shifts that participants discussed consistently reinforced family connectivity as long as the shifts resulted in similar perceptions, optimistic or pessimistic, by the participants. Moreover, when changes in internal thinking and feeling were consistent within the family, overall relational constructions of the outcome of the storm on family lives paralleled the tone of the changes.

The practical changes such as increasing physical challenges for Reuben and Cherise or a loss of a focus on material items for Claude differed in impact on the family. Reuben spoke about the deterioration in both his and Cherise's health and, when put in context of their family, described these new challenges as limiting their independent abilities to contribute to the family. As a result, these changes were both independently and relationally seen as negatives. However, Claude's loss of material possessions and resulting personal shift away from a focus on acquiring

material goods was seen as both positive and negative within an individual context but primarily as a positive relationally. While he struggled to holistically embrace his new identity that he described as being more focused on humanity and less on possessions, he stated that it enabled him to enjoin with Monique in practical decisions that are best for their family, making him a more supportive spouse.

In contrast, when participants spoke of internal changes, the content was less important to relational cohesion than was a shared perception by partners. However, descriptions of these individual changes in thinking and feeling were parallel to participant family assessment of whether their hurricane and recovery experience has resulted in primarily positive or negative changes in their lives. While Edgar and Susan both conveyed negative internal constructions as a result of the storm, they shared a sense of anxiety, fear and a longing to escape that enabled their relationship to remain strong despite the fact that they believe the storm has had a profoundly negative impact on their lives. James, Helen, Claude and Monique all conveyed dualistic constructions combining increases in anxiety and negative emotions with recognition of positive changes in thinking resulting in an overall ambivalence regarding the ways in which their lives have been shaped by the hurricane. Their relationships were portrayed as strong and internally connected, indicating that their shared ambivalence with one another allows for relational solidarity. For Nelly and Yvonne, Reuben and Cherise, and Greg and Danielle, the changes discussed were focused on positive areas of personal and / or relational growth. Once again, these descriptions are consistent with the participants' evaluation of the outcome within their lives and were also indicative of strong interpersonal relationships with one another. Only Elvis and Ann Margaret differed significantly in their construction of their respective independent changes, with Elvis identifying primarily negative shifts in thinking and feeling and Ann

Margaret focusing on positive growth. While these descriptions of thinking patterns were again indicative of the participant's assessment of the overall impact of the hurricane on their independent lives, this relationship suffered significantly. The disconnection between partners can be traced to their inability to relate to one another in terms of the ways in which they have processed the internal changes that followed the storm.

### *Comparison to Literature*

While no published study has specifically addressed all of the components within this question, literature supports the notion that family systems shift as a result of the impact of trauma. Figley and Barnes (2005) have produced extensive research in the field of trauma and family systems, and have concluded that non-normative traumatic occurrences have the potential to dramatically impact the functioning of families. However, while family trauma literature has investigated many sub-components of the traumatic process for families which are most comprehensively presented in McCubin's 1980 review of the literature on family stress and coping and in Norris, et. al.'s 2002 review of empirical studies on disaster victims, little has been said regarding a pervasive shift in family identity as a result of the exposure to a sudden traumatic occurrence and then prolonged exposure to on-going process trauma. Therefore, a comparison of relevant literature to study findings will elucidate various findings from distinct literature that both support and contrast the conclusions herein.

The four components of changes in family identity identified within this study and presented comprehensively in the preceding section include a shifting relationship to community, the development and recognition of new tools for counteracting stress and trauma, an increased focus on family connectivity, and the impact of personal growth and change on the existing family system. Within existing literature, three authors specifically address the changes that



occur within the relationship of families or individuals to broader community systems following a natural disaster. In a conceptual presentation of the relationship between children, adolescents and trauma, Shaw (2000) asserts that natural disaster results in significant interference with both individual and community functioning. The ambivalent relationship study families constructed with their New Orleans community and fellow evacuees supports this assertion and demonstrates the interplay between individuals, communities and families when shifting identities in each sphere necessitate the evolution and restructuring of the identity of the others.

In a book devoted to a study of prolonged trauma and the psychosocial implications of disaster, Gleser, Green and Winget (1981) specifically address the need for families to reengage in traumatized communities as a means to mitigating significant impairment. Study findings tentatively support this conclusion in the cases of extreme exclusion or separation while they are not entirely consistent with this assertion with respect to families who ambivalently rejoined a changed New Orleans. The three participants who were both transplants to the city and struggled profoundly to construct an identity within the context of the rebuilding community – Elvis, Edgar and Susan – did evidence the greatest struggles in the wake of the hurricane and recovery. However, five of the six participants most enthusiastically optimistic about the ultimate outcome of the storm for their families stayed away from the rebuilding process for significant lengths of time. While Nelly did return to New Orleans very quickly following the storm, Yvonne was a resident of Shreveport for over a year. Reuben and Cherise returned to New Orleans after staying for more than a year in the host community of Irving, Texas and Danielle and Greg lived for over two years in Houston. Additionally, Reuben, Cherise, Danielle and Greg constructed positive associations with their evacuation communities in contrast to many other participants and revealed ambivalent relationships with a changed New Orleans upon their return. Thus, these

findings suggest that rather than overt involvement in the rebuilding process of their destroyed community mitigating negative experiences, a measure of protection was provided by conspicuous absence from the initial stages of community trauma recovery.

The relationship between individuals within a traumatized community is investigated by Figley and Barnes (2005) in a book chapter detailing the impact of external trauma on families. The authors assert that, following significant community trauma, individuals within the community establish intimate relationships with one another while simultaneously failing to provide adequate relational support because of the significant affects on everyone within the network. In keeping with the prevalence of pervasively ambivalent constructions by participants in many areas within the study, findings both confirmed and contradicted the supposition of community cohesion. A number of participants described a sense of connectivity immediately following the storm wherein strangers offered help and assistance to fellow evacuees even when they themselves had few resources. However, these reports of community bonding were overshadowed by the predominant discourse across cases wherein participants distinguished their families as different and separate from evacuees who engaged in behavior that was condemned by study families. The struggle of participant families to construct a new family identity within the context of their changed community often revealed rejection of what were projected as representative norms and an increased reliance on family and kin networks. Thus, study findings are consistent with the notion that families struggled to fit within a shifting and damaged broader community as a result of the inability of community members to offer significant support while calling into question the level of connectivity generated within the population exposed to the storm.

Literature on the significance of the changing of family identities as new tools for managing the stress of trauma are identified and incorporated into the family construction of self is primarily focused on factors connected to resiliency. Norris et. al. (2002) and Kessler et. al. (2006) describe attitudes of hope and optimism as related to positive outcomes for victims of natural disasters. In a study of adolescents displaced by Hurricane Katrina, Nelson (2008) identified positive attitudes to be a variable contributing to successful recovery. Additionally, the HKCAG review of findings related to specifically to Hurricane Katrina also described a correlation between increasing spiritual or religious beliefs and positive disaster recovery. While study of Katrina families identified a multitude of methods for maintaining familial strength, Nelly, Yvonne, Reuben and Cherise spoke of intentionally embracing hope and optimism as a tool for family survival. Moreover, Reuben and Cherise and Greg and Danielle focused intently on their connection to God as a means for survival through the most challenging times in the recovery process. In contrast to James, Helen, Elvis, Claude and Monique who focused on gathering strength through external activities and described either ambivalent or negative outcomes as a result of the storm, the families who focused on maintaining a positive internal frame of reference or an internalized spirituality were among those who reported the greatest levels of satisfaction with their lives three years following the storm.

Participants in this study also grappled with the need to rely on external authority figures for assistance and the ways in which they conceptualized their relationship to these potential resources. While some families identified specific positive organizational support, the dominant discourse within the context of the study described feelings of abandonment by or disappointment with those in the position to formally aid in disaster relief. This is consistent with the findings in current literature which contend that victims of community-wide trauma are often

reluctant to embrace the offers of help from those outside of the community because they believe that there is an inability to understand the traumatic experiences as well as the cultural and demographic needs of the community (Figley & Barnes, 2005). Still, families differed in respect to their perceptions regarding the relationship between their own family behavior and the behavior of individuals in helping roles. While most participants identified no connection and felt victimized as a result, Nelly, Yvonne, Danielle and Greg identified ways in which they could harness control within the dynamics of their relationships with aid workers. Existing literature states that having faith in personal abilities or believing in one's own inner resources for strength is correlated with positive recovery (HKCAG, 2006). Within the context of this study, these findings are supported in that these two families took ownership in the context of their developing interpersonal relationships with relief workers. Their belief in their own ability to manage the outcome of these interpersonal interactions through autonomous behaviors and responses enabled a sense of mastery and ultimately was connected to overall perceptions of positive outcomes as a result of the hurricane.

Participant discussions surrounding a shift in family identity as defined by the levels of connectivity between family members both support and directly contradict literature investigating these change processes. In a study investigating the relationship between mental illness and suicidality following Hurricane Katrina, Kessler, et. al. (2006) found that 80 percent of subjects declared a closer relationship with their loved ones than prior to the storm. Additionally, a quasi-experimental study comparing disaster victims to non-victims found that victims were both more likely to seek support from family rather than friends and more likely to report intensely connected familial relationships than were non-victims (Drabek, et. al., 1975). These results parallel the findings in this study in which all participants describe intensifying

their reliance upon family members as opposed to non-family members over the course of the three years during and following the storm. Additionally, both interview data and video observation reveal the strong connectivity between the family participants for six of the seven study families. Many participants specifically described increasing closeness between the adults in the immediate family. Moreover, Danielle and Greg, Reuben and Cherise, Nelly and Yvonne and Helen all reported improved or increasingly connected relationships with extended kin. However, not all study participants described improved relationships with extended family – Claude and Monique, Elvis and Ann Margaret, Edgar and Susan, and James all described relationships with family members in either ambivalent or slightly negative terms.

Studies have also examined the relationship between families who have extended familial support networks in place to offer support and post-disaster outcomes. Sattler, et. al. (2006) found that existing supportive familial networks prior to disaster were predictive of better outcomes for disaster victims. These findings are consistent with results from this study revealing that the three participant families with the strongest pre-existing extended family relationships were also the participants who reported the most positive perceptions of post-Katrina lives both individually and relationally. Nelly and Yvonne, Reuben and Cherise, and Danielle and Greg described pre-Katrina lives intertwined with extended family. While Nelly and Yvonne and Reuben and Cherise also relied on family during the hurricane evacuation and reconnected with relatives upon the return to New Orleans, Danielle and Greg were geographically extricated from their family network during their evacuation. However, all three of these families described optimistic outlooks at the time of the interviews, indicating that Sattler et. al.'s findings regarding pre-trauma connection to familial support may be more

pertinent to disaster outcomes than expressed involvement of those extended networks throughout the immediate recovery.

With regards to the ability of both immediate and extended family to offer support throughout a traumatic occurrence, Morrow (1999) stated in an identification of communities uniquely vulnerable to disaster that when family members are all engaged in the process of recovering from trauma, individuals within the system are unable to rely upon other family members for support. Findings from this study directly contradict this assertion. Six of the seven study families described intensely supportive relationships between the adult partners in the family home despite the fact that each person was engaged in trauma recovery. Additionally, despite the inability of Elvis and Ann Margaret to adequately support one another throughout the three years following the storm, they too described specific ways in which they were able to offer assistance to one another within their newly constituted friendship. Moreover, an investigation of levels of support offered by extended family revealed that the participants who most expressly relied upon and gave assistance to their extended family throughout the evacuation and the recovery were Reuben and Cherise, Nelly and Yvonne and Helen, all of whom were engaged in entire family systems displaced by the storm. Additionally, although Danielle and Greg remained isolated from their family during their time in Texas, pre-evacuation preparation and their reengagement with the New Orleans community was vitally supported by other family members who had also lived through the hurricane. While Claude, Monique and Susan received assistance from family members who lived outside of New Orleans during the evacuation phase of their hurricane experience, these participants did not continue to rely on extended family during the three years post storm. The study participants who described minimal or no reliance upon extended kin – Elvis and Ann Margaret, Edgar and James – all had family

members who had no exposure to the trauma of Hurricane Katrina. Thus, within the context of this study, family members both in the home and in extended family networks were able to offer the highest levels of support when they too were involved in the process of recovery.

In an analysis of 60,000 disaster victims through a review of available empirical studies, Norris et. al. (2002) evaluated the influence of the structure of the immediate family on individual outcomes. Findings showed a significant correlation between marital status and stress levels, indicating that people who were married prior to and during a disaster experienced increased anxiety and negative outcomes. However, Reuben and Cherise, Danielle and Greg and Nelly, all of whom were married during the hurricane, reported more optimistic and hope-filled attitudes than many participants who were not married during the storm. While Nelly's marriage ultimately ended due to the death of her spouse and she reported significant grief associated with this loss, her perception of her own stress during the time period in which her recovery overlapped with her marriage indicated that she perceived her husband to be a source of comfort. Moreover, Norris et. al. concluded that women who were responsible for the care of either children or elderly family members during disaster experienced increased levels of stress and anxiety due to their obligations of responsibility. Findings from this study are positioned in direct contrast to these conclusions. Female and male participants alike who were responsible for the care of minor children in the storm expressly connected their obligations to child care with an increased motivation to maintain a positive attitude and stimulation to continue moving forward in the recovery process. Even Claude and Monique who became pregnant during the years of hurricane recovery described a shift in outlook that required a more concentrated focus on survival and accompanied motivation than earlier in the recovery when there was no consideration of the needs of a child. Therefore, for participants within this study, care-taking

roles were incorporated into positive sources of strength rather than serving to increase the stress associated with burdensome obligations.

Literature investigating personal growth and change following natural disaster is primarily situated within an individual context and explores multiple constructions that are consistent with trauma recovery. However, research examining the connection between these independent changes and family functioning is limited. Comparison between the personal changes reported in this study and those discussed in research on individual responses to natural disaster is primarily consistent. Negative changes described in the literature include increased anger and irritability (HKCAG, 2006) and feelings of inadequacy or a sense of impending doom (Figley & Barnes, 2005). While these changes were described as more pervasive and permanent by some participants than others, all families discussed feelings of agitation, hostility, or fear connected at the minimum with the initial stages of evacuation and recovery. Positive changes are reported in terms of personal growth and are presented to be a pervasive outcome for many victims of disaster (HKCAG, 2006; Kessler, et. al., 2006). With the exception of Elvis, all participants spoke of experiencing components of personal growth, while again the level of intensity or pervasiveness of these feelings varied.

While there was obvious consistency between the findings from this study and those in existing literature regarding individual changes following natural disaster, the focus of this investigation was to highlight the impact on family systems recovering from Hurricane Katrina and as such, individual changes were explored in terms of their impact on relational processes. While existing literature does marginally examine this relationship, the findings are scarce. One finding regarding individual perceptions and the impact on family outcome following trauma is Shawn and Halliday's (as cited in Figley and Barnes, 2005) assertion that the tone of the frame



of reference employed by individuals prior to a disaster has significant influence on post-disaster outcomes. Although a comparison between these findings and those of this study are difficult because there was no pre-storm component to the study, there are generalizable concepts that are consistent. Families within this study who employed a “mastery frame of reference” (p.391) during the years-long recovery process from Katrina did indicate more positive outcomes for their families, as opposed to families who conveyed a passive connection to their recovery efforts. Nelly and Yvonne, Reuben and Cherise, and Danielle and Greg were all members of families who portrayed positive outcomes and also all described individual characteristics that enabled them to focus on the positive and inspired a belief in their ability to engage in recovery and triumph. In contrast, Elvis, Edgar and Susan rarely used language that conveyed ownership or control in the recovery and these were the families who described the most challenging lives following the storm.

An additional finding that connects individual functioning to overall family functioning is presented in McCubbin et. al.’s literature review of family stress and coping in which the authors assert a connection between levels of individual functioning and levels of relational functioning. This finding can be interpreted as being consistent with or contradictory to this study’s findings depending on the inference made by relational functioning. If relational functioning is interpreted to be an assessment of overall family outcomes following trauma, these findings are true for study participants. Families who were comprised of individuals who had primarily negative changes in their independent constructions such as Edgar and Susan also reported an overall negative outcome for their family following the storm. This is true too for families like James and Helen and Claude and Monique who vacillated between positive and negative influences on their individual functioning and similarly reported ambivalent results for their families following

the storm. Moreover, the individuals who regularly described growth to be the hallmark of their recovery experience were Nelly and Yvonne, Reuben and Cherise and Danielle and Greg, all of whom were in family units that portrayed family functioning following the storm to be optimal. However, If McCubbin et. al's construction of relational functioning relates to interpersonal cohesion, the results from this study stand in contrast. As noted in the conclusions drawn from study data relating to the first research question, relational cohesion for study families appeared to be dependent upon a shared perspective and related levels of individual functioning irrespective of the positive or negative tone and couple solidarity was threatened only in the case of Elvis and Ann Margaret where the individuals had vastly differing individual outcomes.

While these study findings present definitive support for a great deal of current literature, the value of the findings are fixed in both the contrasts to existing research and the collective answer to a question that has previously gone unanswered. Findings addressing the question as to how the recovery from Hurricane Katrina has impacted lower-class family systems in the New Orleans area are juxtaposed to the pervasive academic discourse and reveal singularly unique findings when considered in totality. Further, the striking absence in scholarly inquiry of a discussion regarding significant shifts in family identity following natural disaster trauma indicates that prior findings have not effectively addressed the impact of the hurricane on this study population.

### *Research Question Two*

#### *How has social class status influenced this family recovery process?*

The second research question is designed to be a companion to the first and serves to highlight ways in which social class status has informed the changes that have taken place within the investigated family systems. As such, the analysis of data directly addressing social class and

accompanying constructs must be layered with the analysis investigating family system changes to elucidate the ways in which the constructs overlap and intertwine. Through this process, connections to perceptions of class, status and classism identified within the third cross-case theme rise through the penetrable filters of conclusion regarding family identity shifts and illuminate the relationship between the two. The answer to this question then lies in a revisiting of the four primary changes in family identity that arose out of the first, second, fourth and fifth cross-case themes and were identified in the first question – familial relationship to community, the tools necessary for survival and rebuilding, family connectivity and the impact of personal growth on family systems – with a keen eye to the ways in which participants addressed class-based constructs within their discussions.

As families forged new identities within their broader communities, the first challenge they encountered was that of integrating into an unfamiliar town. Although participant ability to successfully meet this challenge was not correlated with the intensity of marginalization the family experiences as a result of class, participants often spoke in terms of class-based values when evaluating their host communities. The families who most fervently rejected their evacuation cities spoke of a conflict between their own value structure and those pervasively guiding the members of their new community. Elvis and Ann Margaret described opportunism as the main motive of shelter volunteers who were primarily thought to be within a college-educated class while for Nelly, the lack of courtesy by the career-driven people in Atlanta was off-putting. Additionally, even families whose relationships with host communities ranged from mildly hostile to tentatively accepting discussed apprehension about the values they encountered. Both Reuben and Helen looked down at the behavioral choices of evacuation city residents, citing poor parenting or a lack of intellectualism respectively to be evidence of an absence of

appropriate class-based values. Despite staying in a new community for two and a half years, Danielle and Greg evaluated the multifaceted differences in value constructions by their neighbors and community members to be alternately devoid of appropriate morals and overly indulgent or confining and restrictive. The challenge of entering a new community while ambiguously classified with respect to class because of their status as evacuees resulted in participant stratification of those they encountered as a method to defining their own standing within the community.

Another way in which social class influenced participant families' ability to reorganize their relationship to a broader community was the early reintegration of some families into a chaotic hometown marked by the disruption of previously established social classes. James and Helen, Elvis and Ann Margaret, Edgar and Susan, Claude and Nelly all returned to New Orleans within a relatively brief time span and engaged in the reordering of the city that included the restructuring of all facets of community life including social class. These participants each spoke of an upheaval in social class norms in which previous class markers were either altered or obliterated. James, Helen, Claude and Nelly focused their discussions regarding their own shifting social class as experiences in which they felt marginalized to a greater degree than they had prior to the storm. Each struggled to obtain and maintain components of status that they had previously enjoyed despite their identification with lower class systems including dependable employment and related benefits. In contrast, Elvis, Ann Margaret, Edgar and Susan described an infusion of money and access to jobs in the initial months following the storm that enabled them to embrace ways of living they previously associated with classes outside of their reach. However, for all of these participants the disruption in class status was unnerving and has had lasting implications. Initially, these participants struggled to construct a new family identity

within the confines of their altered social class. Three years post-storm they still describe a tenuous relationship with class and their resulting position within the broader community, giving the impression that they are still uncertain where they will ultimately reside in the community class structure.

An evaluation of the interplay between social class constructions and family movement toward survival strategies is informed by the access that participants perceived they had to practical resources such as employment and adequate housing. The families who presented themselves as most oppressed relative to class were Reuben and Cherise and Claude and Monique. Both Reuben and Monique have struggled since returning to New Orleans to maintain any form of steady employment. While Claude and Cherise have remained actively employed, both struggle to earn money that enables them to meet even minimal financial obligations. Additionally, both families required external aid in order to secure housing either through government subsidies or volunteer organizations such as homeless shelters. In contrast, participants who viewed their status as less intensely oppressed presented their challenges with access to resources as tangential components of their struggle. Elvis and Ann Margaret, Nelly and Yvonne, and Danielle and Greg all described their processes of acquiring jobs and housing to be related to an internal drive or through pre-established social connections. While these families differed significantly on quantitative indices of class status such as employment and income level, their perceptions of class disallowed a belief that their challenges were directly related to overt oppression. Conversely, analysis of internalized methods for garnering strength such as maintaining a positive outlook or increased focus on spirituality did not appear to be directly related to either construction of class or quantitative class indicators. Rather, a relationship was identified, not by participants but through researcher review, between these

avenues to strength and participant racial identity. This connection will be explored further in the additional findings section of this chapter.

The relationship between shifting family identity with respect to family connectivity and perceptions of social class status primarily impacted immediate family systems. In keeping with the conclusion that relational cohesion arose out of shared perceptions surrounding the positive or negative impact of the storm on personal functioning, cohesion was similarly related to collective constructions of class status between partners. Elvis and Ann Margaret were the only study participants who presented differing perceptions of personal class status. In contrast, Claude and Monique explicitly made the point that their family perceptions were cohesive. Other participants such as Danielle and Greg and Edgar and Susan engaged in a process of contrasting different labels for class status but did so through a shared dialogue and reached a joint conclusion. The six families who shared a label for their social class were ultimately those who shifted their family identities to incorporate a strong solidarity between the adults in the home. While Elvis and Ann Margaret described similar context specific indicators of class such as level of financially responsible behavior, the divisive terms they used to describe their independent social classes belied the disconnect that the couple shared with regards to familial identity. Thus, as shifts in family identity were made with regard to immediate family connectivity, Ann Margaret and Elvis embraced a connection defined by separateness in direct contrast to the increased intimacy of their fellow study participants. While identity within the context of immediate family was clearly connected to shared perceptions of class, the relationship of families to extended kin networks shared little overlap with social class constructions. Just as internalized avenues to motivation situated in positive outlooks and spiritual connections were identified by researcher analysis to correlate with race, definition of family identity as concretely

connected to extended family also appeared to be connected to racial identity. Again, this correlation will be explored in the additional findings section.

An exploration of the connection between social class constructions and personal growth and change as it relates to family identity shifts revealed that participants frequently engaged in various forms of classism as justification for a change in their own attitudes and behaviors. Two of the families who described the most positive internal shifts and similarly concluded positive overall family outcomes contrasted their internal motivations for changes in behavior and thinking with those of other evacuees. Nelly, Yvonne, Danielle and Greg all mightily criticized other New Orleanians for focusing on access to material gains. This was intentionally situated in contrast with their own behavioral and conceptual adjustments which were driven by a personal motivation to embrace emotionally fulfilling ways of thinking. Edgar and Susan, James and Helen, and Elvis discussed a fear-based response to the behavior of others and simultaneously morally criticized these actions while offering this fear as one explanation for their own negative changes in thinking following the storm. However, while Edgar, Susan and Elvis described pervasively unpleasant personal shifts, James and Helen were ripe with ambiguity. These conflicted internal responses correlated with the amalgam of classist messages the couple conveyed embracing both the rejection of evacuee opportunism conveyed by Nelly, Yvonne, Danielle and Greg and the anxiety riddled response to evacuee behavior of Edgar, Susan and Elvis.

Ann Margaret was unique in that she did not directly tie her classist interpretations of the behavior of other evacuees to her positive personal growth. However, she limited her reflections on other people's inappropriate responses to the storm to the time period during the hurricane and in the Cajun Dome shelter whereas she discussed her own personal changes as primarily

occurring since their return to New Orleans after the storm, thereby failing to directly connect these two distinct time spheres and the overlap between these constructs. Claude and Monique and Reuben and Cherise engaged in very limited condemnation of other people in the storm or recovery. These families also defined themselves as the most significantly oppressed within the context of the study. This reluctance to contrast their personal changes with those of others may represent feelings of inferiority related to their perceived downward shifts in class status and be indicative of the overt marginalization that prevents justification of class-based thinking and feeling through classism.

### *Comparison to Literature*

The connection between social class and trauma recovery in current literature is primarily situated within an analysis of the correlation between contextual variables and individual recovery outcomes (Green, 1998; Morrow, 1999; Fothergill, Maestas & Darlington, 1999). However, overt investigation of the influence of social class constructions within this context is virtually non-existent. Within the field of counseling, studies examining social class are typically dated (Drabek & Boggs, 1968; Drabek, Key, Erickson and Crowe, 1975) or are an investigation into theory (Liu & Ali, 2008; Liu, et. al., 2005) and, with the exception of the recent correlation study by Elliot and Pais (2006) examining race, class and recovery from Hurricane Katrina, do not relate specifically to systemic trauma recovery. As a result, a comparison of study findings to literature related to the influence of social class on the process of marginalized families' recovery from trauma must necessarily draw from incidental findings within the context of broadly framed studies. Additionally, while there is little evidence of direct contradiction to findings within the literature, this is representative more of the dearth of findings on this topic than a support of existing literature. As a result, a literature comparison in this regard must draw



heavily from theoretical writings and subsequently functions to add to application possibilities of Social Class Worldview Model in addition to comparing and contrasting findings with existing empirical data.

The influence of social class on family identity shifts within the context of larger communities evidences the importance of Liu et. al.'s (2004) referent groups of origin, peer affiliation and aspiration. As families were thrust into new communities and forced to evaluate their status within that society, they necessarily drew on values that arose from these referent groups. Referent groups of origin provided study participants with value sets that they used to draw comparisons between themselves and their new peers. The critical judgments of host community members' behavior by Elvis, Ann Margaret, Nelly, Reuben and Helen demonstrated the challenges inherent for these families when required to redefine their own social standing. For Danielle and Greg, engagement with a new community provided the opportunity to evaluate the values derived from their referent group of origin with those they imagined to be indicative of their referent group of aspiration while simultaneously categorizing the behavior of their new peers to further their hopes of social advancement. These groups allowed participants to make meaning of their new status within a foreign community by defining expectations for their behaviors, attitudes and objectives and reestablishing a path toward a homeostatic worldview relative to class (Liu, et. al., 2004).

As families began to reengage with their disrupted hometown and struggle with an upheaval in their previously well defined social standing within the community, they participated in assessments of the ways in which social standing influenced recovery efforts. Lareau's (2002) study examining the relationship between social class and family values concluded that families in different class strata maintain different value sets and, as a result, assess achievement of goals

differently. Within the context of trauma, this implies that members of different classes would understand, respond to and evaluate trauma recovery in vastly different ways. While the social constructionist frame overlaying this study allowed for the distinct constructions of each participant family to define their class status and as a result stratification could be inferred, all participants within the study identified themselves at the outset to be members of marginalized classes. Within this context, participants shared their ambivalent perceptions regarding their own shifting social class standing along with constructions about the experiences of those in higher and lower classes in the recovery process. Across cases, participants agreed on the advantages afforded to those of more advantaged social standing and, in the case of Elvis, Ann Margaret, Edgar and Claude, engaged in hostile criticism of the differences in meaning-making between themselves and their privileged comrades in recovery. This resentment of values-based behaviors and resulting interpretations of recovery occurrences served families in their struggle to redefine their shifting identity by aiding in the crystallization of their template of expectations for their families' behavior and meaning-making.

In Bernstein's (2002) chapter analyzing the interplay between social class, language and socialization he emphasizes the importance of the roles of work and access to housing within familial constructs of identity. As such, the relationship between participant social class constructions and their ability to access these specific resources during their reentrance to the city is an influential component of the ability of families to garner the strength needed to mobilize their family in the recovery process. The challenges specifically connected by Reuben, Cherise, Claude and Monique between finding work and adequate housing to their marginalized status are consistent with literature investigating the influence of social class on trauma recovery.

Morrow (1999) details the relationship between indices of social class such as education, health and work experience and the ability to both secure employment and access effective aid from institutionalized aid organizations. Given the participants' understanding of class to be a construct of oppression, their relationship with external supports was necessarily dualistic. The need for institutional support juxtaposed against their inability to adequately garner those resources resorted in challenges to effectively negotiating the practical demands of the recovery. The result is a functional inability to manage the economic demands of rebuilding a successful life for those of lower classes. Additionally, the feelings of a lack of control due to membership in a lower class status and the resulting inability to fully engage in a self-stimulated recovery uncovered by Fothergill, Maestas & Darlington (1999) is consistent with these families' experiences.

When Liu et. al.'s assertion that class status is subjective and relatively defined is applied, these findings are consistent with study results in that the aforementioned families are the same ones who described personal constructions of class which were most limiting. Moreover, the finding in a study of the relationship between class and health that individual assessments of class status are more indicative of overall well-being than are quantitative measures of socio-economic status indicators (Ostrove, Addler, Kuppermann & Washington, 2000) is consistent with the experiences of these participants. Despite the fact that SES indicators would classify Danielle and Greg in a very marginalized class status, their perception of being in a "blessed class" was a better indicator of their ability to access post-storm resources or to internalize hurdles to accessing these resources as only tangentially connected to their class than were factors such as employment, education or income level. This was also true when

considering the whole of participants who discussed their attempts to become employed or find housing upon reentry to the city.

Literature devoted to discussion of the relationship between social class status and family connectivity following trauma is conspicuously absent from research on family systems and trauma. While some research does focus on the relationship between family meaning-making and social class status (Bernstein, 2002; Kohn, 1963; Lareau, 2002), there is no inclusion of a direct discussion regarding the impact of class on family cohesion within findings. However, Lareau does assert that social class defines the way in which family members interpret their roles within a family system. While participants did not directly address the relationship between their roles within their immediate or extended family networks and their social class, the duty participants felt to provide support to other family members was implied. All participants described having the task of providing support to their partners and, with the exception of Elvis and Ann Margaret, reported having adequately met this responsibility. When this participant group is conceptualized as being jointly inducted in lower class strata, these findings may indicate that duty to provide support to a partner through traumatic times is a value held by this social class group. However, when participant families are stratified within their group of seven by either self-report of class status or demographic variables consistent with a quantitative evaluation of social class no significant correlation emerges between status and belief in the role of an adult partner to provide support within the immediate family.

The comparison between literature and the influence of personal growth on family identity relative to class and following a natural disaster necessarily draws from a scholarly base primarily situated in theory due to the absence of parallel empirical investigations. In Norris et al.'s (2002) review of disaster literature the authors did report an established relationship

between class constructs and systems of meaning-making. Within the confines of this study, the relationship between social class and personal growth existed primarily through participant use of classist messages to make meaning of their own changes in behavior and thinking. Social Class Worldview Model explains this reliance upon the juxtaposition of self to others through classism by maintaining that individuals are in need of a homeostatic worldview relative to class and subsequently utilize classism to maintain the existing class structure (Liu, et. al., 2004). With the exception of Claude, Monique, Reuben and Cherise who engaged in delivering very few classist messages, the families all participated in upward, downward or lateral classism as a means to justify their own personal changes.

Although study findings are consistent with the primary tenets of SCWM, when participant notions of social class are considered in relation to overall recovery outcome findings differ significantly from existing literature. Garrison (1985) investigated the implications on mental health of relocation following a disaster in the United States and found a direct positive correlation between level of social class status and ability to effectively cope with the stress of a natural disaster. Participants in this study evidenced no such correlation. Although Reuben, Cherise, Claude and Monique identified as severely limited in social standing, Reuben and Cherise described positive familial outcomes and Claude and Monique presented ambivalent results following the storm. Additionally an inverse relationship was not demonstrated. James and Helen's identification as the only participants who achieved middle class status following the storm did not correlate with the most effective methods for handling stress nor the most positive outcomes as a result of the hurricane.

While this study examined members of a population ineffectually represented in current literature, without the second research question designed to illicit the ways in which

constructions of social class inform the overall family changes under investigation the study would mirror previous research in which correlations between class and trauma outcome are revealed but not investigated. As such, the inclusion of these findings wherein class constructs are identified within the interplay between cross-case theories and investigated as to their impact on the family change process is an essential component to understanding the depth of participant family narratives as well as the themes that span across the multiple cases. The holistic nature of qualitative study demands that a singular contextual variable such as class not be positioned as the only relevant construct to any multifaceted process, including family trauma recovery. Thus, the intention of the focusing within this companion research question is not to imply that class status outweighs other variables that were not directly highlighted. Rather, the purpose is to intensify the academic understanding of a correlation repeatedly established but rarely investigated.

#### *Additional Findings*

While the research questions were intentionally structured to absorb broad and far reaching themes related to the change process, there were significant findings that fell outside of the intended parameters for the study. Two distinct findings emerged out of the within-case and cross-case themes. The first of these arises in conjunction with the situation of the study in socially constructed theory and illuminates the pervasive language of ambiguity that permeated participant narratives. The second finding is briefly alluded to within the research question conclusions and expands upon the correlation between racial identity and two specific themes related to participant family transformation.

Throughout all participant narratives and within the content of cross-case themes are data defined by ambiguity. Families spoke with words conveying an omnipresent sense of uncertainty

and ambivalence as they attempted to verbalize the specifics of the process that has unfolded before them over the three years since Hurricane Katrina. All families utilized this style of language to navigate through the process of solidifying their stories within the process of the interviews. Some of the within-case explorations that revealed words most intensely connected to uncertainty included those of Claude and Monique, James and Helen, and Nelly and Yvonne. Additionally, families who used specific wording conveying ambiguity also often gave contradictory responses to interview topics. Rather than being disingenuous, this inconsistency evidenced in many within-case analyses appeared to parallel the families' engagement with the study process and their attempts to integrate conflicted experiences and emotions into a cohesive representation of their hurricane and recovery journeys. Moreover, a number of cross-case themes are studies in contradiction. While some of these juxtaposed constructions developed as a result of conflicted perceptions between families, many arose from the competing ideas and experiences within each family and each individual. Each of the five themes illuminated in chapter five contain thematic representations of ambiguity and examples of participant language conveying uncertainty. These multifaceted layers of ambivalence and lack of clarity reveal how participants three years into their recovery journeys are still struggling to define their experiences, clarify their emotions and make meaning from their trauma.

An additional unexpected finding was identified through my external analysis of demographic information and participant similarities. While this study did not aim to present social class as a more centrally relevant construct than other contextual variables but rather to intensify understanding of the relationship between class and trauma within families, the focus of the interviews on topics related to class resulted in themes primarily derived from participant reflections on their social standing. However, through an engagement in analysis of participant

contextual variables and study findings it became evident that two overlapping constructs related more specifically to racial identity than to any form of class construction. The exploration of family changes as they related to immediate and extended familial relationships revealed that Nelly and Yvonne, Reuben and Cherise and Danielle and Greg, all of whom are members of a racial minority and physically present as possibly African American, described intense connections to and reliance upon their extended family in ways that the Caucasian members of the study did not. Additionally, these same participant families described accessing resources for familial strength through internalized systems of meaning making including maintaining an optimistic outlook and reliance upon spirituality. Although there are likely many connections between variables other than class to these families' experiences of recovery, the focus of this study was to further understand participant relationships between social class and family change in the wake of the storm. However, the significance of both extended kinship networks and reliance upon internal resources for growth within the thematic analysis and the clear correlation with racial identity as opposed to class constructions necessitates the exploration of this connection as a companion to study findings.

### *Comparison to Literature*

A review of existing literature contains similar challenges in identifying studies relevant to these additional study findings as to literature comparisons with the primary study findings. Research currently 2008 examining systemic familial influences of natural disaster is primarily quantitative in nature. As such, investigations into pervasive language patterns in long term recovery are conspicuously absent. Moreover, while race has been identified within an abundance of literature as a correlating variable in the outcome of mental health on natural disaster victims, examinations illuminating the specific connections between racial identity and



cognitions relative to post-disaster meaning making are virtually non-existent. However, comparisons can be drawn between these study findings and components of existing literature in an effort to further elucidate the relationship between these additional conclusions and those constructing the current scholarly dialogue surrounding families in the midst of natural disaster recovery.

Investigation into the literature centered on long term psychological impact of natural disaster recovery reveals a substantial conflict in findings. A study by Murphy (2007) contrasting individualized responses to natural disaster one and three years following the traumatic occurrence indicates that fewer than four percent of study participants reported full recovery at the three year mark, indicating that subjects were still struggling to understand the implications of their experiences and reconstruct a semblance of their pre-trauma lives. However, in a similarly constructed investigation into natural disaster recovery, Steinglass and Gerrity (2006) indicate that markers of trauma had decreased significantly as evaluated by indices of post traumatic stress disorder at the four and sixteen month marks. This contrast is representative of the larger presentation within disaster literature in which long term outcomes are evaluated with respect to quantifiable measures and conclusions are contradictory. While participants in this study varied with respect to the degree they described overall outcomes for their families, the pervasive participant use of ambivalent language and involvement in conflicted discussion threads indicates that three years following the hurricane, participants are still struggling to comprehend and make sense of their experiences. Through this qualitative analysis, the intricacies of participant constructions are revealed and allow for an illumination of the ambiguity within families and even individual participants with regards to outcome. These

findings offer family uncertainty as an explanation as to why quantitative studies reveal inconsistent findings.

Exploration of literature focused on racial identity and natural disaster recovery reveals consistent identification of race as a relevant contextual variable (Morrow, 1999; Norris, et. al., 2002). Moreover, studies have identified both perspective and connection to kinship networks as predictive variables in positive post-disaster outcomes. In a review of empirical data, Gibbs (1989) concluded that there is a strong correlation between effective coping styles situated in optimistic attitudes and post-disaster psychopathology while Benight and Harper (2002) conducted an empirical analysis of the relationship between coping self-efficacy and levels of global distress and found a positive correlation. Additionally, foundational literature on natural disaster revealed the relationship between strong kinship networks and positive outcomes (Drabek and Boggs, 1968; Drabek, et. al., 1975). While Elliot and Pais (2006) identified race as a more significant factor than class in the outcome of a quantitative correlation study conducted two months following Hurricane Katrina, the stories of Nelly and Yvonne, Reuben and Cherise and Danielle and Greg are situated somewhere within this amalgam of findings. The implications that arise from the overlapping of these narratives with existing data suggest that this relationship – similar to that between language, ambiguity and disaster recovery – is conceptually incomplete.

### *Emancipatory Outcomes*

The process of empowering participants through the critical design of a research study involves expressed and transparent solicitation of participant engagement. Within the context of this design, analysis of thematic data related to family constructions of the impact of study participation revealed that the study did achieve the goal of influencing and shaping participant

lives relative to their recovery. While the paradigm of critical humanism informs the goals for participant empowerment, the specific outcomes related to de-marginalization are constructed independently and relative to participant worldviews and the shared reality developed within the space of the interview.

The families participating in the study each discussed the reflection that study involvement inspired. While reflection in and of itself is not a direct component of empowerment, it served within this framework to assist families in finding their voice as it related to Katrina. Of the five families who described the interview experience in overtly positive terms, all similarly noted engaging in deep self-reflection regarding their individual and family change processes. Additionally, Danielle, Greg, Edgar and Susan each described revelations occurring within the space of the interview that caused for broader thinking in which they intentionally broadened their perspective beyond the experiences of their family. Through these personal reflections, participants described an experience of engaging in personal growth as a result of study participation. Within a paradigm of critical humanism this increased insight and reflection is seen as empowering through both validation within the self and family as well as providing a conceptual framework from which to begin a larger societal discussion.

In addition to inspiring self reflection in participants, many families described the experience as therapeutic or as having therapeutic qualities. A three part interview series allowed room for families to establish an alliance with me within the space of the interview dialogue and to exercise exploration of emotions that may have previously been conceptualized in a different and less concrete way. Despite the fact that he described having had the greatest internal and relational struggles as a result of the hurricane, Elvis expressed relief as a result of his interview participation. Additionally, while he was the only study participant to reengage in destructive

attempts at self-soothing, he expressed a cathartic release in being able to volley his emotions within a safe environment. This process of constructing a safe and welcoming environment for participants to explore their constructions related to the storm was also a foundational component of the empowering experience. Through engaging in a frame in which their experiences and related emotions were seen as relevant and valuable, participants expressed an increased sense of personal worth.

Consequentially, evidence of participant empowerment grew out of the study experience. Families ranged with their level of comfort in extending their conversations outside of the interview into a broader social dialogue, but many described initiating conversations related to change and social class within their family networks. Additionally, Nelly directly applied the dialogue constructed in the interviews to her workplace and stimulated conversations related to the influence of social class on the recovery experience from Hurricane Katrina. Through creating a co-constructed narrative between participant families and myself based on the relevance of participant family experiences, perceptions and emotions, families began the process of constructing a platform from which they might enjoy in a process of transforming dominant discourse.

### *Comparison to Literature*

A literature comparison to emancipatory study findings involves addressing the theoretical tenets underscored by participant data. The three primary ways in which participant families embraced the rejection of their marginalized status are evidenced by thematic conclusions relating to reflection upon self and experience, involvement in the cathartic process of expressing and validating emotions, and evidence of empowerment through participant willingness to engage in a broader discourse related to their experiences. Drawing from literature

espousing the benefits of an emancipatory action research agenda, this comparison to existing literature will highlight the ways in which conclusions drawn from data analysis parallel tenets of critical humanism.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) attest that study framed by critical humanism is effective when both researcher and participants work in tandem to share authority while creating a co-constructed narrative that contrasts confining power structures. To this end, action research must address the alienation of those in marginalized classes (Creswell, 2003) by creating a shared process of reflection. Participants within this study specifically cited ways in which a valuing environment allowed them to engage in a process of self-reflection and new possibilities for enlightenment. An agenda designed to suppress alienation must first encourage the process of raising individual consciousness (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) in order to combat feelings of inadequacy within dominant discourse. The interview transcripts that reveal participant reflection both within and beyond their own lives illustrate this process of change, thereby beginning the process of empowering marginalized families to “transcend the constraints placed on them” (Creswell, 2003, p.10).

Within this study design, an important component of empowerment was situated within Halliwell and Mousley’s (2003) assertion that individuals are principally valued for their social and cultural contributions to a larger society. The participants within this study including Elvis, Ann Margaret, Edgar, Susan, Claude and Monique who directly reported therapeutic responses to study involvement demonstrate the importance within relationships that recognize the expertise of each individual regarding their own lives. By constructing an environment in which families felt honored and respected enough to explore their own feelings related to their trauma, the interviews gave voice to a formerly silenced population. A specific aim of action research is

to counteract the suppression of valid human thoughts and emotions (Creswell, 2003) by creating a forum for the narratives of the oppressed (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The assertions by these participants that our interview dialogues resulted in their freedom to explore and re-conceptualize their emotions surrounding the hurricane and subsequent recovery indicate progress toward this study objective.

The process of participant engagement in dialogues beyond the interviews connected to the oppression of lower social classes and the relationship between class status and autonomous recovery most directly demonstrates the emancipatory process at work within the study. Creswell (2003) asserts that research grounded in action must work to overtly combat social constructs that further domination and oppression through the liberation of marginalized individuals and groups. Further, Rossman and Rallis (2003) challenge researchers working in a critical frame to construct a supportive environment in which participants are encouraged to question the dominant power systems constituting oppressive forces within society. While all participants engaged in discussions within the context of the interviews related to the subjugation of lower class New Orleans residents in the recovery from Hurricane Katrina, the reports from participants of the extension of these conversations into external environments demonstrates the beginning of the process required to shift dominant social discourse. Further, these data construct evidence that the aims of empowerment guiding this study were addressed through the process of igniting action within these families which has the potential to address pervasively oppressive schools of thought in society.

#### *Study Limitations*

The intention of this study was to contribute to the significant gaps in the literature surrounding the long-term process of recovery from the specific natural disaster Hurricane

Katrina on family systems and to illuminate the influence of familial constructions of social class on this experience. Moreover, the paradigm of critical humanism which guided the study design and objectives informed the secondary objective of engaging participant families in a process of empowerment through stimulating internal reflections on construction, creating a platform for silenced voices to be amplified and stimulating self-worth through respect and validation in an attempt to enjoin participants in the process of altering dominant social discourse. In addition to the foundational paradigm, the perspective of social constructionism and the guiding theory Social Class Worldview Model framed the construction of the study. While this research endeavor was meticulously applied in an effort to maintain consistency with the theoretical structure and with an end goal of answering the specific research questions, limitations for findings are inherent in academic study. Moreover, throughout the evolving process of this qualitative inquiry, specific confines related to methodology and the scope of findings became evident.

While this study was intentionally structured within specific ontological and epistemological assumptions consistent with qualitative research, the limitations of a qualitative design must be reiterated. The historical reliance on positivistic and post-positivistic inquiry within the scholarly research tradition has led to the tendency of readers to interpret findings within these long-established parameters. However, throughout the process of incorporating these study findings into a working internal reference frame and drawing independent conclusions, the audience is encouraged to regularly return to the intentions of this qualitative study. The findings presented herein should not be assumed to be representative of any population larger than the participants of this specific study. Although qualitative inquiry may contribute to theory (Yin, 1994), results are not elicited in a manner that would allow for a

reasonable application to any family who did not specifically participate in the research. Findings should inform reader understanding of the selected families for this study and, should questions arise regarding implications for the broader population, inspire notions of how theory might develop out of these results and stimulate further inquiry.

A review of the methodology implemented in this study also reveals limitations that must be considered in determining conclusions from an analysis of data. The multiple case study design was implemented to improve the thematic analysis across cases by investigating the intersection of multiple case perspectives through constructing a similar interview experience for all families. However, some deviations from a strict implementation of identical processes inform the analysis of cross-case themes. Interview guides were used in all interviews to increase the likelihood that participants would reflect on similar phenomena. However, an intentional component of the methodology derived from the social constructionist perspective allowed study families to deviate from prescribed topics throughout the interviews. This flexibility was infused with a dual agenda – to increase the understanding of the multi-faceted unique factors that influence family constructions as well as to increase the emancipatory agenda of the study through validation of participant reflections. Still, while these deviations heightened the ability to engage in a dialogue illuminating participant lived experiences, they similarly resulted in fewer assurances that families spent similar amounts of time reflecting on the same topics. As a result, the variability in the intensity or quantity of family responses to themes may be less indicative of the importance of the topic for the participants and more representative of interviews that did not spend equal amounts of time investigating the same themes.

In addition to the intentionally designed methodological constraints limiting the similarity of study design across cases, there were practical challenges that resulted in differing experiences



for families. Interviews were scheduled when they were convenient for the family without regard to implementing consistency across cases regarding the time in between interviews. This potentially limits findings in that the experience of having more or less time between interviews likely impacted family reflections and resulting constructions. In addition to shaping the thematic outcome for families, this time variability may also have impacted the emancipatory process. Families who engaged in interviews within a three day time span had limited access to on-going support within the context of the interviews when compared to families who participated in one interview a week. This potentially influenced both the family's ability to incorporate the validating experiences in the interview and the likelihood that they would translate newly formed constructions into engagement with the broader community discourse. Moreover, interviews were conducted with some families in their homes and with other families in public places. There were multiple reasons for this disparity, including the comfort level of the family with having strangers into their home and the assessment of myself and my camera man regarding the safety of the neighborhood in which participants lived. As a result, the level of comfort and familiarity between me and participants may have been shaped by our external environments. Additionally, families who engaged in interviews in public places may have felt constrained when discussing intimate experiences by the presence of other people and engaged in less self-disclosure as a result.

In addition to the limitations regarding similarity of participant experiences, additional methodological constraints must be considered as limiters to study findings. While sampling methods relied on the distribution of fliers and as a result allowed for consistency in the manner in which families engaged with the study, the study population must be bounded by the families that were not able to be accessed. The use of fliers required self-motivation and access to

telephone services for families to make contact and indicate interest. Additionally, there were a large number of families who called and expressed a desire to participate but ultimately were not part of the interviews. The reasons these participants gave for not participating varied, but many evidenced limitations to their involvement that may have been derived from their social class status. One non-participant family described in my reflexive journal vividly illustrates the challenges to study participation. Two African American men who described themselves as non-romantically linked roommates and identified as one another's sole family engaged in the telephone screening and were determined to meet study criteria. However, on three separate occasions we attempted to schedule our first interview but were never successful. The first meeting was cancelled minutes before our scheduled interview because one of the men was given a last minute opportunity to earn money through a local community center. Our second meeting was cancelled forty-five minutes after it was to have begun when one of the men called to say he had been waiting for a city bus for over an hour and had just found out that the bus for his line had broken down. The final attempt at holding a scheduled interview was abandoned when the men neither called nor showed up and no longer returned my phone calls. Families that did participate in the study then are members of a population who had enough resources to overcome similar hurdles to study involvement.

Limitations in addition to those arising from methodology include recognition of the parameters of the study with regards to findings. The overlapping and interconnected relationship between contextual factors must be recognized even as independent relationships between variables are established. Thus, the focus of the study on social class must not imply that these constructions are more or less relevant than those related to other context specific indices. Moreover, the conclusions presented in answer to the research questions identify many

apparent relationships between factors such as degree of oppression, racial identity, family structure and geographic affiliation among others. However, the pairing out of these variables to establish connections is misleading if the totality of the family identity is not considered.

Therefore, each identified relationship within study findings must be understood to be a singular slice of the familial whole and considered relevant only within that context.

Moreover, the scope of the study is bound by the focus of the research agenda and does not adequately construct a template from which the additional findings can be understood. While the findings related to ambiguous language and the relationship between racial identity and study themes are revealed because of their saliency within a thematic analysis of data, their presentation is not intended to suggest that this study can sufficiently draw inferences from these supplemental findings. Moreover, contextual variables including race and gender were identified within existing literature as potential correlates to outcome processes. However, the research questions driving this exploratory process informed the literature review as well as the methodology in order to construct a holistic understanding of the interplay between social class constructions and familial recovery from Hurricane Katrina. As a result, neither sufficient relevant literature nor appropriate methodology is presented to understand these additional phenomena beyond a cursory exploration.

Finally, there are limitations with respect to the emancipatory agenda of the study. An expressed objective of this research is creating a shared and equal dialogue between researcher and participants with the aim of promoting a belief in self worth in families who have been marginalized in society as a result of their class status. Although study data suggests that families primarily interpreted our dialogues as emancipatory experiences that inspired self-reflection and increased willingness to engage in discussions outside of the interviews, the relatively limited

exposure to this supportive environment will restrict the extent to which families will both maintain and develop this new personal framework. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from data supporting the success of the application of critical humanism need also include an understanding that these germinal expressions by participant families of willingness to engage in the process of overcoming marginalizing power structures may not result in increasing or even continuing engagement with these processes.

### *Suggestions for Future Inquiry*

The findings and conclusions presented in this discussion surrounding the study of marginalized family systems and changes resulting from exposure to Hurricane Katrina and subsequent recovery allow for a new understanding of the implications of these experiences. This study addresses significant gaps in current literature and contributes to a further understanding of the interlocking nature of these findings. The preceding review of the study limitations works in concert with the breadth of study results to create a template for future researchers as to relevant directions for further inquiry. Within this discussion, specific suggestions for the direction of complimentary research will be presented along with the ways in which these particular explorations would work in tandem with the results of this study to create a holistic understanding of family systems changes in the wake of trauma.

While the emancipatory design of this study was most relevantly applied to a population that has experienced marginalization as a result of social class status, future research could supplement these findings by investigating similar experiences of individuals in privileged social classes. The conclusions drawn within this study are situated within the constructions of participants related to the silencing of their voices within society. However, the emancipatory objective of the study implies that these families would derive benefits in their recovery

processes if they can engage in the shifting of dominant discourse to deconstruct existing power structures. In order to fully understand the contrasting experiences of those with and those without social power and to support the notion that it is advantageous for families recovering from Hurricane Katrina to work toward this deconstruction of social hierarchies, study must illuminate how those with social advantages have experienced this recovery process differently. Such research should embrace the qualitative tradition and employ similar methodology and research objectives but must operate from a different paradigmatic frame that is more appropriately suited to the suggested population. An appropriate paradigm to employ that would allow findings to conceptually parallel the results of this study in order to allow for such a contrast would be constructionism. While the current research is informed by a social constructionist perspective, these theoretical tenets are situated within the expressed agenda inherent in critical humanism. The implementation of constructionism as a paradigm would allow the narratives of privileged participants to develop in a similarly unrestricted manner while simultaneously removing emancipation as an objective of the research.

Although the design of this inquiry has effectively illuminated implications for the study participant families with regards to marginalized social class status, an unintended result of data analysis was support for the idea that multiple contextual variables existed in concert with social class and influenced the process of familial recovery. The discussion presenting additional findings within the study reveals the need for an extension of this body of research that would directly examine the relationship between other family factors and their family change experience. As such, another area of needed future research is the investigated relationship between racial identity along with other variables that have been established as correlates to trauma recovery. These results could then be situated alongside and overlapping with findings

from this study which reveal the significant influence of social class constructions. Ideally, this research would employ a similar qualitative design situated within an emancipatory frame so that consistency in epistemological assumptions and methodological practices would contribute to the holistic presentation of these related results.

In addition to the development of lines of research uncovering the connection between familial change responses to specific natural disasters and factors other than social class, conclusions within this study demonstrate the need for in-depth investigation of the interlocking relationship between study findings. The relationships between cross-case themes are evidence of the depth to which factors leading to a systemic change process are intertwined. While the findings presented herein outline the multiple ways in which these distinct components of trauma recovery and change are connected, a study designed to explicitly investigate the compounding nature of these multiple relationships would supplement these results and inform this inquiry by contributing an additional lens of understanding. It is suggested that this objective could be met with this existing study data by applying an interpretivist paradigm and constructing research questions specifically aimed at uncovering the complexities of these multiple relationships.

Finally, future inquiry designed to expand upon these study findings must extend the emancipatory agenda instituted with these participant families. As described in the study limitations, the restricted time frame, wherein participants were exposed to the supportive relationship necessary within the attempt at a conference of power to those operating from a marginalized frame of reference, limited the success of the humanistic agenda. Therefore, it is suggested that future study employ a mixed-methods approach in which an experimental design attempts to intertwine qualitative methodology with long-term counseling processes derived from a Rogerian theoretical model. Research of this nature would extend the three part interview

series employed herein into a longitudinal study. It is recommended that this process would include moving beyond the data saturation achieved here to in-depth investigation where each interview would rigorously explore the componential constructs identified by families as relative to their change process. Interviews would continue to follow the parameters within this study designed to inspire and measure participant empowerment. Results from a lengthier study of this nature would both confirm the data presented here that suggests a movement toward de-marginalization has occurred and provide results that indicate whether a lengthy engagement is necessary for pervasive empowerment.

### *Implications for Intended Audience*

The construction of the guiding framework for this study most concretely informs family systems literature and is specifically relevant to family counselors. However, there are broad implications contained herein that are applicable to all counselors operating in the immediate aftermath of natural disaster and to counselor educators as well. Although generalizations to population are not possible from a qualitative inquiry, Yin (1994) asserts that findings are generalizable to theory. As such, implications arise out of theoretical assumptions developing from study findings. The following implications for these respective audiences should inform practice relative to the research questions posed for this study.

#### *Trauma Counselors*

The implications for those immediately responding to trauma can best be addressed by returning to an analysis of participant data. Participants in concert requested a combined approach by trauma counselors integrating empathy, respect, and valuing positions. This demand, while consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of most counseling approaches, is in

contrast to the treatment many participants actually received. As a result, the effectiveness of current models of counseling when applied in response to a natural disaster must be evaluated to determine how theory and practice were so inconsistent in the experiences of these study participants. Further, a return to the Rogerian approach (Corey, 2001) emphasizing the importance of establishing a meaningful and therapeutic relationship in all counseling endeavors must be undertaken. Participants demand that effective interventions arise from respectful recognition of individual and family narratives, including acknowledgment of and response to specific requests for help.

In addition to a focus on the client / counselor relationship, findings suggest that trauma counselors must extend conversations beyond the immediate reactions and responses of victims of trauma to include exploration of family systems of meaning making. Conclusions from data analysis in this study emphasize a significant shift in family identity as a result of the on-going trauma of experiencing and then recovering from a hurricane. Moreover, the language of ambiguity as identified in the additional findings and the conflicting perceptions of families with regards to various within-case themes suggests that families often are unclear as to what defines their family even prior to a traumatic event and then struggle mightily as trauma disrupts an already ambiguous process. As such, it is imperative that trauma counselors explicitly direct families to explore the constructs and beliefs that define their family and investigate the ways in which trauma may impact their shared identity.

Finally, the analysis of family social class worldviews and the relevance of these constructions to trauma experiences indicates that trauma counselors are remiss in their failure to expressly investigate the meaning of social class experiences in family lives. Although counseling theory and supporting literature rarely indicates a need for counselors to incorporate



dialogue surrounding class into counseling objectives, SCWM (Liu, et. al., 2004) directly outlines ways in which these constructs can be implemented in counseling and offers theoretical suggestions as to why they are relevant. The findings from this study reveal that social class is a primary component of trauma recovery from the initial stages of trauma exposure. Additionally, the findings from the emancipatory component of the study suggest that the engagement of families in the process of attempting to decentralize dominant discourse have therapeutic value in the process of recovery. Thus, if counselors are able to engage families in this process at initial stages of their trauma experience, the possibilities for fewer negative shifts in family identity emerge.

#### *Family Counselors*

While many of the implications for family counselors overlap with those for trauma counselors, there are specific ways in which these implications coincide with appropriate systemic intervention. Although there are many different theoretical models employed in family counseling, they share a belief in understanding the beliefs and values that guide family behavior. Narrative therapy is an appropriate outgrowth of these study findings due to its foundation in the tenets of social constructionism. This model suggests that family counseling is best employed by the identification of family stories and the ways in which these stories inform the process of familial incorporation of new experiences (Weingarten, 2004). Within this model, the influence of exposure to both event and process trauma (Figley & Barnes, 2005) on these participant family identities can be constructed as a need to investigate the family stories that support the ways in which these identities shift. Further, when employing this theory, these findings suggest that counselors must work with families to construct alternate family stories that would capitalize on the positive reports of growth and change by these participants and diminish

ambiguous responses through the application of these positive changes as guiding frames for new narratives.

Another implication for family counselors is the need for validation through recognition of the long-term effects trauma can have on family meaning making and behavior. Although the findings presented in this study do not suggest through generalizability that all families recovering from natural disaster should be assumed to engage in a lengthy process of identity restructuring, they do imply that, because this was true for all members of this study, investigation as to whether it is true for families engaged in family counseling is warranted. Further, the overlap in existing trauma literature (Green, 1998; Sattler, et. al., 2006; Norris et. al., 2002) between trauma responses irrespective of the type of trauma suggests that counselors would best serve clients by exploring any historical traumatic processes the family has undergone in order to determine whether these experiences continue to influence daily family constructions.

Family counselors are also encouraged to give the same attention to social class constructions that are suggested for trauma counselors. Liu et. al. (2004) present a holistic argument for the infusion of class investigation into individual counseling experiences. The results from this study suggest that the experiences of constructing identity and incorporating classist messages that make social class a construct worthy of investigation with individual clients are similarly present and significant for family systems. Further, the relationship between class and trauma for the participants of this study implies that counselors working with families who have similarly experienced trauma and report being members of a marginalized social class group must explore the potential relationship for their clients between class and healing. The incorporation of these areas for inquiry into a family counseling model, whether derived from

Narrative thought or an alternate theory, will infuse an additional layer of substance into the restructuring of family experiences.

### *Counselor Educators*

Implications for counselor education are born out of those for practicing clinicians and should inform the process of training counselors to adequately address these processes. The current model of family counselor training explicitly involves conveying the multi-faceted layers of family interactions and the factors contributing to resulting beliefs, emotions and behaviors. Findings from this study suggest that an essential component of effective education must be the explicit inclusion in family counseling courses of the importance of family identity. Cross-case analysis reveals the way in which relationship with community, immediate and extended family, constructions of social class, perceptions of other individuals, and the process of growth and change all directly contribute to the construction of identity for the families in this study. While these specific categories provide a broad template for areas counselors in training might consider exploring with their clients, they ultimately suggest the need for educators to instruct students on the importance of identifying the factors relevant for each client family in their own identity formation. Further, counselor educators must infuse lectures that directly outline the ways in which family identities shift and reform over time.

In addition to the explicit insertion of language and process surrounding family identity formation into didactic and training experiences, these findings suggest that the systemic influence of trauma be included in family-specific coursework. While literature exploring these processes is limited, these findings coupled with the work of Figley and Barnes (2005) among others investigating family systems and trauma can serve as the foundation for discussions on the significant impact of trauma. Moreover, the positive assertions of many participants in this study

regarding both individual and familial growth and change must be highlighted. Counselors in training are presented with the symptomology of PTSD and other negative outgrowths of trauma, but these study results when situated within the wellness model guiding the counseling profession demand that students be exposed to the resilient, positive experiences of families as well.

Finally, despite the emphasis by the counselor education organization CACREP (2001) on multicultural awareness in all areas of counselor training, the dearth of counseling-based literature investigating social class as a central construct in family functioning parallels the lack of focus of counselor education programs on constructions of class. Foundational textbooks (Lee, 1997) used in multicultural counseling courses expand upon many components of diversity but are primarily focused on race and ethnic culture. This absence of a significant discussion related to the impact of social class on both counselors and clients must be explicitly infused into current models of multicultural training. Participants in this study detailed the central ways in which social class contributes to their interpretations of many essential components of their lives. While again these findings do not suggest that generalizations regarding all members of marginalized classes can be made, they do contribute to a theoretical understanding of family systems. The resulting implication is that, without explicit direction by counselor educators encouraging the recognition and exploration of client social class constructions, families may be inadequately served.

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## APPENDICES

### *Appendix A*

#### *Initial Telephone Interview Screening Guide*

- 1) How many adults live in your home and are part of what you consider to be your family? (Must have at least 2)
- 2) When people talk about social class, like “middle class” “working class” “upper class” – what does that mean to you?
- 3) How would you describe your families’ social class status?
- 4) Do you feel like your family has suffered in any way because of your social class status? How so?
- 5) Is your home located in the city of New Orleans or Orleans Parish(Must be yes)
- 6) Are the adults in your family able to attend three interviews (about one hour each) to talk about your family’s experiences during the recovery from Hurricane Katrina?
- 7) Are you comfortable with being both audio and video-taped for participation in this study?
- 8) What questions do you have for me about what it means for your family to participate in this study?

#### For families who meet study criteria:

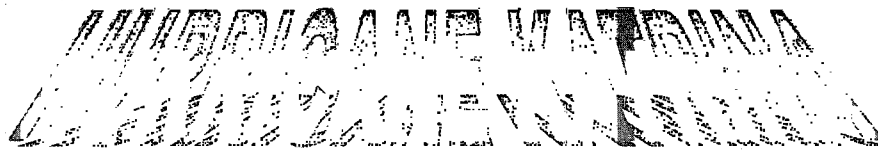
- Let me get your address and telephone numbers & let’s go ahead and schedule our first interview now. At the first interview, there will be some forms I will need you to sign explaining what it means to participate in the study and your rights and responsibilities as study participants.
- In addition to the interviews and the family event, I will be asking for your feedback on the notes I take from our interviews. I would like for the adults in your family to help me to decide what themes come out of our interviews and want to be able to check with you to make sure the themes I identify reflect what you all meant when we were talking.
- After we have completed the interviews and have attended the family event, I will give your family a \$100 as a thank you for your participation.
- Let me give you my phone number and email so that if you have any questions between now and our first interview, you can get in touch with me.

*Appendix B*

*Participant Flyer*

Would Your Family  
Like to Share Your  
**STORY**?

We are looking for families interested in  
participating in research about the recovery process  
from



Does your family meet the following criteria?

- ❖ Have two adults in the home – relationship does not matter – who can participate in three interviews, an hour long each?

Get a

**\$100** Gift Card

for completing study participation

Call 804-212-8143 or email [EEGODW@WM.EDU](mailto:EEGODW@WM.EDU) to participate

*Appendix C**Researcher as Instrument Statement*

My position as a researcher of Hurricane Katrina Families was born out of my connection to the area and the community. As researchers, we are often drawn toward areas of specialization that have touched our lives directly, and my decision to investigate the impact of Katrina on New Orleanians developed as I watched my husband's family suffer through the storm itself and then struggle to rebuild their lives and families. Having lived in New Orleans for 10 years, I was well acquainted with the process of hurricane evacuations and the emotional questions that inevitably arose: should I stay or should I go – what should I bring with me if I leave – what do I need if I stay – what will happen if my home is not here upon my return. However, I was also familiar with the surreal feeling of it all, the belief in your heart of hearts that this is just another fire drill, and one that is increasingly expensive to participate in. And so, as my husband – a New Orleans native – and I witnessed the desperation, the shock and the numbness extend into weeks, months, and then years for our family members, I began to formulate research questions related to their struggles. A review of the literature demonstrated that there were no investigations offering the answers to the questions I sought – and my study was born.

Founding a study on a topic so intimately connected to me personally demands intense scrutiny in my role as researcher to pull back the layers of connection and expose the ways in which my personal reality has been shaped through my experiences unrelated to the research project itself. The first connection is to the geographic area I am investigating. New Orleans was my first adult home. I found and developed independence there, met a husband, started a family, pursued a post-secondary education, earned two degrees, and began my career all in the Crescent

City. I love New Orleans. I love the history, the architecture, the food, but most importantly, I love the people and their culture. There is a laissez-faire attitude that permeates the society and that promotes a freedom of personal expression and individuality that I have not found anywhere else. I found the people to be generous and kind, and I found that I was accepted for who I was without caveats or preconditions.

Yet, I must also recognize the things about New Orleans that I struggled with. The state of public education is abysmal and, throughout my time there, only got worse. The government and city infrastructure are inextricably linked to corruption and the people of the city complain about these practices while paying off tickets and voting for the old guard unashamed. As an outsider living in New Orleans, I could never completely embrace the culture fully because I wanted more for my city. But, I recognized and recognize that it may not be what the city wants for itself. It is my foreign embrace of values and customs that are rooted in the Puritanical conservative America that I was raised in that clash with the New Orleans slogan – *Laissez Les Bon Temps Roulez – Let the Good Times Roll!*

I have recognized the need to account for both my attraction to and frustration with the culture of New Orleanians throughout all phases of my research. The theoretical foundation of my study presumes independent socially constructed realities. Thus, the construction of my premise, the development of my research questions, the gathering of my data, and the analysis of study results have all been filtered through my lens. While this is presumed to be true for all research, it is particularly relevant when the researcher is so emotionally connected to the culture and struggles of the participants. As such, the thematic development in this study is recognized to be a by-product of the intermingling of my underlying beliefs about New Orleans and the



people of the city with the constructions and narratives of those who participated in the interviews.

In addition to my connection to New Orleans and its residents, I must also explore the ways in which my beliefs and experiences have constructed my own views about social class status. The Social Class Worldview Model argues that social class status is an independently developed construct that is based upon interactional experiences and social messages as they are interpreted by an individual. This is a foundational assumption in the investigation within my study as I have attempted to ascertain what social class means to my participants and how it is a part of their development of family identity as they recover from the experience of Hurricane Katrina. However, without an investigation into my own understanding of the term social class and the ways in which I define social class status for myself and others, the analysis of participant meaning is incomplete. It was the social interaction of our conversations during the interviews that gave birth to the explanations the participants provided to demonstrate how social class has played a part in their family experiences. Thus, a presentation of the framework that guides my conception of social class is a crucial component to an effective analysis of participant meaning.

I grew up in a home that most people would likely consider to be an upper-middle class environment. Our family defined ourselves as alternately middle-class and upper-middle class, depending upon the context of the discussion. As a result, I often identify myself with values that historically drive middle-class thinking such as the importance placed on education, a respect for fidelity, and abiding by laws and rules, among others. As I situate myself within the context of this research, I believe I am informed alternately by my own class-based values and the skills I have learned as a counselor that include limiting judgment and an accepting position as a

listener. However, the analysis of data will most certainly be tied to my own class status as I identify themes through my own lens. While I will attempt to look through my own values to embrace the context of the research, I believe that our understanding and constructions are so intimately tied to our own class and value systems, it is impossible to achieve objectivity in the development of themes. Therefore, my class status as I define it will contribute to the themes I co-construct with my research participants as our voices merge together in the analysis process.

*Appendix D**Samples from Reflexive Journal*

6/3/08

I have begun the process of hanging up fliers and getting participants. I struggled with decisions as to where to place the fliers – I tried to put them in diverse areas of the city where primarily people who may meet study criteria would see them, but felt ineffectual. I ended up placing them primarily at bus stops on telephone poles, and also was able to leave a stack of fliers at the WIC office. I've signed up two families for participation and am hoping now to have 8 families as opposed to the 6 I had originally planned on getting. Right now I'm thinking about ways to diversify the sample – the two families so far are both made up of only women and are both African American and both live Uptown. I would like families from a few different areas of the city, families that include men, and families of different races. I'm considering going to hand out fliers for the remainder of this week – maybe standing outside of some places where I think there would be a lot of foot traffic. Also, I've made a few connections – Dr. Byron Harrell of Baptist Ministries in New Orleans and just left a message for Eleanor Simmons of CARE – some sort of non-substance abuse recovery program in New Orleans (I'm a little unclear right now as to recovery from what). Dr. Harrell has had my info forwarded via email to some families who might be interested in participating and I've left a voicemail for Ms. Simmons. My other primary concern right now is where I'm going to hold my interviews. My plan is to spend some time next week in the areas around where my subjects live trying to secure either a school, a church, or a library where I could conduct the interviews. I'm frustrated that OLHCC has not really responded to my emails although they said they would be more than willing to help. I'm thinking that if I go out to New Orleans to hand out fliers tomorrow that maybe I will just go over there and see who I can pin down. I feel that I would be able to possibly get some Caucasian families from the clinic and also families that live on the WestBank.

6/4/08

A stroke of genius! I decided to go to the quarter to hand out fliers to the people who work in the quarter – palm readers, carriage drivers, etc. I believe I have 2 – maybe 3 possible Caucasian families as a result – I'm feeling much better about the possibility of having a racially diverse sample. I currently have a definite 3 families signed up – one who is checking w/ her husband, one who should call later tonight, and one who may or may not qualify re: class status.

6/17/08

I have six families signed up – 2 Caucasian families both located in the French Quarter and 4 African American families – 3 Uptown & 1 in the Lower Ninth. My biggest struggle right now is securing locations for the interviews. This has been more challenging than I expected. I first planned on using the N.O. public library but they want to charge me \$20 for each time I use their meeting room which won't work out b/c of budget constraints. I've decided to film the Quarter families in Jackson Square and am hoping since I'm just using a camcorder I won't be hassled about not having a permit! The uptown families and the family in the 9<sup>th</sup> ward are my bigger challenges. The Ashe Cultural Center Uptown has expressed interest in hosting me and would seemingly be a perfect place – very close to all of my participants' homes and a celebratory community center for African American New Orleanians. However, the director asked me to go

through the scheduling coordinator and I have not been able to get her to return my attempts at contact. So far I have emailed her, left one phone message, and dropped by (she was in a meeting so I left a note asking her to call). I am hesitant to call again b/c I don't want to harass her, but at the same time I feel the need to find out if this place will work out or if I need to begin looking someplace else. My second lead in the area is with the Dryades YMCA, so I may begin contacting them today if I don't hear something soon from Ashe. I will have my first interview tomorrow with one of the Quarter families at 5 pm. I feel anxious – really just about doing an interview in general, but am thankful I will have Ian with me as a camera man and someone who may be able to talk to anyone should a problem arise re: the permits.

6/18/08

I had my first interview scheduled for today but the participant called to say that her fiancé is in jail and they won't be able to make it. I am thinking about the challenges specific to my population – those who consider themselves to be in oppressed classes of society often face challenges that prohibit their keeping / arriving at / scheduling appointments, etc. I am wondering how this will affect my study with regards to participant compliance (i.e. participating in a series of 3 interviews). I also am feeling let down that my first interview was not able to go ahead as planned – anxiety related to wanting to get started with the interviews themselves, wanting to have all of my participants lined up, the places where I will hold the interviews secured, etc. I told the participant I would check back with her in a week or so – she is uncertain how long he will be in jail. She continued to express interest in participation, primarily it seems because of the money being offered as a thank-you.

6/24/08

I felt that I had 3 good leads on participants (including the couple that cancelled last week) and now none of the 3 seem to be working out. Also, I have had a number of names of people who have called after seeing a flier and who say complete the phone interview with expressed interest, but then will not return my calls when I call to set up an appointment. I am guessing that some of their reticence may come from talking to other people (friends, family, etc.) about the project and those people being skeptical about the motivation behind the interviews (you can't get something for nothing, if it's too good to be true it probably is, will there be questions about the use of FEMA money, etc.). In fact, I even had one woman who had said she would be ready to do the interviews this week hang up on me when I called yesterday to schedule the first interview. However, I have talked to the participant who cancelled last week and they have rescheduled for this Thursday, so I am hopeful that this interview will get the data collection process started.

12/5/08

I have been slowly, slowly transcribing data and still have 7 interviews left to transcribe. I have decided at this point to pay a transcription company to complete the transcription process for me so that I can move forward w/ coding. I am disappointed that I was not able to complete all of it on my own b/c I do believe that I have become more in tune w/ the data and my participants through the process of transcription and I am curious as to whether the fact that I did not analyze certain participants' interviews will affect how immersed I am with their data.

12/27/08

The data is now all transcribed w/ the exception of two interviews that I can't find audio files for. I will transcribe those two interviews myself directly from the videos and then will begin the coding process tomorrow. I am excited and enthusiastic about moving on to actual data analysis and am looking forward to what I will find.

12/28/08

I have begun the coding process. It is actually moving much more quickly than I imagined. I wonder if I forget about old codes as I move the second and third interviews and am trying to review the coding list every page or so in order to be more familiar w/ codes that were developed early in the process. I have read three other qualitative dissertations to get a better handle on how themes emerge. The way I understand the process is that each case has its own set of codes that will independently define the themes for that case. Then, all of the data is looked at as a whole to develop cross-case codes and themes. I had originally planned on doing both the cross case and within case analysis before beginning the writing process, but have now changed my mind. I think I will code each case independently, develop themes, and then write my chapter 4 before beginning the process of developing cross-case codes. It seems to me that I will be even more familiar with all of the data by doing this and can then have some ideas as to how the participants connect to one another before I begin the process of developing the cross-case themes for chapter 5. I am still uncertain whether I should re-code all of the data with one coding key in order to develop cross case themes or if I can just put piles together of the chunked data that are related.

1/3/09

I have completed the coding process and am now moving on to developing themes. My plan is to cut all of the data into color coded strips and then put all of the like color patterns together so I can look at each code as a whole. I will begin this arts and crafts portion today ☺

1/5/09

Today I have begun to develop themes. I have completed the themes for 2 of the case studies. My process was as follows – pull out all of the emic code headers for a case and place them on a bulletin board. Look for relationships between the ideas underlying each header and group into like categories. Then, when necessary, further connect categories to each other. It was fascinating to me to see the themes emerge. When I initially put all of the headers on the bulletin board, it seemed that there were very few connections. However, as I began to think about the underlying meanings and ideas for each of the categories, the connections between categories sort of effortlessly appeared. Four to five themes simply grew out of the process and so far I haven't felt as if I have had to "reach" to make connections between ideas at all. After I had the themes established, I made a handwritten outline of the themes – with one label called "my idea" that used my words to explain what I thought the theme meant and one label called "title – their words" in which I looked through all of the data related to that theme and attempted to choose participant words that best illustrated the thread of the theme. Within each theme, I pulled out obvious sub-themes and used the same labeling process on the outline. After the outline was complete, I glued the "title" for each theme to a piece of construction paper and glued the headers for all of the codes that fell under that theme underneath each title. This way, I will be able to easily glance at the construction paper "outline" to see which color codes to look at as I write about the themes.

1/8/09

W/in case themes are complete. I was very involved in the process and think I understand the expression "falling in love with your data" which I have been hearing about for some time. Today I will begin the process of analyzing the videos for internal observation data and will create notes on the artifacts brought by the participants. After this is complete, I will go through the notes to see if themes are illustrated in the observational and artifact data and I will also analyze the external observational data (already completed) as well. I believe that I will be looking to verify the themes that have emerged already, but I will also look for threads that may

illustrate ideas that were less prominent in the interview data to see if I have overlooked any thematic connections between the interviews, observations and artifacts.

*Appendix E*

*Interview Guide*

*First Interview – Family Processes*

A. Begin interview by obtaining demographic information from each participant:

1. Name
2. Age
3. Marital Status / Relationship Status
4. Children in home? Number of children / ages – Other individuals in the home / ages
5. Racial & Ethnic identity
6. Class Status (lower-middle, working, lower)
7. Geographic home location (Uptown, New Orleans East, Westbank, etc.)

B. Questions

1. Describe your family before the hurricane.
  - i. How did you all communicate with each other?
  - ii. What was a typical family day?
  - iii. What were the relationships in the family like?
2. How did your family interact during the storm & evacuation?
3. What is your family like now after the hurricane?
  - i. How do you all communicate with each other? Are there differences from before the storm? Why?
  - ii. What is a typical family day? Is this different? Why?
  - iii. What are the family relationships like? Are they different? Why?
4. How has your family changed as a result of the hurricane?
5. Looking back over the last 3 years, what things stand out as specific memories about your family's recovery? Why do these particular memories stand out for you?
6. Did your family change in ways that you didn't like as a result of the stress of the storm? If so, in what ways?
7. What sort of coping strategies do you think your family used to deal with the stress of recovering from the storm?
8. Is there anything else about your family's experience of recovering from Hurricane Katrina that you think is important to share?

C. Family Evaluation

1. What was participating in this interview like for you?

2. How do you think it will or will not change the way you think about your family's recovery from Katrina?
3. How would you describe your personal reaction to this interview?



*Appendix F*

*Interview Guide*

*Second Interview – Social Class*

A. Reorientation

1. How have you thought about the experience of the last interview?
2. How would you characterize your family's experience in this study so far (positive, neutral, negative)?

B. Questions

1. How would you describe your family's social class status?
2. What does \_\_\_\_\_ class mean to you?
  - i. What is your definition of what it means to be \_\_\_\_\_ class?
  - ii. What things make your family \_\_\_\_\_ class?
  - iii. What class would other people (friends, co-workers) say that you are?
3. Before the hurricane, what characteristics did your family have – ways of thinking, doing things, or communicating with each other – that you think come from your social class?
4. How was your family's experience of the hurricane itself shaped by your social class?
5. How was your family's recovery from the hurricane shaped by your social class?
6. Since the hurricane, what characteristics does your family have – ways of thinking, doing things, or communicating with each other – that you think come from your social class? Have these things changed as a result of the hurricane recovery?
7. Is there anything else related to your social class and the hurricane or hurricane recovery that you think is important to share?

C. Family Evaluation

1. What was participating in this interview like for you?
2. How do you think it will or will not change the way you think about your family's social class? What about your social class and your family's recovery from Katrina?
3. How would you describe your personal reaction to this interview?

D. Explanation of Artifact Data for next interview:

Please as individuals and as a family select items that you think represent your family's experience with the recovery from Hurricane Katrina. These items can be connected to your social class status and the impact on your recovery process or have

no connection to class and simply reflect your family's experience of the recovery from Hurricane Katrina – whatever seems most relevant for you and your family. Some examples of what you could bring would be photos, letters, personal or family objects, or documents. But please don't feel limited to these things – they are just examples – bring anything you feel is most representative of your family's experiences.

*Appendix G*

*Interview Guide*

*Third Interview – Family Artifacts*

**A. Reorientation**

1. How have you thought about the experience of the last interview?
2. How would you characterize your family's experience in this study so far (positive, neutral, negative)?
3. Is there anything about the interview process that you would like to discuss?

**B. Questions (followed for each item brought)**

1. Tell me about why you chose this item.
  - i. How did you all select this item?
  - ii. What does it represent to you?
  - iii. How does this item connect to your family?
  - iv. Is this item connected to your family's social class status? If so, how?
  - v. What sort of feelings do you have when you talk about / look at this item?
  - vi. How is this item a part of your family's story about recovering from Hurricane Katrina?

**C. Family Evaluation**

1. What was participating in this interview like for you?
2. How did it change the way you think about your family's Hurricane Katrina recovery story?
3. Have these interviews changed the way you think about your experience with Hurricane Katrina? If yes, how? If no, why not?
4. How would you characterize the experience of participating in this study for your family?

*Appendix H*

*Sample Family Observation Notes*

Elvis & Anne Margaret

Sitting far apart

A.M. – very fidgety, moves a lot – face has odd movements

Look at each other while telling stories – she laughs and smiles frequently

Dressed in similar outfits – black t-shirts, “goth” style hair and make-up

Elvis – eyes look up and side to side while he remembers

She looks at him while he’s talking and smiles a lot – he rarely looks to her – looks up & away mostly while he talks – stares down while she talks w/ occasional glances at her

She fixes clippings in the scrapbook that are coming loose while they look through it

He plays w/ his rings while she talks and looks down – she looks to him while she tells the story, looks like she’s trying to draw him in

Nelly & Yvonne

Sitting relatively close, on the same side of the table – relaxed demeanor, arms folded in a comfortable position

Look primarily at the interviewers as they talk

Smile at one another as the other person talks and nod

Keep an interested focus on the other person who is talking

Move close together as artifacts are presented

Animated as they talk about important points – both use a lot of body language to illustrate points

Nelly regularly gets up to check on her dog

Yvonne’s son wants to sit and watch one interview and she gets him a chair just out of the camera range – looks at him and smiles frequently

Both seem calm and relaxed throughout the interview

Nelly cries when she talks about her husband

Often change from audience of interviewers to a conversation w/ each other – explaining things the other one doesn’t know about

Nelly looks to the card as she talks about her “savior” looks fondly as if looking at the person himself

Point to the table to make points

*Appendix I*

*Observation Field Notes*

Observation Field Notes:

6/24

Shopping at Goodwill today – listening to conversations between customers and employees – customer made a joke about the lack of inventory since Katrina and how nothing at Goodwill is really old now – employees laughed and then stated (in a lighthearted way) that there better not be another storm, or the thrift store industry will be wiped out for good

6/28

Man is talking to a neighbor – they are complaining about the way people have landscaped their yards post-Katrina, a lack of following the neighborhood covenant (specifically putting in Palm Trees despite a ban on them in the covenant)

6/30

Community Coffee House – Patrons sitting outside are talking about the job market – the whole conversation is interspersed with the marker “Before Katrina” and “Since Katrina” – although the hurricane itself was not a topic of conversation, it was the only prevalent time marker in the conversation.

7/4

Multiple incidences in community dialogues talking about “before Katrina” and “after Katrina”

7/10

McDonalds – large flat-screen television on the wall showing the news, maybe two customers appeared to be paying attention until the weather came on and the weatherman started talking about a hurricane in the atlantic. Every person in the restaurant turned to look at the television; many stopped eating, stopped talking, and just watched.

7/14

Overheard discussion at a restaurant between two women discussing how frustrated they are with people who have not “pulled themselves up” following Katrina. They expressed disdain for individuals they felt were relying too heavily on the help of the government or charity organizations. They offered many examples of the ways in which their families have been able to recover without significant aid.

7/25

Mall – people discussing w/ one another “what are people in the rest of the country saying about us now? What do they say about the way things are still such a mess?”

11/08

Blog posting from New Orleans resident “25 things about me” list – “1. I was born and raised in New Orleans, and evacuated for Katrina. For a long time, I was ambivalent about how I felt about being uprooted like that. Now, I’ve decided that I miss New Orleans, but I’m not homesick. That way, I can acknowledge the longing, but still stay open to the great things that have unfolded in my life in Austin.” – generated dialogue in comments section about identity as a New Orleanian

*Appendix J*

*Sample Artifact Notes*

*Randy & Cherise*

2 Teddy bears wearing camouflage clothes – Randy holds one, Cherise holds the other – comment that “they looked better than this – they had berets” – bears are in good condition – came from Irving, TX where they evacuated – states that “everybody be wanting these bears” – very important to the family, will always keep them so they can remember where they were

Family photo album – a few pictures from TX – many family photos not related to the storm – Randy shows us every member of the family and tells us about them – shows pics of the boy when they were young and talks about how much they’ve grown – shows wedding pictures

*James & Helen*

Self portrait of Helen in her studio – she is nude, standing on a ladder w/ satin pink bridal shoes salvaged from the studio standing on a ladder w/ debris and collapsed structure all around her – reminds her of the smells of Katrina – black and white photo w/ matting but no frame – her face is looking down – specifically distinguishes her art as separate from the “documenting our tragedy and selling it back to us” – as art that “transcends” and you can’t tell where it is – was featured in an exhibition at NOMA

Intends to show his website – McDonalds webservice is fee based so he can’t access the internet – talks about how he made art out of the debris and left over wood from Katrina – became focused on “reusing” the discarded rubble from the storm

Appendix K

Coding Samples

Danielle & Greg Coding Key (D G)

*Demographic Info*

~~██████████~~  
We missed home  
We were looking for jobs  
Ungrateful and crazy  
Working  
Devastating to have to up and leave  
It was real, real nice  
Praying every day  
There's nothing  
We can't do anything for you  
Had gave us a lot  
(Kids) Wanted to stay  
It was a whole new beginning  
*I want friends, yeah*  
*We're closer, I think*  
*Parents don't know anything*  
Go, because its gonna hit  
Not making plans  
*We didn't lose no one*  
*We couldn't find her*  
*People are so different now*  
*Stuff we hadn't even thought about*  
*The Blessed Class*  
*Get right into school*  
*We got the whole house to ourselves*  
Just really get to know them

Edgar and Susan (ES) Interview 1 Coded

**Interviewer:** Earlier when I asked what gets you through when you're feeling (inaudible), I don't think I got an answer from you. What sort of things do you do (inaudible)?

**E:** I don't know. I know I was feeling like -- only like the effects I have from Katrina, I don't know, they kind of shaped me. My personality helped me get my overall experience and it was like an awkward one because I just came from my mother into a devastated environment. It wasn't ordinary, but it was definitely a big change, a drastic change at that point. So I'm trying to fend for myself and definitely -- I don't know. about it, as far as being suffocated, I don't really feel suffocated. I don't know. I don't have any effects from Katrina. I feel like -- I don't like

talking about it. It just -- I don't know. It just feels (inaudible) *and I know it's more devastated now because it's just struggling because of the business and everything. There's no money here. As far as (inaudible), I'm not doing that well as far as the money and everything and it's hard for them to come back when a lot of the tourism is not there anymore because -- we heard a lot of bad things about the city on the news and shit. So it shows how (inaudible).* Yeah, I don't know, as far as being suffocated, I don't feel suffocated. I think now I feel suffocated because the city just feels like it's too much for me to handle anymore. I don't feel safe (inaudible) and I don't really like it here anymore. I used to love it and really like it and it's a lot strange. It's came the wrong way from a (inaudible).

S: *You can still go two miles in that direction and find a house that hasn't been touched yet, just still boarded up, just still (inaudible). It's just still there.*

Interviewer: *What are your thoughts on the emotional impact of that for people who --*

S: *It was devastating. This is a place where there's a home, happy family, it didn't look that way before, and now you'll have \$300,000 house next to a patch of grass that's seven feet tall in the air with a shack in the middle of it that hasn't been touched. It's got to be -- they can't do anything about it. You can't go pay your own money to rent a bulldozer and pull the whole thing down. There's a time for that. They're worried about recovering the stove. They're suffocated as well.*

E: *I guess it is kind of hard to imagine losing everything they ever had, or everybody around you -- like you've grown up here, you've lived here, you've know how it is. And my cousin lived down the street from me, but now he's dead and his mom lives in Houston. I guess that's a pretty big change.*

S: *My friend Stephanie grew up right across from you and her house had ten feet of water in it for two weeks, and so they lost everything that was hers from being a tiny, little baby until -- she was 24 years old. So everything her whole family has -- she's got two other siblings, so I watched their family. They had two trailers in the front yard for four or five of them for almost two years before they had drywall and everything back up in their houses. I remember it being really tough for her. She was one of those people, "I will always live here. It doesn't matter. I love New Orleans where I'm born and raised." She was one of those people.*

James and Helen (J H) Interview 2

E: *Is there anything else you think of related to social class, related to the hurricane -- recovery itself, that you think is a really important point?*

H: *People that had resources and means and vehicles were able to get out faster -- but that's just the way it is. And b/c of the way our neighborhoods are set up now its like not really*



neighborhoods, just – that's the person I live next to and I'm going to avoid them every chance I get. So nobody really took the time to find out about the elderly people in the neighborhood, or even said I have an extra seat, or whatever. And there's even PSAs about that – like, make sure that you, its like wow – the TV has to tell us to do it, that's fantastic! But at the same time, apparently it does. Its like I'm paying attention now to who has vehicles in our area and what age they are and if they have people visiting. Cause I wouldn't mind giving someone a ride, I wouldn't mind helping someone out.

H: We actually, oh my Lord, with some friends in Lafayette went back to New Orleans with some friends to get one of their family's housekeepers here cause she was holed up – a little bit of wine, a whole bunch of wine and a dog. I don't remember her name – but they said, we would have gotten you a whole lot sooner if you would have called. You didn't have to live like this, and she was like well now I know. And I told her I live in New Orleans, you can call me, this is my phone number – this is stupid. People need to help each other out.

H: And our workforce in New Orleans depended upon the 9<sup>th</sup> ward to sustain all the restaurants and hotels pretty much. It was a certain class of people that relied on public transportation and the public transportation failed to get people out, so of course they were still here. It's sad, but one of my kids didn't have a father and I'm pretty sure his mom was an alcoholic although we weren't able to prove – it was kind of just neglect and its hard to put a child in a different atmosphere, a lot to prove. So, I'm pretty sure she didn't make it – but he got out though. And I know this because on one of these kids Nick television shows there he was and he was in GA – he was one of these people, these artists – god, he's fantastic. I would give him a roll of fax paper and he would make a train on the whole roll – it would wrap around this room. And he had these amazing drawings about the hurricane, from his perception on the roof – and his perception was right, all the details were right – where he was, the whole neighborhood. And he was talking about how he lost his mom and he hopes she comes back, and I was like, I hope you get a new family and I hope you're a superstar. Because you deserve both. A new opportunity – and his work is on national coverage – you have more exposure than I do right now. You know, I emailed them and they emailed me back and it was really, really sweet. And then when I was in a gas station going from place to place that I didn't know they'd gotten out – I was really worried about them. I had 5 schools and I was worried about all those people in all those schools. I should look him up – he'd be in 9<sup>th</sup> grade now.

Some people had talked about this as an opportunity.

H: I call my kids all the time since I'm in special ed and anybody who has my number, call me. And like you said, they were able to relocate to TX and start a new life and they were happy.

J: Some of the trade off though, it really is a general security. Like I'm sure we'll be alright. We're boring and safe

H: We didn't go to any parts of new York where there wasn't a camera

J: But what's the trade off – we've got a bunch of millionaires in the French Quarter now..

H: When our mayor was talking about

J: Oh yeah, don't say any bad news b/c you're hurting the city – dumb ass

H: And he was talking about turning Canal St into partnering w/ Disneyland – destroying what it is, the architecture. And canning and serving Jazz is not the answer for anyone. And he was saying all the neighborhoods that had been destroyed, that's going to be green space now. And that's when he had to give us the opportunity, if you want to save your neighborhood – but

J: But everybody basically said, we'll prove it asshole. Broadmore, Holy Cross – a bunch of neighborhoods still getting together.

J: *It's like every time you go somewhere and its like New Orleans Jazz night in Philly – its like 5 guys playing rag-time, and its not, its not- sorry*

H: *It's never dead here – there's people to see, music to hear, things to do.*

H: *Can you imagine all these kids going these places and telling them about playing in parades during Mardi Gras – no one gets that kind of experience, you're like a superstar during Mardi Gras season*

J: *It would really suck if their general contribution to this world is those memories as opposed to reality – they're sitting in Houston going I used to*

H: *Well hopefully they'll get off their little tails and make their own Jazz Bands*

Claude and Monique (CM) Interview 3

E: It seems to me like that's something pretty powerful for you. I mean, while it's a physical object, its still something that has represented a large part of your life and something that was really important to you and to come back and see a majority of it destroyed, what was that like for you?

C: It was, well, it was completely devastating you know – you don't know what you had until its gone and I guess at the time I was a very materialistic person. Like I said, I had pretty much all things middle class people have – I had a home, I had a car, I had music, I had computers, I had a cell phone. I had every single thing that middle class people had. Overnight it was gone. Some things at the time of my evacuation preparation I was able to take some things, but you have to understand, people like ourselves, we were making plans to evacuate but we all expected to just be able to come back to those homes within a matter of a day or two. The hurricane was a storm in itself, but to understand what the hurricane actually did with the levees, the infrastructure that surrounds our entire community. You know the levees breaking that was devastating. The hurricane happened on a Sunday

M: Oh – I remember

C: The levees broke on a Monday, so like I said, it was wind driven water. That's the way the hurricane officials like to address it. What actually happened? That was basically it – it was wind driven water at hundreds of miles per hour – you know I was completely devastated like everybody else b/c we expected to come back to our homes the following day. I did not expect for any of the things that happened to happen. Removing all of the contents of your home, losing family members, not being able to come back to your regular life and lastly being displaced from everything you knew or worked for up until that point in your life. Those are very devastating things to have to deal with in a short period of time

E: I'm thinking about stuff we've talked about, in many ways you had to start your life all over again – new job, new house, new stuff

M: Mmmhmmm

E: New friends, you saw yourself in different ways, but there also seem to be some things that you've talked about that you really like about that new person.

C: Mmmhmm – Yes, I kinda sorta almost like the person I am now more than the person I was then – I think I was more of an insular person, because the home that I lived in was in an urban community and there weren't that many people like myself that lived in my community. I had a comfortable home, it had a two-three car parking garage, off street parking, central air & heat, everything, could have easily raised a family there and everything – up until that point I had worked for all of that for all of this time. But at the same time it made me into a different person, I wasn't as caring of a person, I wasn't as open minded to different things, you know food,

people, places, I took daily vacations and I was only interested in paying for the things I had sort of built up in my own world. Now, I'm in a completely different environment around completely different types of people and I almost like it b/c its more challenging and it's a little bit more refreshing and I feel that I can, I see the world from another side. I guess in a way it has made me a lot more accepting. I'm a lot more accepting of people places and things. Living outside of the quarter – the quarter is a famous place, but it also has some negative stereotypes – you know from people who don't live in the quarter. You can't even drive by and not see all the homeless people, you see people who don't dress like you know, you know, now I have been socialized – living in the French Quarter – you have to sort of look deep inside yourself because you're all living in the same place. And now you have to socialize with those people that before I wouldn't have, just on a normal level.

*Appendix L**Informed Consent Form*

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in a critical research study involving families who believe they have suffered as a result of their social class status and who are living in New Orleans and recovering from Hurricane Katrina. The purpose of this study is to explore family experiences in the recovery process from Hurricane Katrina and to investigate the impact of social class status on the family recovery process. The researcher, Emilie E. Godwin, is conducting this study in partial requirements for a doctoral degree in Counselor Education at the College of William and Mary.

As a participant, I understand that my involvement in the study is purposeful in that participants were chosen with the intention of providing a representation of a variety of experiences with the recovery process from Hurricane Katrina. Additionally, participants were selected to illuminate the process of family recovery for residents of New Orleans.

I understand that I will be expected to participate in 3 interviews related to my thoughts, perceptions and feelings about my family's recovery process related to Hurricane Katrina and investigating how my family believes our social class influenced our recovery experiences.

These interviews will last approximately two hours. I am aware that my family will be observed by the researcher during a family event of my choosing. I am also aware that our family will be asked in the third interview to provide objects, pictures, letters or documents that represent our experiences recovering from Hurricane Katrina. I understand that the study seeks to improve and increase the base of knowledge regarding family recovery from natural disasters, the influence of social class on the recovery process, and the specific experiences of New Orleans families following Hurricane Katrina.

I have been informed that any information obtained in this study will be recorded with a pseudonym of my choosing that will allow only the researcher to determine my identity. At the conclusion of this study, the key linking me with my pseudonym will be destroyed. All efforts will be made to conceal my identity in the study's report of the results. My personal information will remain confidential. I understand that I will be audio-taped and videotaped in my interview and these tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet for the duration of the study. I also understand that portions of the videotaped interviews may be used in research presentations, but will never include any sort of identifying information about myself or my family and will always be presented using our chosen pseudonyms.

I understand that there is no personal risk or discomfort directly involved with this research and that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time. Additionally, I understand that I am under no obligation to answer any questions that I do not wish to respond to. I further understand that it is a stated objective of this research study to promote personal family growth through the interview process. My family will engage in reflection about our experiences in the study and will share our thoughts and feelings related to our participation with the researcher throughout the study. I understand that I may keep a copy of this consent form. I also understand that as a gesture of appreciation for my involvement in this study, I will receive a gift card upon the completion of my last interview.

If I have any questions or problems that arise in connection with my participating in this study, I should contact Dr. Victoria Foster, dissertation chair and project director at 757-221-2321 or