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In loving memory of Brent K Marshall (1966-2008)

ABSTRACT

This study examines the lived experiences of 51 low-income, former and current public housing residents in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Using mixed-methodology, I assess women's capacity to evacuate, survive displacement and recover following the Hurricane Katrina disaster. Primary findings include that women were able to evacuate, despite their poverty. For those who did not, this was most commonly a choice, based on their assessment of the risk. There was not sufficient evidence to support the claim that their poverty prevented evacuation, since most women were able to pool resources with others in their social network to overcome their individual monetary barriers to evacuation.

Once evacuated, women's regular poverty survival mechanism of aid-based, kin-based and work-based assistance were partially dismantled in the disaster context, with kin assistance helping for short durations, and aid-based assistance being the most utilized in the longer term. This pattern occurred, in part, because work-based survival was dismantled by split labor markets and labor discrimination in communities receiving the evacuees in this sample. Lastly, the assessment of recovery finds that women were not able to return to their previous states of impoverishment, but were instead living in more precarious circumstances, now dependent on time-delimited disaster relief programs, all of which were due to end. In sum, short-term recovery was not available to these women, and long-term disaster recovery is questionable at best.

EVACUATION, EXTENDED DISPLACEMENT AND RECOVERY: SURVIVAL
RESPONSES OF LOW-INCOME WOMEN TO THE HURRICANE KATRINA DISASTER

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Hurricane Katrina disaster exposed the multifaceted nature of catastrophe through its social and material crisis. With thousands stranded for days and floodwaters on the rise, the magnitude of the emergency surpassed the capacity of local, state and federal governmental agencies to respond. Despite continuous national media coverage, the arrival of food and potable water took five full days, endangering the lives of women, children, the elderly and men alike. Through the lens of the Hurricane Katrina disaster, the social inequality, chronic poverty and racial segregation of New Orleans took center stage in the nation's psyche as tens of thousands of residents were seen waiting, indefinitely, for help.

Steeped in a history of inequity, New Orleans struggled to recover from Hurricane Katrina. A poorly resourced city to begin, slow recovery times and struggles with insurance companies left citizens to decide between rebuilding lives elsewhere or making their old lives work in new, challenging environments. For the poor, the loss of affordable rental housing and the demolition of subsidized public units made even a delayed return questionable as the storm's long-term displacement effects became apparent. For many, the opportunity to return was largely contingent on the flooding patterns — those whose homes did not flood returned more quickly, while those living in flooded areas had to weigh their options carefully. Yet, through the entire experience,

residents faced a plethora of challenges, beginning from the moment the storm approached.

During this chaotic period, residents were seen as victims, but in many cases, they were also actors in their own lives, making decisions at each stage of the storm and its aftermath. In response, this study examines the role of low-income, Black women as actors in their own Katrina narratives. It examines several key questions: First, how did these women create their understanding of the disaster and come to choose their evacuation pathway? Next, how did women with the least resources rebuild their lives while displaced from their homes, families and communities? Did they engage the same poverty survival strategies as before the storm successfully in their new displacement locations? Finally, what did recovery even mean for low-income women whose daily lives were already mired in the same conditions of disorder that define ‘failed recovery’ within the disaster literature?

Together, these questions investigate the lived experiences of poor, urban women throughout the Hurricane Katrina disaster, indentifying the emergent survival responses engaged on the pathway to recovery. By theorizing how survival strategies function at the intersection of gender, poverty and disaster, this research contributes to sociological theory by fusing three scholarly literatures: theories about urban poverty, research about poor women’s ‘survival strategies’ and research about disaster. It also contributes as it theorizes the concept of recovery for a highly marginalized portion of the U.S. population.

The organization of this analysis begins with a review of the relevant literature on poverty, survival and disaster. In this same chapter, I argue that three areas of the

disaster research need to be expanded to encompass low income women's relevant experiences under Hurricane Katrina. These areas include evacuation, extended displacement and disaster recovery. Next, an explanation of methodology, key concepts, sample characteristics and analytic themes follows. From this theoretical and methodological foundation, the next seven chapters consider the process of evacuation, being stranded, living displacement and rebuilding communities, engaging five main themes to analyze women's experiences — creating and choosing, helping and believing, hurting and healing, relying and living in uncertainty. Lastly, the conclusion discusses the theoretical meaning of recovery among women at the intersections of race, gender, poverty and disaster.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Understanding the evacuation, displacement and recovery experiences of low-income women originates in the literatures on chronic poverty, women's survival strategies and disaster recovery. It is also informed by the literature on the internal displacement of refugees and the vulnerability of marginalized populations during disasters. Together, these resources create the theoretical foundation for a holistic understanding and theorization of evacuation, displacement and recovery among this population. The discussion will now begin with an overview of the literature on chronic poverty.

Chronic Poverty. Chronic poverty is the experiential foundation for most women in this study. It also characterizes the city at the time of the storm, as New Orleans suffered from most urban problems associated with high rates of poverty. These problems include crime, violence, out-of-wedlock childbirth, high education dropout rates, family dissolution, drug-use, unemployment and lack of services (Wilson 1987; Massey and Denton 1993; Murray 1984; Dreier, Mollenkopf and Swanstrom 2001). Such impoverished urban environments have historically experienced legally sanctioned racial residential discrimination, including blockbusting¹, redlining², race restrictive covenants³

and racial “steering.”⁴ Such practices create and maintain the “hyper-segregated,” concentrated urban poverty dominant in American cities today, including New Orleans (Massey and Denton 1993; Gotham 2002; Yinger 1995; Patillo-McCoy 2000).

According to Massey and Denton, “hyper-segregation” is represented by a high score on four of five dimensions of segregation: unevenness, isolation, clustering, concentration, and centralization⁵ (Massey and Denton 1993: 74). For African Americans, which represent the sample examined in this study, the primary consequence of Massey and Denton’s dimensions of segregation is that these factors have “remove[d] blacks from full participation in urban society and limit[ed] their access to its benefits” (p. 74). This layering of multiple dimensions of segregation results in blacks being more segregated than any other U.S. racial or ethnic group on all “hyper-segregation” dimensions

¹ Blockbusting is a process in which a real estate agent attempts to move a nonwhite, usually black family, into an all white neighborhood for the purpose of exploiting white fears of impending racial turnover and property devaluation to buy up other property on the block at depressed prices (Gotham 2002: 25).

² Redlining is a discriminatory practice in which neighborhoods are rated based on their risk assessments, with red being the most risky. These assessments systematically undervalued older central city neighborhoods, as well as those that were racially or ethnically mixed (Massey and Denton 1997: 51).

³ A race restrictive covenant is a legally enforceable contract between property owners and neighborhood associations prohibiting the sale, occupancy, or lease of property and land to certain racial groups, especially Blacks (Gotham 2002: 37).

⁴ Racial steering is a behavior that occurs when a customer’s access to housing is constrained if s/he does not state any preference for a certain type of neighborhood, but is nevertheless shown housing in neighborhoods with a particular racial or ethnic composition, i.e. someone is directed to alternate housing based on their race (Yinger 1995: 51-52).

⁵ According to Massey and Denton (1993: 74), unevenness is the representation of blacks across residential areas, while isolation refers to the physical separation of housing by race. Clustering refers to whether black neighborhoods are scattered or contiguous, while concentration reflects the size and spread of neighborhoods — whether they are small or expansive. The final dimension, centralization, refers to whether the neighborhood is located within the urban core, or along the periphery.

simultaneously (p. 74). In this way, residential segregation creates and maintains barriers to full civic participation and functions to reinforce poverty and exacerbate its effects.

While segregation itself does not guarantee the concentration of poverty, among public housing residents, the priority given to extremely low-income households for participation in all programs effectively assures it (Abt Associates 1996). For example, research on the nationally implemented HOPE VI public housing initiative, a federal program to raze dilapidated housing and build new, mixed-income communities in its place, identified a nearly sixty percent poverty rate nationally among participants prior to relocation from public housing projects, preceding the demolition phase of the program (Kingsley, Johnson and Pettit 2003: 433). This poverty rate was over ninety percent in New Orleans (p. 432). In addition to economic segregation, racial isolation is also evident in public housing, where nationally “the *typical black household* lives in a project that is 85% black, and 8% white, with 80% of tenants below the poverty level....” (Goering, Kamely, and Richardson 1997: 734). Research by Pardee and Gotham found that in New Orleans’ public housing, segregation was absolute: out of a citywide public housing population of nearly nineteen thousand African Americans, there were just *eighteen* white residents (2005: 9). Yet, more important than the severity of hypersegregation are the consequences that segregated, concentrated poverty creates for families attempting to survive under ‘typical’ poverty circumstances.

In particular, poverty is place-bound and represents a context of both disadvantages and opportunities. Among the disadvantages, living under conditions of concentrated poverty creates new levels of material hardship for families; it determines access to jobs, transportation, education, credit, services and other opportunities (Wilson

1987, 1996; Massey and Denton 1993; Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Edin and Lein 1997; Yinger 1995; Dreier, Mollenkopf and Swanstrom 2001; Zhou and Bankston 1998). For example, in New Orleans, the educational system was commonly understood as having been grossly inadequate when compared to those of the surrounding parishes. Even before Hurricane Katrina, seventy percent of the Orleans parish schools ranked among the worst in the state and fiduciary responsibility for the entire Orleans parish educational system was transferred to the State of Louisiana (Huggins and Devine 2005). The consequence of this weak education system is reflected in the high percentage of adults *without* high school diplomas. Specifically, prior to Katrina, a quarter of the New Orleans adult population lacked a high school degree (Census 2000). A second, and more revealing indicator, though, is local literacy. A report by the Literacy Alliance of Greater New Orleans estimated in 2001 that a third to one-half of all adults⁶ in New Orleans were functioning at the lowest level of literacy, meaning that on a day-to-day basis these individuals are “likely to be excluded from all but minimum-wage work, [to] have serious difficulties helping their children with homework and experience barriers to full participation in the life of the larger communities to which they belong” (2002: 2)⁷.

Illiteracy blocks job opportunities. Without basic reading skills, the educational limitations of nearly half of all New Orleanians directly translate into limited job qualifications. Reflected by the over forty percent of individuals not involved in the workforce (Census 2000), the consequent ability to acquire and hold employment

⁶ Adults are defined as individuals aged sixteen years and older.

⁷ Being at the lowest level of literacy also means that an individual cannot identify a street intersection on a map, or read an evacuation plan. It should be noted that evacuation maps were largely absent at the time of Katrina.

remained a challenge for a substantial proportion of New Orleans residents prior to the storm. Again, failed access to employment created limited economic resources and tangible challenges to evacuation for many residents. These challenges are furthered by the low vehicle ownership rates throughout the city, with twenty-eight percent of households owning no vehicle. While over seventy percent of households do have a car, such cars among New Orleans' poorest are likely to be old and in no shape to travel long distances. One structural inhibitor to owning and maintaining a newer car is that those who are receiving state "welfare" are saddled with wealth and asset restrictions — a mere \$2,000 in "resources" are allowed for Louisianans receiving benefits under the state's Family Independence Temporary Assistance Program (FITAP)⁸. While a resource is defined as "possessions that a household can convert to cash to meet needs," and does *exclude* motor vehicles, educational savings and burial and funeral insurance (State of Louisiana 2006: II; Williams n.d.), basic savings are counted *against* the asset restrictions, meaning money in a bank account, furniture, and anything else convertible to cash must sum two thousand dollars or less to retain benefits. With such observable limits on wealth, again, chronic poverty — and the program intended to curb it — directly impacts the year, make, and quality of vehicle that a welfare recipient can afford to own, drive and maintain⁹. Thus, those lacking reliable vehicles cannot use their own

⁸ The Family Independence Temporary Assistance Program (FITAP) is the state-level implemented welfare plan, which meets the guidelines outlined by the federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program (TANF), while layering on state specific requirements. TANF replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program in 1996, which was commonly referred to as "welfare."

⁹ During a typical New Orleans evacuation, the traffic leaving the city is bumper to bumper, and can travel at speeds as low as five miles per hour, and rarely exceeds thirty-five mph, until the vehicle is at least 100

transportation for evacuation. Meanwhile, as Hurricane Katrina painfully demonstrated, the city had not planned for evacuating the neediest — neither those residents without their own dependable transportation, nor those too young, too ill, or too ability-challenged to even seek transportation out of the city in the first place.

The effects of place-bound poverty on evacuation have been consistent in New Orleans across the last three decades as well (1969 to 1999), with more than twenty five percent of individuals falling below the federal poverty threshold¹⁰ (U.S. Census 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000). By contrast, the national poverty rate during this same timeframe never exceeded sixteen percent and was about twelve percent at its lowest¹¹. As such, the poor in New Orleans face a distinct disadvantage, considering their poverty experiences are both more severe and chronic than is typical. In this manner, place — where a person lives at the time of a disaster, and the structural realities of ‘place’ at the time — have consequences for the ability of poor residents to flee a region targeted by a hurricane. Specifically, place predicts access to resources and being place-bound to a poor community predicts lack thereof. In New Orleans, this dearth is illustrated best in the loss of housing for the poor, as the public housing supply was decimated by half through neglect and planned destruction, both in conjunction with and independent of the HOPE VI housing program. Meanwhile private market rental housing costs increased over the

miles outside the city. This low speed and “stop and go” traffic makes many older cars prone to overheating.

¹⁰ The poverty threshold is established at the federal level and is applied uniformly across all states and counties, independent of cost of living and other regional expense variations, such as housing costs.

¹¹ Between 1969 and 2002, the federal poverty rate was highest at about sixteen percent in 1982 and 1992, both times following a recession. The rate was lowest in 1973 and 2000. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1960-2003. Annual Social and Economic Supplements. Online at www.census.gov/hhes/poverty/poverty02/pov02fig1.jpg. Retrieved 7/10/03.

three-decade period between 1969 and 1999, such that a ‘fair market’ rent (FMR) for a three bedroom unit in New Orleans cost eight hundred, ninety-six dollars a month, or approximately three hundred, thirty-five percent of what a full-time, minimum wage worker earned in 2002 (Pardee and Gotham 2005). With Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans housing stock was greatly reduced by the extensive city-wide flooding, and fair market rent levels again increased, by thirty-five percent in a single year, further straining the economies of the least affluent (GNOCDC 2006). Given this increase in housing costs alone, how can the poor possibly have the resources to evacuate for a hurricane, survive during extended periods of evacuation, and then return to a city with an exacerbated reduction in housing and a precipitous increase in housing costs?

The historical linkage between residential segregation and material hardship¹² maintains the effects of place-bound poverty into the present as well, because to live in high-poverty urban communities is more expensive than to live in low-poverty suburbs. Based on a meta-analysis of several works, Dreier, Mollenkopf and Swanstrom calculate the annual cost burden of living in an impoverished community to be \$4,593 for a poor family making twenty thousand dollars per year (2001: 91). This “hardship burden” represents nearly one-quarter of an already limited income. In this manner, place-bound poverty creates a life characterized by economic challenges that disable individuals from leaving their economically disadvantaged, segregated housing, because the costs of place prevent the accumulation of wealth necessary to leave. It could also be hypothesized that

¹² Material hardship differs from poverty, reflecting the ability to meet one’s needs, rather than to earn an income above the federally determined poverty threshold. Families facing material hardship often encompass the class of individuals at the classification fault line between being ‘working class’ and ‘poor’ (Edin and Lein 1997; Ehrenreich 2001; Peck and Segal 2006; Rubin 1994).

such conditions place exceptional disadvantages on poor populations who face a natural disaster, given they have the least resources to evacuate, to be displaced or to recover.

A final consideration for understanding the role of poverty in daily and disaster survival is the manner in which the poverty threshold is calculated. An absolute standard, the threshold is based upon the food costs associated with the “emergency temporary low budget diet,” a diet intended to keep a family alive for a period of about two months (Devine and Wright 1993: 12-3). As Devine and Wright explain, the total annual food cost for such a diet is multiplied by three to determine the poverty threshold; adjusted annually for inflation and family size. The first problem noted is that the temporary emergency diet is not the same as the minimum adult daily requirements; it is a substandard level of nutrition if used over a prolonged period (p. 13). Another problem lies in the multiplier of three — when the threshold was originally determined, an average family spent one-third of its income on food costs. In contrast, “recent evidence suggests that more than a third of the nation’s poorest households spend in excess of 70% of their total income on shelter alone” (p.15), with food, clothing, transportation, medical and other costs accounting for the remaining thirty percent. In this way, the threshold severely underestimates the total living costs of low-income families because it is based on a national average, and not one specific to the spending patterns of the poor, even though these are the very same families affected by the poverty threshold in the first place.

Thus, to be poor in America is to live in nutritional deprivation, economic minimalism, and very frequently in dangerous, segregated and isolated housing. Educational opportunities are inadequate and literacy is likely limited. So, how then are

such poor to prepare for, evacuate from, survive long-term displacement after and eventually recover from a major disaster such as Hurricane Katrina? How do the poor survive under such extreme circumstances? The next section examines the survival strategies engaged under ‘typical’ circumstances of impoverishment, establishing a baseline against which to compare post-Katrina survival strategies.

Women’s Survival Strategies. As previously stated, place-bound poverty generates disadvantages and opportunities. Despite the grim context created by endemic poverty in New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina, low-income families — whether in New Orleans or nationwide — have been shown to address their poverty and material hardship through a variety of survival strategies. One common strategy is to establish kin ties throughout the community, leveraging those networks to meet daily needs (Stack 1974; Edin and Lein 1997; Domínguez and Watkins 2003; Henly, Danziger and Offer 2005; Oliner 1995; Anderson 1989, 1990, 1999). By creating a collective network of kin and non-kin, individual families are able to survive by trading resources with those in their network.

Simply stated:

Whether one’s source of income is a welfare check or wages from labor, people ... borrow and trade with others in order to obtain daily necessities. The most important form of distribution and exchange of the limited resources available to the poor ... is by means of trading, or what people usually call “swapping.” As people swap, the limited supply of finished material goods in the community is perpetually redistributed among networks of kinsmen and throughout the community. (Stack 1974: 33)

In this manner, the community survives *together* by sharing resources. Yet, was this pattern upheld in New Orleans during evacuation, extended displacement and recovery

from Hurricane Katrina? With so many people scattered across the Gulf Coast region, could households locate and maintain the same systems of survival?

In addition to kin networks, research by Edin and Lein (1997) found that low-income minority women — the population of this study — also used other resources to “make ends meet.” Whether these women were on welfare or working, none were able to pay all their bills, often falling between one-third to two-fifths short of what their budget required (p. 6). In response, these women engaged a combination of three survival strategies simultaneously: utilizing resource networks, working, and obtaining social services (p. 17, p. 100-119). Similar to Stack’s kin- and fictive-kin-based community, the networks of Edin and Lein’s sample included boyfriends, children’s fathers, family and friends. These individuals frequently offered childcare, clothing, food and diapers. This pattern is also confirmed by Anderson’s work in Philadelphia, which identified the role of poor urban men as peripheral but present in the family unit, likewise bringing “pampers” and “Similac” to the women who mothered their children or whom they were courting (1989, 1999). A second survival strategy engaged by low-income mothers — working — included involvement in legal occupations, where taxes were paid and income reported, and a combination of unreported legal and illegal work. Unreported work occurs when women supplement their income with additional jobs, but either provide a false social security number to the employer or receive money “under the table.” In this way, they can receive another paycheck, while not paying taxes on such money or disqualifying themselves and their families from social service programs — the final survival strategy.

Through the combination of the first two survival strategies, kin networks and paid work, women cover many of their expenses. However, since their networks include

others who also lack financial stability (Anderson 1989, 1999), the collective resources are not plentiful enough to cover all collective needs. Furthermore, some networks can drain women's reserves (Anderson 1989, 1990, 1999; Domínguez and Watkins 2003). In Anderson's work, he noted how men will attach to their children's mothers for the stability of a home cooked meal and housing, especially when his job opportunities are limited by structural factors, mainly the economy (1989:75). Thus, without consistent financial support from a man, low-income women utilize social service organizations and federal assistance programs to fill the gap (Anderson 1989, 1990, 1999). These programs include food stamps, public housing, health clinics, food pantries, and local charities (Edin and Lein 1997; Domínguez and Watkins 2003). Of course, many programs have income caps, which task women with monitoring their incomes, being sure to decline opportunities that might make them ineligible for assistances, and ultimately, in worsened conditions (Oliker 1995). Yet, even then, day-to-day problems emerge — a broken car, a sick child, a natural disaster — which exceed the reserves of their fragile web of survival. In the first two cases, alternate strategies result: going without food, winter clothing, or medical care, having their utilities shut off periodically, living on the streets, or in shared, or low-quality housing, or utilizing soup kitchens to save money (Edin and Lein 1997: 119; Erikson 1994). In the case of natural disasters, however, little is even known regarding the ways that low-income women respond to these unexpected events. Are they able to engage the same survival skills during their evacuation and displacement as they do under 'normal' poverty circumstances? Without jobs and lacking access to traditional federal assistance programs, especially immediately following the storm, did women piece together a new working budget? Did the emerging social service disaster

‘programs’ provide the same assistance levels, or assistance at all, to people whose residence had been in a city and state other than the ones to which they evacuated?

Together these hardships — the ‘normal and chronic’ and the ‘irregular and acute’ — provide a window into the painful under-belly of American poverty. At its intersection with disaster, can traditional survival mechanisms help women recover? And what does “recovery” mean for women whose pre-Katrina economic lives had been characterized by chronic, concentrated poverty and its associated disadvantages? The next section examines the final piece of the intersectional conundrum: the disaster literature.

Explaining Disaster. While seemingly simple to define, sociological disaster research has spent much of the last fifty years qualifying what a “disaster” is and how the responses and outcomes of different disaster “types” manifest themselves. Originating in research on such natural hazards as floods, hurricanes, tornadoes and earthquakes, Fritz summarizes a disaster generally as “any unexpected mishap or baleful experience,” and sociologically as “a basic disruption of the social context within which individuals and groups function, or a radical departure from the pattern of normal expectations” (1961: 655). However, when referring to community or societal level disasters, Fritz presents a third conception, defining a disaster as:

... an event, concentrated in time and space, in which a society, or a relatively self-sufficient subdivision of a society, undergoes severe danger and incurs such losses to its members and physical appurtenances that the social structure is disrupted and the fulfillment of all or some of the essential functions of society is prevented. (1961: 655)

This conception has four core properties: disasters are (a) events in space and time, b) they have impacts on c) social units, which d) respond to the impacts (Fritz 1961; Kreps

1984: 311). As a baseline, this elaboration of a disaster's components requires that a disaster be an event that is concrete and explicit. The disaster 'event' and its 'impacts' are operationalized as independent variables, while social units affected and their responses to the disaster are seen as dependent variables (Kreps 1984: 312).

Recognizing not all disasters occur as one-point-in-time "events," another model of disasters has emerged. The second model acknowledges largely imperceptible, slow moving and hard to recognize disasters, such as slow leaking toxic contamination and other forms of environmental degradation (Mitchell 1996; Picou 1996; Edelstein 2004). These 'chronic' conditions have effects that are constantly present on a day-to-day basis and often result from various forms of "technological" disasters. Technological disasters are defined as disasters resulting from man-made causes, where failures in modern technology create new dangers for communities (Erikson 1994: 17; Roush and Watson 1993; Picou, Marshall and Gill 2004; Freudenberg 1997). Examples of technological disasters include anything from a nuclear reactor meltdown to the mechanical failure of a levee or dam, seeping contamination, or underground fires — basically any disaster resulting from an act of man, machine or technology (Mitchell 1996; Adams et al 2002; Erikson 1976, 1994; Edelstein 2004; Couch 1996). Furthermore, many disasters in the technological typology are considered "never-ending" where the contamination continues, or remediation is not simply available (Picou, Marshall and Gill 2004: 1495-6; Edelstein 2004: 21-2; Mitchell 1996). Whether acute or slow moving, in either case, some 'social unit' causes and responds to the disaster. Therefore, technological disasters cannot be described as an 'act of God,' unlike 'natural' disasters such as hurricanes and tornadoes. In fact, survivors of technological failures are often insulted if such a

designation is even engaged, recognizing the role of man in the disaster at hand (Erikson 1976; 1994: 19).

More recently, some disaster researchers have begun employing a social constructionist definition of “disaster,” instead of the natural or technological definitions, defining disaster by the collective community *outcomes* rather than focusing on the event itself — whether acute or chronic, an ‘act of God’ or an ‘act of man’ (Marshall, Picou, and Gill 2003; Quarantelli and Dynes 1977; Erikson 1994; Quarantelli 1998). As Marshall, Picou and Gill (2003) explain:

The rigid conceptual and methodological distinction between natural and technological disasters, perhaps cogent when technological disasters first emerged, appears to be increasingly less meaningful. Although people may perceive some disasters as an act of God or nature, the severity and duration of disaster impacts may be ascribed to anthropogenic factors... In short, we suggest that an a priori categorization of an event as either a natural or technological disaster is possible analytically, but increasingly difficult in the real world and is counterproductive. (p. 76-77)

They continue to show how terrorism shares characteristics of both natural and technological disasters, yet remains distinctive from either form of disaster typology. In this way, they, like Erikson (1976, 1994) call for an outcome-based definition of disaster, rather than a cause-based one. In this sense, it is the ‘trauma’ created by the event itself that makes it a disaster, as defined by the collectives most damaged by it. This means that such disparate experiences as tornadoes and floods, toxic contamination and terrorist attacks, or poverty and chronic physical victimization (such as women’s greater vulnerability than men to rape) can be conceived as disasters (Quarantelli and Dynes 1977; Quarantelli 1998; Kroll-Smith and Couch 1990; Picou, Marshall, and Gill 2004; Marshall et al 2003; Erikson 1994). In fact, Erikson argues that:

It has long been recognized, for example, that living in conditions of chronic poverty is often traumatizing, and if one looks carefully at the faces as well as the clinic records of people who live in institutions or hang out in the vacant corners of skid row or enlist in the migrant labor force or eke out a living in the urban slums, one can scarcely avoid seeing the familiar symptoms of trauma ... From that point of view, being too poor to participate in the promise of the culture or too old to take a meaningful place in the structure of the community can be counted as a kind of disaster. (1994: 21)

Which brings us back to the central question of this study: How can women, already mired in the challenges and disadvantages of chronic poverty recover from a disaster?

Complicating our understanding of the intersectional relationship between gender, poverty, and disaster is the fact that Hurricane Katrina can be designated as more than a natural or technological disaster. Hurricane Katrina qualifies as a catastrophe, a separate class in and of itself. Catastrophic disasters include events such as the Chernobyl nuclear disaster and Florida's Hurricane Andrew, a category five storm that leveled parts of Southern Dade County (Adams et al 2002; Gladwin and Peacock 1997; Smith and Belgrave 1995). Hurricane Katrina, whose damages covered 93,000 square miles of the U.S. Gulf Coast (The White House 2006: 5) and devastated New Orleans, Mississippi's Bay St. Louis, Pass Christian and Gulfport areas, also covered a much wider swath of territory than Florida's Hurricane Andrew. Moreover, in the case of New Orleans, the levee breaches that followed Katrina's winds greatly exacerbated the scope and depth of the disaster in the city. Thus, the classification of Hurricane Katrina as a catastrophe results from the extensive wind and storm surge damage in coastal Mississippi, the failure of the levee system in New Orleans and the devastatingly high death toll of over thirteen hundred people across the entire Gulf Coast region (Dynes and Rodriguez 2005; Rodríguez, Trainor and Quarantelli 2006; Harrald 2006; Kates et al 2006; Cutter and Emrich 2006; GAO 06-934).

Within the city itself, nearly eighty percent of New Orleans' housing stock was flooded, with some houses lifted off their foundations and rendered entirely uninhabitable. In the weeks following the storm, New Orleans faced an extended period without water, sewerage and electric services, as well as the closure of such institutions as schools, banks, and courts. Finally, several hundred thousand people were displaced from their homes, indefinitely in many cases. So extensive was the damage that the city's recovery was estimated to take between eight and eleven *years* (Kates et al 2006). Of course, this estimate says nothing about individual level recovery — especially among the urban poor whose resources were spatially embedded in the work and social service systems of the city, as well as the kin-based community networks which helped them sustain themselves and meet their daily needs.

Disaster Stages. To better understand the 'typical' disaster experience, this section will review Chapman's Natural Disaster Stage Model (1962, presented in Couch 1996). Next, I examine this model in relation to the lived experiences of women in this study. Due to the catastrophic level of damage, combined with the impoverishment of these women, a more detailed model is developed. A diagram of the Chapman model appears in Appendix 1.

In the Chapman model, a natural disaster progresses linearly through periods of warning, threat, impact, rescue, inventory, remedy, recovery, and rehabilitation (Couch 1996: 69). The first stage, warning, occurs when the potential for danger is recognized and made public by authorities. For example, when a television station interrupts a broadcast with news of potentially dangerous thunderstorms, this would constitute a

warning. The second stage is threat, and is indicated by “unequivocal signs of impending trouble” (p. 68). These signs may be the formation of funnel shaped clouds, in the sky — a clear tornado warning — as a storm approaches, or the formation of a tropical depression in the Gulf of Mexico. The third stage, impact, is when the threat becomes a reality and the actual event occurs. For a hurricane, this is when the storm makes landfall, showing its strength.

Once impact has passed, the response begins. In the natural disaster stage model, inventory and rescue begin immediately afterwards as people assess damages and piece together a picture of what has happened. Informal rescue activities also begin, as the damage survey may reveal trapped individuals, and these stages can occur in tandem. This initial response occurs at the community level, as its members try to help themselves in the minutes and hours following the event. Following Hurricane Katrina, Rodríguez and colleagues (2006) describe instances of such communal actions taken by workers at hotels and hospitals, by neighbors to help each other find food and by search and rescue teams who conducted rescue activities without any federal guidance or regulation prior to the establishment of the Joint Field Office in Baton Rouge, LA, which emerged to coordinate federal response efforts.

The remedy stage begins when formal government agencies such as the National Guard, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or the Red Cross enter the disaster area. These groups assume control of inventory and rescue activities, managing cleanup and recovery efforts, introducing the next stage. Recovery is defined as a reconstitution of the old community structure with a possible modification of personal

and collective life (Couch 1996: 68). Finally, rehabilitation occurs when the community “returns to normal,” as if no disaster happened at all.

For this study, the eight stages of the Chapman model are largely inadequate. First, the model does not include an evacuation stage, which dominated the Katrina disaster experiences for many individuals. In Chapman’s model, evacuation is folded into the ‘threat’ stage, but is not developed as its own stage, which is merited based on the importance of the decision-making process for these women. Chapman’s omission of the evacuation stage is likely due to the fact that many natural disasters are instantaneous (e.g. tornadoes, flash floods and earthquakes) and do not allow time for an evacuation. For example, tornado protocol is to seek shelter in a cellar, bathtub, or interior doorway. With a flash flood, one must seek higher ground or be swept away. Depending on the type of disaster, there may be little, if any, time for an organized evacuation. This immediacy is illustrated by research on a flash flood in Denver, Colorado (Drabek and Boggs 1968). According to local officials, the entirety of the “evacuation” included a police warning stating: “A twenty foot wall of water is approaching this area. You have five to fifteen minutes to evacuate. Leave for high ground immediately.” (1968: 444). Clearly, this type of evacuation is quick, immediate, and non-negotiable — barely a stage — making it *seemingly* (although perhaps not advisably) unnecessary to include as part of a disaster stage model.

Chapman’s model also fails to address extended periods of residential displacement as a possible stage or even a permanent outcome. This also dominates the Katrina disaster experience. In fact, a discussion on the effects of extended displacement for disaster recovery is lacking in both Chapman’s disaster model, as well as the entire

field of disaster theorizing and research. At most, displacement in the disaster literature usually refers to a short-term condition, one that is resolved quickly as people return to their communities. Perhaps, the omission of ‘extended displacement’ in most *industrialized country* disaster models makes sense given that most disasters in such countries have been destructive, but not catastrophic. Usually, there is some remaining housing or shelter space available that allows residents to return to their community. Rarely has the devastation been so extensive that an entire metropolitan area lost over half its population. In this regard, the concept of ‘extended displacement’ had little place in the natural disaster models of industrialized countries to date.

Internal Displacement. While the previously discussed disaster models inadequately engage the concept of displacement, refugee scholarship on ‘internal displacement’ within the world’s poorest countries offers a rich empirical and theoretical material for modeling disaster’s several missing stages, including ‘extended displacement.’ The reason is that the process of internal displacement removes persons from their homes, communities, means of livelihood and access to traditional coping strategies much in the same way Hurricane Katrina did for the New Orleans poor (Weiss and Korn 2006; Dynes 2006). Similar to Hurricane Katrina evacuees, the internally displaced are:

...persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border. (Vincent 2001: 6)

This shared experience of displacement — between Katrina evacuees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) — reflects the necessity of leaving one’s community for

survival purposes. How do the survival mechanisms used by the internally displaced inform our knowledge of Katrina survivors' expected experiences during extended displacement? Are these basic survival skills transferable?

First, the literature on internal displacement and refugee survival exhibits several commonalities to the traditional survival strategies engaged by the poor as part of their daily survival mechanisms. In this regard, for internally displaced persons (IDPs) the experience of 'extended displacement' represents a dire version of the typical poverty experience. As articulated by Edin and Lein previously, the three main types of survival strategies for the poor include relying on kin and friend networks, utilizing work or welfare for economic security and receiving goods and utilizing social services (1997). Among internally displaced persons, survival while displaced revolves around four sets of strategies and issues: protection strategies, subsistence strategies, civic strategies and property issues (Vincent 2001:11-12). Protection strategies are those strategies that displaced persons use to protect their right to life and personal security, shield themselves from violence, assure members of the community are not unlawfully detained, and acquire and assure the right to move freely, in some cases actively avoiding entry into a refugee or IDP camp (p. 11). The second set of strategies support subsistence and function to "improve access to basic goods and services or materially improve conditions of displacement" (p. 11). These activities can include employment, farming, accepting formal assistance or food and any other mechanism to enable the meeting of basic needs (p. 12). The third set of strategies — civic — focuses on maintaining legal rights, enabling a voice in policy and protecting the identity of families, communities and culture (p.12). Finally, various property issues emerge, as the displaced attempt to

protect their original property or fight to receive restitution for property losses (p. 12).

Within this framework, Edin and Lein's poverty survival strategies can be classified as forms of protection and subsistence strategies.

Since low-income individuals and displaced persons both engage similar subsistence survival strategies, a closer examination of this behavioral intersection is in order. First, just as low-income women use friend and kin networks to survive (Stack 1974; Edin and Lein 1997; Anderson 1989, 1990, 1999), displaced persons also do the same (Vincent 2001; Sorenson 2001; Sorenson and Vincent 2001: 269). In general, the displaced may rely on friend and family networks for food and shelter, while setting up communication networks to access and transmit information between their old homes and new residences (Vincent 2001: 8). When direct family or kin ties are not available, research on Afghani displaced women has found that the shared displacement experience may become a basis for establishing new network ties to non-relatives. Specifically, the displaced Afghani women have come together to create cooperatives to help themselves survive, where "food and other resources are shared and labor is divided: some women look after children while other women search, or beg, for food" (Farr 2001:134). This mutual survival arrangement frees older women to represent the group publicly, while younger women are enabled to raise their children. As those women bond together for self-sufficiency and survival, we must wonder: are Katrina evacuees engaging similar techniques of pooling resources with fellow evacuees? Or, are they remaining independent to assure they don't lose resources by becoming a singular "household"- a common designator for who is eligible to receive assistance?

The second major poverty survival strategy — utilizing work sources and welfare

— is again paralleled among the internally displaced as well (Edin and Lein 1997; Callamard 1999). For example, a common pattern across displacement studies is to see women engaged in unreported labor to supplement household economies and enable survival: including wage labor, subsistence farming, hunting and gathering, and trade of food relief (Callamard 1999: 199). Likewise, among the Sri Lanka Muslims, the men accepted employment in whatever jobs were available, even though their prior livelihood had primarily been fishing (Sorenson 2001: 186). For the women, some began to work for the local businessmen when the men's wages weren't sufficient, including agricultural work. Yet, like the men, many women became frustrated that the work did not allow for upward mobility (Sorenson 2001:187). Which raises an important question — while survival strategies enable daily existence, they do not enable increased stability or restitution to life prior to displacement among internally displaced persons. Thus, if internally displaced families with two workers cannot achieve stability, how will the internally displaced, impoverished single women of this study achieve stability, much less upward mobility? Is this outcome even available to them?

The third dimension of Edin and Lein's survival strategy triad is the utilization of social services (1997). Among the internally displaced, these services can vary widely. For example, displaced persons in camps may have access to food rations and shelter, while those who are not encamped must negotiate services independently, or perhaps receive none at all (Cusano 2001; Bookman 2002). But the receipt of services is not always a worthwhile endeavor. For example, Callamard notes that food rations are often insufficient and require supplementation (1999). Likewise, refugees are often 'rounded up' in fenced lots and 'counted,' similar to animals or slaves; this treatment actually

encourages relief workers to respond to refugees in ways that keep them nameless, enabling openly hostility from aid workers toward refugees (Harrell-Bond 1999: 141). Given this inhumane treatment of refugees and the internally displaced, it is logical that some displaced persons would prefer to be free and struggle, than caged, but fed. Given the massive number of evacuees seeking social services following Hurricane Katrina, were the women of this study treated as the refugees in these camps were? Did the personal interaction of social service workers deter women from pursuing social services as part of their recovery strategy?

One final consideration emerges regarding the relationship between poverty, displacement survival strategies and the Hurricane Katrina experience for low-income women. Because involuntary displacement and its subsequent resettlement disrupt the regular routines of individuals, Downing argues that the cultural transition resultant from resettlement can devalue the survival skills individuals engage (1996). Which begs one of this study's primary questions — are survival skills learned and engaged under conditions of chronic poverty transferable following a catastrophic disaster such as Hurricane Katrina? For Downing, the answer is no — because the skills are developed in response to the local environments in which the displaced normally live, and therefore they are spatially embedded components of culture that are disabled outside their environment of origin (1996). From this logic, therefore, it would be expected that the strategies outlined by Edin and Lein (1997) would *not* be available for low-income women once they left the city of New Orleans. Yet, was this actually the case?

Vulnerability. While the gendered poverty-survival-disaster conundrum remains unanswered, the discussions of vulnerability among the disaster literature do provide initial insight into the effects of poverty on recovery. Vulnerability is defined as “exposure to potential harm from the effects of the disaster agent on the built environment” (Miller and Nigg 1993:2) and reflects the susceptibility of a population to the effects of disasters. Vulnerability may be exacerbated by geographical factors, such as residential location; structural factors, such as government preparedness and response; or social factors such as race, class, age or gender (Wisner 2004; Carey 2005; Oliver-Smith 2004; Bankoff, Frerks, and Hilhorst 2004; Cardona 2004). In this way, vulnerability can function at both the macro- and micro-levels simultaneously.

Additionally, populations can be vulnerable to a disaster event and a disaster’s consequences differentially. For example, upper-class Californians may be susceptible to mudslides, but have insurance to cover their losses, while low-income public housing residents may be less susceptible to an earthquake due to building codes, but more at risk during the recovery stages due to their pre-existing social locations (Miller and Nigg 1993). Given this diversity of vulnerabilities, how can these classifications inform our understanding of disaster recovery among low-income women following Hurricane Katrina? And what contribution does this literature make to our understanding of the evacuation, extended displacement and recovery experiences of these women?

The first dimension of vulnerability is physical, with specific geographical spaces yielding higher levels of susceptibility to particular types of disasters than other spaces. In the Peruvian Cordillera Blanca range, the city of Huaraz sits along a river that flows

from a glacial lake further above in the range. As global warming causes more of the glacier to melt, outburst floods are occurring more frequently, with the city becoming increasingly vulnerable based on its geography (Carey 2005). Yet, even when people are aware they live in a flood-plain or another dangerous area, sometimes they have no choice but to live there due to their social and economic positions in the global-capitalist system (Oliver-Smith 1996, 2004; Lavell 2004). For example, many residents of New Orleans knew they lived in flood-prone areas of the city, but even that did not alter the fact that many could not afford to evacuate—meanwhile, others simply chose to stay. To what extent did the physical vulnerability of the city affect the decision to evacuate among women in this study? Were they aware of the risk of levee failure, or were they simply unable or unwilling to leave despite it?

The second dimension of vulnerability is linked to structural factors, such as governmental policy, risk communication and economic development. If a government fails to warn the community of an impending disaster or communicates it in such a way the threat is not perceived as serious, the affected population will be made increasingly vulnerable because of this governmental failure (Handmer 2000). In the Peruvian example previously mentioned, the government failed to heed and articulate warnings from scientists about emergent flooding, causing a lack of legitimacy for the government and thousands of preventable deaths (Carey 2005:123). It can be argued that this same pattern of governmental ambivalence was seen in New Orleans during Katrina's approach, as delayed decision-making to initiate the mandatory evacuation order implied the threat to the city was not significant.

Yet, even when emergency warning systems are in place, they may actually exacerbate risk and subsequent vulnerability, not reduce it. As Handmer argues, emergency warnings can actually enable greater risks to be taken because:

Development may occur in flood prone areas or in areas subject to other periodic and predictable hazards because warnings will (or rather should) trigger appropriate safety and damage reducing behavior. (2000:2)

In this way, the warning system that is supposed to reduce risk actually encourages additional development in the affected area, and the increased population and built environment generates greater hazard vulnerability (Handmer 2000; Oliver-Smith 1996). Yet, is this pattern the same in underdeveloped nations? What can those cases tell us about vulnerability that might aid in understanding the poverty-survival-disaster interaction?

Among underdeveloped nations, historical patterns of development frame the context in which disasters occur, such that underdeveloped nations often suffer more extreme disaster effects than industrialized nations do (Hilhorst and Bankoff 2004; Oliver-Smith 1996; Bankoff 2004; Benson 2004). In particular, Oliver-Smith's work indicates that in many underdeveloped nations, indigenous populations who would traditionally migrate to reduce vulnerability face new challenges as their countries industrialize, and the bounded nature of modern development roots them to singular spatial locations. This spatial boundedness makes migratory populations vulnerable to events like flooding or drought when previously they were not (p. 311). Again, similar to industrialized nations, we see development as a vulnerability factor, not a mitigating force. In short, it is the "progress" of modernization that functions to increase vulnerability, rather than reduce it.

The final dimension of vulnerability encompasses individual level characteristics such as race, class, gender and age, which affect the ability to prepare for, evacuate and recover from disasters (Wisner 2004; Cutter 2005; Miller and Nigg 1993; Fordham 2004). For example, Miller and Nigg find that income and race affect recovery separately, such that income effects are linked more closely to event vulnerability and physical damages to housing, while race effects are linked with consequence vulnerability and affect the recovery process (1993). Yet, some scholars critique the generalization that all minorities, or all elderly or all women are vulnerable to a specific disaster *a priori*. In Fordham's work, she calls for a nuanced gendered vulnerability analysis such that interpretations are situated within a specific historical and societal context, meaning not all women are always vulnerable all the time. Likewise, Stephen calls for the same, as he identifies differing levels of vulnerability among rural people of Ethiopia, where socio-economic group, social-political resources and even the altitude at which they live all affect the ability to survive, manage and mitigate drought conditions differentially (2004: 100). To what extent, then, will race, class, and gender in the context of New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina create vulnerabilities among the women of this study? Is there a singular factor that is most salient? Or do these factors work in tandem, in a situated manner, to create vulnerability? Are there other factors within this seemingly homogenous sample that increase vulnerability and extend displacement?

Addressed at the micro- and macro-levels, the concept of vulnerability is a useful tool in beginning the synthesis between the poverty, survival and disaster literatures. Still, it is important to note that the above discussions about vulnerability do not challenge the fundamental conceptualization of disaster recovery as a process which all

people, regardless of status, experience linearly. Rather it suggests that recovery is harder for low-income populations because they are more “vulnerable,” however, it does not explore the possibility that recovery and rehabilitation among the poor may be a completely unique—or even unattainable—status.

As shown above, perhaps the best models for understanding the Katrina disaster as a whole include the research and scholarship on ‘internal displacement’ and ‘vulnerability.’ Clearly, given the extensiveness of disaster created in New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina and the levee breaches, the concept of ‘*extended* displacement’ demands further consideration through the literature on ‘internal displacement.’ Likewise the discussion of vulnerability helps inform our understanding of the recovery options available to the women of this study. In particular, since rehabilitation may never be fully available to large numbers of those displaced by either Katrina or in poor countries by internal war, droughts, and ethnic persecution, research on such catastrophe-level disasters must include ‘extended displacement’ in its model. Within such a perspective, extended displacement may become a stage that works in tandem with recovery. In fact, the decision to permanently remain displaced, or the coming to terms with the reality of this outcome, becomes a type of recovery in itself.

Again, I return to the key questions that drive this research: To what extent has extended displacement become a new survival challenge for the women in this study? Is a woman’s belief that staying away from New Orleans, but ‘someday coming home,’ a mechanism for creating an alternative form of recovery? Finally, how can this study’s proposed disaster model stages — evacuation, extended displacement, and recovery — elaborate the literature’s broader understanding of the lived experience of poor women

displaced by a catastrophe-level disaster? The next section will examine these three stages — evacuation, extended displacement and recovery — in more detail.

Developing New Disaster Stages

One of the primary contributions of this study is to document what happens during evacuation, displacement and disaster recovery among low-income women. By considering the ways in which low-income women respond to disaster threats, rebuild their lives in displacement and recover from catastrophes like Hurricane Katrina, future disaster programs can improve the effectiveness of disaster response and recover policy.

Evacuation. As seen in Chapman's Natural Disaster Stage Model (Appendix 1), evacuation is not considered a stage unto itself and studies on evacuation tendencies alone are scarce. This is in part due to the immediate, unexpected nature of many disasters, from which evacuation is not possible. By contrast, the refugee displacement literature does account for evacuation, or "flight" under various circumstances including war, armed conflict, and disaster. Specifically, the "flight" period represents the separation and passage of an individual, family or group from their homeland (Ager 1999:7). Unlike a hurricane evacuation in an industrialized nation, the refugee experience is one that is exceptionally dangerous, and for women, engendered as sexual assault is a frequent occurrence (Ager 1999:7; Summerfield 1999:114). Yet, even amidst the danger, displaced persons will often prepare for flight in advance, much in the same manner as American citizens prepare for an approaching hurricane (Cusano 2001; Sorensen and Vincent 2001). For example, Cusano's work on the Karen people of

Burma found that families will keep carrying baskets, stocked with valuables such as cooking pots and blankets, by the door for a speedy retreat to the jungle at the threat of war or the entry of soldiers into their villages (2001:162). Does this preparation activity translate among the women of this study? Are they prepared for evacuation, or is the poverty experience in America unique in disabling the self-protective strategies used by both displaced persons and middle-class evacuees?

What else do we know about evacuation and flight, and how can that knowledge inform our understanding of the evacuation experiences of low-income women during Hurricane Katrina? First, a brief discussion of the disaster literature's contribution to evacuation studies is in order. In their work on Hurricane Andrew, Gladwin and Peacock found that fifty-four percent of all households located in an evacuation zone evacuated entirely, while in the highest-risk coastal evacuation zones this percentage increased to seventy-one percent¹³ (1997: 64). The analysis also revealed that Black families living in evacuation zones were two-thirds less likely to evacuate than Anglos in those same areas (1997: 69). Based on race alone, this suggests a low rate of evacuation might be expected among this sample, which is entirely African-American. Further supporting this possibility is work by Elliot and Pais (2006) who found significant racial trends for Hurricane Katrina, with suburban blacks being one and a half times more likely to leave *following* the storm than prior when compared to whites, and urban low-income blacks to be the *least* likely of all groups to evacuate prior to the storm (p. 308).

¹³ Gladwin and Peacock report this as a low-rate of compliance. The standard compliance rate expected by emergency managers is 80% compliance (Waugh 2006: 16).

So what reasons determined the failure of low-income African-Americans to evacuate prior to Hurricane Katrina's landfall? Common explanations for non-compliance include lack of wealth, lack of transportation, refusal to leave pets, possessions and homes behind, medical and mobility problems, care-giving responsibilities, and disbelief of risk (Waugh 2006; Cutter and Emrich 2006; Fussell 2005). In Gladwin and Peacock's Hurricane Andrew research, the data were inconclusive, but common reasons included lack of transportation, lack of affordable refuge, or some other factor (1997: 71). By contrast, failure to flee among displaced persons or those at risk of armed conflict is sometimes engaged as a survival strategy in and of itself.

Given the strength of will to survive among refugees and the displaced, why is it that so few low-income and African American individuals take evacuation orders seriously preceding powerful hurricanes such as Andrew in Florida or Katrina on the Gulf Coast? Is it possible that independent of social class, some individuals truly did not perceive a hurricane as threatening or the New Orleans levees as capable of bursting? And if so, how pervasive are these reasons? In their work on Hurricane Katrina, Elliott and Pais also found that almost half of respondents reported that they did not believe the storm would be so bad, while only a fifth reported not having transportation to leave (2006: 309), with neither finding predicted by race or class for city residents. But what about low-income African Americans? Are there unique reasons why they stayed at a higher frequency not represented in this cross-sectional survey sample?¹⁴ Did those low-

¹⁴ In both these studies, evacuation has been addressed quantitatively, and from the viewpoint of structural issues.

income individuals remain behind for structural reasons such as lack of transportation and cost, or were their decisions predicated on a belief that the storm really wouldn't be that severe? What role do networks play in how low-income women decide to respond to the threat of a storm like Hurricane Katrina? If they leave, are they displaced together with the same family, friends, boyfriends, and fathers who previously helped support them in their daily lives?

One final consideration in understanding how low-income individuals evacuate may be that extended warning periods redefine the decision-making process into a social interaction between multiple individuals based on a consensus-interpretation of the danger and risk, independent of the objective threat (Gladwin and Peacock 1997: 56). By this logic, the same communities that provide social support and kin ties to low-income women for daily survival might also be acting to either promote or inhibit evacuation since the decision to leave, like survival resources more generally, becomes communal. This collective interpretation is supported by Drabek and Boggs' work, which found encouragement and insistence by family members to be a statistically significant predictor of evacuation prior to the Denver flash flood (1968). In their study, almost a third of surveyed families received warnings from relatives, while three-quarters of families evacuated in units including extended kin. During Katrina, over a million people left the Gulf Coast region, supporting this pattern at the macro-level (Nigg, Barnshaw, and Torres 2006: 113). Yet, does it also hold true for low-income women of limited means?

What explains why some individuals stay and others remain? And how may evacuation patterns differ for low-income populations in industrialized countries? One

explanation, according to Dynes, argues that pre-existing social capital, such as Stack's kin networks (1974), creates a type of consensus formation process regarding the severity and threat of a storm, and is founded in the obligations individuals hold to friends, family members and coworkers (2005). This consensus encourages evacuation because "behavior during the evacuation phase is prefigured by normal daily routines and action choices are guided by obligations that existed prior to the disaster situation" (Dynes 2005: 6-7). In this way, we can hypothesize that if the family unit or kin network decides to leave, an individual in that network will likely go as well. In this sense, the idea of "all our kin" (Stack 1974) may extend well beyond daily survival and into the realms of disaster evacuation, extended displacement and recovery. Similar network patterns do hold for refugees and the displaced, as information networks function to warn a community of the approach of police and security forces to increase their time to flee to safety (Sorenson and Vincent 2001: 268), while failure to take a threat seriously as a collective can endanger the entire family unit (Boutin and Nkurunziza 2001: 61-3). Yet, if a family or community evacuates or escapes together, do they remain intact once they are displaced from their homes over extended and variable periods of time? Can these kin continue to help during their own recovery process, or do the limits of these networks show themselves once the community is spatially dispersed and recovering from individual and collective disaster experiences?

Extended Disaster Displacement. Hurricane Katrina was an unprecedented, catastrophic disaster that challenged the limits of social order and individual survival in New Orleans. For virtually all New Orleanians, a period of temporary or extended residential

displacement followed the storm. For the first time ever, mandatory evacuation orders were enacted and harsh curfews were put into place as the city struggled to stop the massive flooding and repair the incomprehensible damages. According to one study, one full month following the storm over half of displaced residents from New Orleans reported staying in a shelter, while over forty percent were housed in someone's home (Elliott and Pais 2006). This short-term displacement accounts for ninety-five percent of all residents. Yet, what are the longer-term outcomes for residents, especially low-income individuals? Where did they go once the shelters closed and parts of the city reopened? Were low-income residents able to make their way back home, and what kind of lives awaited if they did?

Unfortunately, there is little in the disaster literature to explain how extended displacement manifests. We do know that displacement can weaken communities, with Erikson's work on Buffalo Creek showing how the physical relocation of neighbors away from each other broke the bonds that created and maintained social order (1976, 1994). Additionally, Downing's research argues that resettlement causes the weakening and dismantling of social networks and life support mechanisms, as groups lose the capacity to self-manage and the community erodes (1996). In the case of Sudanese internally displaced persons, as IDPs were shuffled into refugee camps, they had no legal rights, nor were they able to acquire land or establish permanent living arrangements to enable participation in trade or employment following their displacement (Jacobsen, Lautze, and Osman 2001: 89). In this manner, the internally displaced are treated much the same way the homeless are treated in America — as a problem to be managed and tolerated, but not resolved. So, what does this mean for the displaced in America following Hurricane

Katrina? Were they, too, nominally assisted but essentially left in worsened conditions? Or did they adapt to the hardship in creative ways, as the Karen people of Burma have (Cusano 2001) through hiding food in forests to ease their evacuations? What would be the equivalent strategy to maintain survival in industrialized America?

Finally, what if returning home was not available? How many low-income women were unable to rebuild and recover in the traditional manner, instead starting over in some other location? Because of the catastrophic damages, understanding the role an experience of extended displacement plays — an alternate recovery option, so to speak — may provide insights in how better to promote future recovery. And how does extended displacement change the outcomes of recovery compared to temporary displacement, followed by a return to a catastrophically damaged “home”?

Recovery. Disaster recovery is the third stage in this analysis of low-income women’s disaster experiences. Seen above in the natural disaster stage model, the conventional model sees this stage as represented by ‘resolution’ toward normality — recovery occurs when communities reconstitute the old structure (Couch 1996: 68). At the community level, short-term responses to natural disasters are characterized by an increase in social cohesion which evolves into a “therapeutic community” as residents come together, initiate search and rescue activities, pool resources, and provide mutual support to one another (Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski 2006: 58; Rodríguez, Trainor and Quarantelli 2006). Recovery is achieved by the rebuilding of the physical environment, as government institutions, schools, services and businesses reopen and resume. For individuals, the negative effects of natural disasters are expected to be short-term, as

social, cultural, psychological and economic consequences are typically absorbed by the larger (intact) social structure (Drabek and Boggs 1968; Drabek et al 1975; Picou, Marshall, and Gill 2004; Marshall, Picou and Gill 2003; Kreps 1984). Unfortunately, these studies do little to explain how the poor are affected during the recovery stage, leaving the questions of this study unanswered.

By again looking to the internal displacement literature we see some interesting, but unfortunate findings regarding recovery from displacement. First, the common conception of recovery in the disaster literature suggests returning to ‘life as usual,’ yet for those displaced by armed conflict, the landscape which one returns to is frequently radically altered. For example, in Mindanao, Philippines, individuals displaced by war returned to their communities to find they no longer had livelihood opportunities, their housing had deteriorated, there was inadequate public health and sanitation, and no educational or recreational facilities (Frederico et al 2007: 173). In this way, returning home was not actually returning to a recovery from war — it was returning instead to a land devastated by it. Similarly following Hurricane Katrina, the landscape of the city of New Orleans looked like a war zone. Where the waters had risen, flood lines and dirt markings were left on buildings — some so high they were above rooftops. Cars were overturned; walls washed away; roofs shredded by the wind. Schools, churches, courts, and other public institutions remained closed, keeping community members isolated from their traditional networks and daily routines. While Hurricane Katrina was a natural disaster for her wind and a technological disaster for her levee failures and subsequent flooding, the net effect of the damage on the city was catastrophic, and reminiscent of the aftermath of a devastating war.

In this context, the definition of recovery as restitution is extremely problematic when considering the long-term, irreversible effects of Hurricane Katrina, and even technological disasters more generally. Events such as the structural levee failure and toxic contamination of soil permanently alter the biophysical environment, often rendering recovery efforts powerless (Adams and Boscarino 2005; Adams et al 2002; Picou, Marshall, and Gill 2003; Freudenberg 1997; Erikson 1976, 1994). The negative effects of such massive technological disasters are characterized chronically, and include physical illness, pessimism about health, a sense of being out of control, fear of one's community or residence as unsafe, social and governmental distrust, and stigma (Edelstein 2004; Erikson 1994; Picou, Marshall, and Gill 2003; Adams et al 2002; Couch 1996; Roberts and Toffolon-Weiss 2001; Davis 1996). When these responses fail to terminate or be remedied (i.e., by toxin cleanup or relocation), distrust and anger ensue as the community transforms to become "corrosive" (Freudenberg 1993, 1997; Picou, Marshall, and Gill 2003). So, to what extent did low-income women avert the long-term negative consequences of the catastrophic damage in New Orleans? Did they choose extended displacement as a permanent living situation to enable recovery and resolve other negative effects they experienced following the storm? Or did they attempt to rebuild on the shards of their former lives? And, more importantly, what does recovery even mean for these women when the pathological environment resulting from a catastrophic disaster parallels the unhealthy state of deeply impoverished, dangerous and neglected urban communities before a disaster? Does this suggest that the potential for recovery may not even exist for the urban poor? If it does exist, is that designation even meaningful?

One last look at the effects of displacement bodes especially poorly for the city's least resourced, the low-income women of this study. As Sorensen and Vincent (2001) note:

Displaced people often end up in temporary squatter settlements, with only insecure incomes from the informal economic sector or from criminal activities, and with few, if any rights.... From the point of view of an internally displaced person, it suggests that displacement may not be simply a temporary decline in living standards, but a more permanent, structurally enforced plummet to the bottom of society. (2001:276)

Which brings us back to our central question: What does it mean for an impoverished woman to 'recover' from a disaster when her daily life can already be defined as disastrous? And if internally displaced persons are forced to the bottom of society by their displacement, how much lower can the impoverished fall until they are no longer even standing on the social ladder at all?

Synthesis: Chronic Poverty, Survival Strategies and Catastrophic Disaster

By modifying Chapman's Natural Disaster Stage Model, this research will explore the meaning of evacuation, extended displacement and recovery for chronically impoverished New Orleans women. In New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina's damage was so extensive that flooding alone damaged or destroyed approximately seventy percent of all homes, equaling 134,334 damaged units out of a total of 188,251 housing units within city limits (HUD Housing Damage 2006: 23). The broken levees represent a serious technological failure that questions the future integrity of the city (Kates et al 2006). These two facts created dual dilemmas for low-income women as they rebuilt their lives.

First, with the loss of housing, could they afford to come home? Second, if they could, did they even want to do so?

Since Katrina, fair market rents in the city of New Orleans have increased by approximately thirty-five percent, averaging a \$276 dollar increase across all housing sizes (GNOCDC 2006), making housing increasingly expensive and difficult to locate. Additionally, the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) and City Council made public announcements in Fall 2005 of plans to demolish public housing units, only allowing “working residents” to return¹⁵. With a loss of jobs following the storm (City of New Orleans Website 2006; Scott 2006), and a cutting of social service programs that support low-income families, such as food stamps and Medicaid¹⁶ (Dreier 2006: 532), these structural shifts suggest that returning home could inhibit recovery when compared to remaining in an evacuation location. This is compounded by the lack of housing and employment, of course. Yet, many of the states that have received those displaced by Katrina are discouraging residents to stay, and expect the evacuees to return to New Orleans.

Such realities take us back to the central research questions of this dissertation: How did displaced poor women respond to their new circumstances following the storm? How did they rebuild new lives? Have older (pre-Katrina) survival strategies helped or inhibited their post-Katrina adjustment? Did they return to their pre-Katrina dwellings and try to rehabilitate their lives? Or did they choose to stay in their post-Katrina

¹⁵ The employment restriction has since been removed, but the demolition did occur as proposed.

¹⁶ These budget cuts were actually part of the disaster relief bill passed to help victims. In essence, the federal government cut long-term relief program funding to fund short-term disaster relief programs.

evacuation location? How did they *live* their extended displacement? Again, these are some of the questions that drive this research. The next chapter will present the methodology engaged to answer these and the other important questions about the Katrina experiences of poor New Orleans women during evacuation, extended displacement and recovery.

CHAPTER THREE

STUDYING DISPLACEMENT AS A DISPLACED SOCIOLOGIST

This research did not begin as a study of the Hurricane Katrina disaster. As a doctoral student at Tulane University, my work prior to Katrina was a dissertation study of the HOPE VI federal housing program in two New Orleans communities. Specifically, the study would have examined the displacement effects of the transformation of the St. Thomas and Desire housing projects from low-income neighborhoods into mixed-income communities. Such changes would ultimately impact public housing residents' ability to return to New Orleans in the years following the storm, though this eventual reality would be unknown to me in the years leading up to the disaster.

Likewise, as a quantitatively-oriented, mixed-method urban sociologist, my past methodological skills would be tested to the limit in a post-disaster New Orleans context. As the disaster made landfall, the validity of the housing policy study was washed away with the levees—in its aftermath, I lost three years of preparatory work for the project, and stood questioning the future, as Tulane University began a process of intensive restructuring. Closed until January 2006, the Tulane administration had eliminated its graduate program in Sociology, with students such as myself receiving a set period to complete all graduate work. With no stipend funding remaining and academic advisors

in three states, I moved ahead into uncertainty, assessing my options as I started my research anew.

Meeting the Storm: Surely another False Call

On Saturday, August 27th 2005, Hurricane Katrina made aim for New Orleans. A day later, the New Orleans Mayor, Ray Nagin, ordered a mandatory evacuation. I chose to leave on Saturday, taking with me research articles, working papers, textbooks, my laptop, my cats, and a weird variety of work attire in case the “worst case” happened. Sadly, I largely forgot “regular” clothing, having just two pairs of jeans, no shorts and three or four tee shirts to wear. Like many others, I assumed that this hurricane evacuation would be like the rest—either a false alarm or a mandatory mini-vacation to a nearby city. I left ‘just in case,’ but honestly, I didn’t believe the storm would hit New Orleans. I never expected that the levees would overtop and breach, or that the city would flood, killing over 1,300 people. Like so many of the women I would subsequently interview, I also believed that the storm was ‘no big deal.’

We were wrong. On Monday, August 29th, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall. All day long, newscasters did their best to show images of the storm in progress. Safely evacuated to a friend’s home in Houston, TX, I remember seeing the televised images of the storm in progress: window blinds fluttering violently out of broken windows at New Orleans’ downtown Hyatt Hotel; the wind-blown hole in the Superdome’s roof with people huddled together below—calm but seemingly aware that the ceiling might collapse on them at anytime. I also remember that on Monday, I saw no televised flooding, heard no talk of levee breaches, nor had any suspicion that Hurricane

Katrina would be anything other than a very, very close call. Tuesday morning I turned on the television to see when I could go home. I saw instead a stream of water—it was powerful, fast moving, dark and disgusting. I wanted to vomit. The levee had broken in the 9th ward. The city was filling up with water.

I understood before the storm how and why the levees could break, yet their actual destruction left me in absolute shock. It was incomprehensible.

It is one thing to intellectually comprehend what might cause a disaster—to even watch a disaster—and quite another to have a disaster happen to you. The rest of that Tuesday was spent calling New Orleans friends, but the phone lines were constantly busy: everyone else who had evacuated was doing the same. As the day continued, more reports of new levee breaches emerged, blending into a barrage of painful images of helicopter rescues and dead bodies floating in murky waters which still bring a knot to my throat and tears to my eyes when I allow myself to think about it for any amount of time. At some point that Tuesday or Wednesday, the reality of the flooding for my academic life and research began to creep into my consciousness: My research project was gone. The flooding was in the Desire community. And, there were other questions, like was there anything left of my university? Would Tulane cease to exist? Would all my work, records and transcripts for my Bachelor's and Master's degrees, and my Ph.D. coursework be gone, leaving me with no evidence of any higher education?—I hadn't packed my diplomas. Was my house flooded? Did I have anything left of my previous life other than a car and three cats?

In all of this, the only area I could control was the academic. I knew the women displaced from public housing surely would not want to talk about their pre-Katrina lives

in newly built homes that now sat under eight feet of water. So, I made a phone call to my mentor and friend Jim Wright, a former Sociology Department faculty member at Tulane University who had been my Master's thesis chair. Currently working in Orlando at the University of Central Florida, I asked Jim: "What are my options? Do I have to start my coursework over from scratch?" We discussed transfer options and made a plan for me to enroll at UCF for the fall semester. At minimum, Jim's work with the Orlando Housing Authority yielded some limited data on HOPE VI in Orlando. Within two hours, Jim sent the survey guides for me to review.

By Wednesday or Thursday, I had a plan. I was enrolling in UCF for the fall semester, and would find a quantitative data set to analyze, finishing my degree within the year. Talking this over with my Tulane advisor at the time, he was very supportive. Yet, it felt wrong. As I looked at the survey, I realized there wasn't enough data for a dissertation-length analysis. And what about the women I had been preparing to study for three years? Where were they? Did they survive? Did they make it out of the city alive? Before long, the women from my old dissertation began to haunt me. How could I walk away from a project I knew was so important? How could I stand at the precipice of the harder, better, "right" path, and instead run some statistics to rush through my doctorate on a different project that had no soul to it? By the week's end, I was determined to locate the women from my original study—I had New Orleans addresses for them and some old and outdated land-line phone numbers. This meant they would be near impossible to find. But so where the 1,500 couples in Jim Wright's covenant marriage study that I located as his research assistant working on my Master's degree. Finding displaced populations, whether by marriage or disaster, was something I knew I

could do. It defied all logic, yes. But I just *knew* I could do this. So, I chose the harder path. With no formal training in environmental sociology or in disaster studies, I pushed ahead refusing to allow any one stumbling block to derail my resolve.

Weaving Old into New and Seeking the Displaced

The development of my new project occurred largely in a vacuum—I wrote the survey without feedback, submitting it to the UCF IRB with Jim’s help, and returned to New Orleans to clean my apartment during the last week of September, 2005. In two week’s time, I was living in New Orleans again, and received IRB approval. Through all of this, I never discussed the project, the survey or the conceptualization with my Tulane faculty—they were each on their own evacuation journeys, sprinkled across the nation. In fact, I had very little contact with anyone at that time. I had a boyfriend, but we were dating out of necessity—the isolation otherwise would have been unbearable.

In my previous study of HOPE VI¹⁷, I had focused on the physical displacement of public housing residents through social policy mandates. The new study and its developing survey would initially use some of the same theoretical arguments and research questions that had been woven together for the HOPE VI study. With my

¹⁷ HOPE VI, also known as the Urban Revitalization Demonstration program, is a federal initiative passed in 1992 to address the unsanitary, dangerous, and severely distressed conditions of urban public housing nationally (Bacon 1998; Popkin et al 2004). In an effort to undo the unanticipated consequences of high rise, Le Corbusier-style public housing, HOPE VI provides funds to renovate and replace dilapidated housing by creating healthy, self-sustaining communities with social service programs such as job training, work opportunities, transportation, child care and other types of support (Finkel, Lennon and Eisenstadt 2000; Forrest and Williams 2001; National Housing Law Project 2002; Kingsley, Johnson and Pettit 2003). The physical design also differs by including mixed-income, low-rise housing and homeownership options at some sites (Freedman 1998).

existing lists of resident names from the Housing Authority of New Orleans¹⁸, I began seeking my respondents—low-income women who had been living at the St. Thomas (now River Gardens) and Desire (now Abundance Square) public housing complexes immediately prior to their “redevelopment.” The implementation of these policies had displaced each to an array of private, traditional and Section 8 public housing dwellings throughout the city. Now, Hurricane Katrina had essentially done the same, but on a national scale.

Knowing how difficult these women’s lives had been after losing their public housing, and recognizing the tremendous expenses associated with my own evacuation—my car had just broken down a week before the storm and the repair expenses had left me just \$500 for evacuation—I could not imagine how poor women with children and grandchildren could manage. How would they leave employment (41% had it prior to Katrina), locate transportation out of the city, garner sufficient funds for food and shelter, and secure affordable temporary housing? I felt compelled to study these women: How would they survive during their evacuation? How would they rebuild their lives? What would ‘recovery’ look like for women whose pre-Katrina lives assumed the form of an economic disaster?

The challenge, of course, to studying a displaced population is precisely that they are *displaced*. Locating people who have moved from place to place—as money, shelter,

¹⁸ While no complete listing of this population exists, I obtained partial resident lists from the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) in May 2004 for my original dissertation research. The distribution of the lists was authorized by the HUD federal receiver, who was managing HANO at that time. The resident lists include a roster of residents relocated from the Desire public housing site and a roster of approximately one-third of all dislocated families from the St. Thomas community, equaling 694 female heads of household in total. A supplemental list of forty St. Thomas families was also received following the storm from a social service provider with long-standing connections to the community. Only women were considered for an interview due to the fact that less than ten men were among the entire sample frame.

aid-assistance or family goodwill ran out—is difficult and tedious work. My own evacuation journey took me from a two-week stay in Texas to next spend a month with my sister and brother who were in college in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Then, it was home to New Orleans to clean my house and assess the damage, then back to South Carolina to get my cats, then back to New Orleans to live. There were also two other trips in here—to Washington, D.C. for a wedding (since everyone else’s life outside of New Orleans continued as usual)—and to Florida to enroll as a graduate student so I could have student loan money to pay for the rent on my undamaged New Orleans apartment¹⁹. In this way, after the first two weeks, I was barely ever in one place for more than about 10 days.

When I settled home in early October, the city was a militarized space. Hummers drove down the streets with armed National Guardsmen, weapons out and ready, pointed upward, but with a clear sense that you could be shot at any time. I didn’t know of any faculty or graduate students who returned—most lived in neighborhoods which had not yet reopened. Grocery stores were closed and the one Winn-Dixie had hour long waits at each of the six checkout lanes that were open. Of the few restaurants that were open, most served food on paper plates with plastic utensils. Every few days, my boyfriend and I would go to the city’s webpage to see the recovery progress reports, which listed trash pickups and which stores and restaurants were now open for business. In my neighborhood, the Red Cross had a hot meal line, but the food was disgusting. MREs

¹⁹ Since my apartment was undamaged and I didn’t move residence, I did not qualify for any long-term rental assistance, despite the fact that my source of employment—adjunct classes at Tulane—was unavailable. By contrast, I know some other people who moved across town and received 12 months of aid because they moved, yet they retained their jobs. Some five months after returning to the city, FEMA called to say I was eligible for a trailer, which was ironic given a FEMA inspector visited my apartment to see it wasn’t damaged and denied me the rental assistance in the first place.

were available as well, but with power returned quickly to Algiers Point, cooking at home was a ready option of which I took advantage.

These personal complications aside, my reason for returning to New Orleans was because it was my *home*. We were not refugees, but Americans who loved where we lived. I would become angry when people would suggest the city not be rebuilt, or that I should move to Florida or South Carolina to do my work. I understood the logic, but I wouldn't go. I missed home and had to see it and live it for myself before I could be ready to leave permanently.

Once back and settled, I began to try to locate the women from my original sample. Between October 2005 and July 2006, for ten months, I lived in immediate post-disaster New Orleans, using my time to locate interviewees and conduct interviews. In mid-March, I learned of an instructor position at the University of Central Florida, where Jim Wright was working. I applied and was hired, moving in July to an Orlando suburb. My data collection continued from my new "home" and was completed in December 2006. In Florida, I was commuting two hours a day, teaching eight courses annually, and preparing five new courses at that time. It was an incredible amount of work, but it was my survival strategy—living in the "new" New Orleans was just too difficult to bear.

Seeking Interviewees

After returning to New Orleans to live, I searched for the women who had been in my pre-Katrina sample—I had their addresses and land-line phone numbers only. I knew the task would be difficult, but I began calling numbers and searching names in online telephone databases, similar to how I had done as a research assistant recruiting survey

respondents for Jim Wright's study of covenant marriage. After a few months, I realized this would not be enough. By March 2006, I had interviewed just ten women, but called well over a thousand phone numbers. For each name in a search base, four or five numbers would appear. Occasionally, a woman would have her new phone number on record with the phone company and I could follow her path to her present location through the automated recording. In other instances, women didn't answer, or declined, but even then the refusals were just a handful of respondents. The challenge was that I wasn't finding women. With phone lines down across the city and internet databases barely updated, I began to think about other ways to find these women.²⁰

About this same time, a professor in the Sociology department approached me about using his survey with my sampling frame. The benefit would be some money for paying respondents, and presumably, a more interactive experience. Comparing his survey to mine, I decided to blend the two since so many of the questions were exactly the same. With this change came a new infusion of enthusiasm, and I began thinking about new ways to find my sample.

In response, I imagined every low- or no-cost method I could, most involving just hitting the street. I began by posting flyers in the neighborhood surrounding the Desire complex—the complex itself was closed and monitored by military forces (I was “escorted” out when I drove through to look at the damage). I also hung them in a package store on Magazine street by the St. Thomas complex, as well as on telephone poles near a few of the service agencies in the neighborhood. Not long after, I returned to

²⁰ The sampling design is a convenience sample. Due to the incomplete nature of the sampling lists and the massive displacement of the target sample, locating a randomized sample was not feasible. In fact, locating a non-random sample was still quite difficult under these circumstances.

the St. Thomas community, placing quarter-page sized slips of paper into people's mailboxes as a recruitment flyer with my information on it. These garnered calls, though in some instances, I couldn't locate the individual's name on the housing authority list, and had to decline them the interview. I also hung full-page flyers in the Lafitte housing community, since some Desire residents had been relocated there and many families had returned to live, despite the Housing Authority's discouragement. I also contacted churches and social service providers using email for references, though this was minimally effective. In the end, one service provider graciously assisted me with a list of about forty names. He knew about my HOPE VI work from before the storm and remembered my name. His help yielded 13 interviews. Throughout all of this, I interviewed only women whose names appeared on my sampling list or the list from this one provider, as I knew the information was accurate.

As I moved into April and May, I began a new approach for recruitment: letters. I sent personally signed and hand addressed recruitment letters²¹ to approximately seven hundred women. Each letter included a summary explanation of the study, two counseling hotline numbers for anyone who needed additional support—either because of the trauma of evacuation and/or from participating in an interview about it, my personal cell phone number and additional contact information.²² While over 200 of these letters

²¹ It was my belief that a personally addressed letter would be more likely forwarded by the then over-taxed postal service in New Orleans.

²² Women who received the letter would call my cell phone if they were interested in the study. I then offered to call them back if they had a landline, or in some cases arranged a time to talk when it would not cost them precious cell phone minutes. I only acquired cell phone numbers when women contacted me from the letters, or a referral by another respondent. I cannot estimate what proportion of women used cell or land lines.

were returned to me, they were still the most effective recruitment approach, yielding 20 interviews. To date, I do not know how many letters actually made it to potential respondents. In order to increase this sample size, I also sought snowball referrals, where one interviewee recommended another one and provided contact information for that person, but this provided just three or four interviews—my records aren't clear.

I used telephone interviews for my study, primarily because many of my respondents were displaced from New Orleans and I had no research funding for meeting with them in person, let alone any idea where to locate them. Whether using cell phones beforehand, setting up landlines in new FEMA apartments or by using someone else's phone, women found ways to contact me upon receiving my letters. Only one respondent interviewed lacked her own phone and she utilized a neighbor's phone to complete the interview.

Each interview had two parts: a section of closed-ended questions on evacuation, employment, assistance before and after the storm and demographic characteristics, followed by a section allowing women to describe their evacuation and recovery experiences in detail in their own words (Appendix 2). The first section required 5 to 15 minutes to complete while the second section typically took between 30 to 90 minutes. Responses were typed during the interview and edited after; interviews were not tape-recorded to assure respondent anonymity. Compensation included the \$20 gift card and two hotline numbers for free counseling services.

Displaced People: Interview Sample

My interview sample consisted of 51 women²³, all black and averaging among them nearly six years residency in public housing prior to the storm. As a group, their mean age was just over fifty. Most (55%) were single; 12 percent married, 16 percent divorced, and 12 percent were widowed; the remainder, separated or cohabitating.

Forty-one percent of women had no educational degree, while the majority (47%) had a high school degree or a GED. Just ten percent had an Associate's or Bachelor's degree and one respondent, a school teacher, had a graduate degree (Master's). With these low educational levels (88% with a high school education or *less*), these women are representative of the limited educational attainment of the broader population of the city at that time.

In addition to, or perhaps because of, their low educational attainment, ninety percent (n=46) of women interviewed had earned below \$20,000 in 2004, the year prior to Katrina. The women in my sample represent a population with limited income and other associated resources, but—as this study demonstrates—with a seemingly infinite capacity to transform existing and invented social capital into survival resources for themselves and their family members.

²³ One fifth of women were in the pretest sample. The “pretest” sample refers to interviews gained early in the process, prior to the securing of any type of funding. The final survey is a modified version of the Neighborhood Change Survey, a NSF funded project to understand the evacuation and recovery experiences in selected New Orleans neighborhoods. Combining this research with the larger project allowed participants to receive a twenty dollar gift card as compensation.

Poor, Middle-Aged Black Women: Ruby Creates Options

A typical woman in this study, Ruby, 56, had been unemployed at the time of Hurricane Katrina. Having lost her husband in 1994, Ruby moved into the new “Abundance Square” mixed housing, which had been built through the old Desire Housing Project’s HOPE VI redevelopment program. Ruby shared her unit with six other family members—two daughters and her grandchildren, ages 18, 16, 15, and 13. Ruby was caring for her grandchildren because their mother (her third daughter) had been murdered.

Ruby had evacuated as best she could before the storm, attempting to take her family to Reserve, LA, a location halfway between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

Amidst the traffic, Ruby missed the exit:

It was very stressful. We had left my house at 12 p.m. and we got ourselves going through Jefferson Parish. The people could drive in their vehicles, even with the door open. It was stressful and hot. It was 5:30 p.m. when we hit Airline Highway. We went through Jefferson [Parish], then back to Airline [Highway]. On the way out, I was in Reserve, LA. I had passed Reserve by like two to three miles. Then, a hard rain came down. Then, a man on the radio said the storm would hit Baton Rouge before New Orleans, so we turned back [and returned to New Orleans]. [P50]

Since her evacuation location was in the direct storm path, according to the radio newscaster, Ruby returned her son’s home in Kenner, a New Orleans suburb. Ruby and her family rode out the storm there. After two days passed, the whole family went to the New Orleans International airport, where they were stranded for a few more days until being transported to a church in a small Louisiana town near Shreveport. It was there that Ruby learned about the flooding of her neighborhood, which she described to me briefly: “I was [living] upstairs, but there was still water. I got 9-10 feet in my house. I

lost everything downstairs and stuff [downstairs was ruined²⁴].” Ruby effectively lost everything she owned.

Staying in the church near Shreveport for the next two and a half weeks, Ruby and her family began to piece together survival systems during their immediate displacement. First, Ruby’s daughter found an apartment with the help of the church members where they were staying. Once settled, the daughter then helped Ruby to get an apartment in the same complex, in the same community as the church that sheltered them. While her unit only had two bedrooms, instead of the four she needed, for Ruby, this was a starting point, albeit a difficult one, as her rent increased by \$82 a month from before the storm. Ruby also received food stamps, though her allocation was reduced from over \$300 before the storm to \$226 monthly after because her eldest granddaughter had turned 18 and was no longer covered by the program. Ruby faced the most difficulty with her medical care, requiring medical prescriptions for blood pressure and regular screenings for diabetes. In New Orleans, her medications had cost just \$18 a month at Charity Hospital; in her new home in Northern Louisiana, her medications were \$259 per month. So, while Ruby was housed, fed and receiving medical care, her monthly costs were significantly higher for her and her family. In this way, Ruby epitomizes the evacuation, displacement and recovery challenges experienced by so many women in this study who, after trying to rebuild their lives, managed to survive but not actually fully recover from the storm and its aftermath.

²⁴ Ruby had a two-story apartment. Her bedroom was on the second floor, but her clothing and other things were still ruined.

Discussing Disaster

Hearing stories like Ruby's was difficult. However, my central objective in interviewing had to be to think first of those I was interviewing, not about my own pain over troubling accounts. Knowing before I had even begun interviews that I lacked the financial and counseling resources for assisting women troubled by my interviews, I set about to create a list of social service providers who could help interviewees who expressed a need for such assistance. With the assistance of graduate student friends who were studying psychology, they identified national counseling and crisis hotline phone numbers as one small thing that I could do to help those I was interviewing. I was not qualified in any way to give counseling myself. Just the same, a pre-Katrina trauma of my own—in April 2004, I had been raped—made me painfully aware of the complex needs of those who have gone through life-changing pain and suffering. I knew on a personal level how important and helpful counseling could be in the wake of traumatic circumstances.

Despite this small service, throughout the interviews I felt guilt about the inherent benefits that I would receive from each woman's loss. Was I insensitive for using women's pain as a basis for my dissertation? Might the story that I would tell impact in some positive ways on these and other low-income women's own lives? Could they teach disaster planners about the diverse needs of those fleeing disasters? Could municipal, state and federal governments learn from the gendered disaster experiences of poor women? Admittedly, I have never fully resolved these questions for myself: I cannot ignore that the women's stories benefit me professionally. Yet, I firmly believe that the voices of Katrina survivors deserve to be heard. Consequently, I continue

writing, presenting papers, teaching the topic and telling these stories to anyone who will listen.

Living Losses Together

The duration of data collection—sixteen months in all—was made longer than its ‘real-time’ by the stressful aspects of the interview content. Many women had lost family members, been stranded in floodwaters or trapped in shelters of last resort. As a very early returnee to New Orleans, I could see the painful aftermath of these realities.

Dwellings were spray-painted with hash-mark symbols indicating that a first-responder had been there searching for survivors, human bodies and animals left behind. Buildings were stained by dark black water lines where the flood waters had risen and settled—many far in excess of eight or ten feet. Overturned cars and mile-long piles of debris cut across the New Orleans landscape.

Each time I called a prospective interviewee I feared that I would encounter someone whose loved one had drowned; it was normal for interviewees to have lost all of their possessions. Additionally, there was uncertainty about homes and whether women would be allowed to return to their public housing units. Often, women looked to me for answers, but I typically had none. To manage the mix of emotions that I felt every day, I collected data in fits and starts, conducting four or five interviews in a week, until I was emotionally and physically exhausted. Then, I would cease interviewing for two or three weeks, using the time to muster the courage to begin again.

Returning to New Orleans in October 2005, the city was devastating, depressing, sexist and racist. In my own Algiers Point neighborhood (just across the Mississippi

River from downtown New Orleans), there was a home with a wall missing. It looked like a giant, life-sized doll house, with the contents of its owner's life on display for all to see. Another house had collapsed on itself, leaving a splintered pile of wooden debris spilling into the street. Most homes had blue tarps on their roofs, and many had shingles and siding missing. But the real devastation was not the state of New Orleans' built environment, it was a social culture marked by intolerance. At neighborhood bars, relief workers and locals alike confided in me (a white woman) that "the Blacks" had burnt down a shopping mall, looted local grocery stores, and "invaded" my Algiers neighborhood. By contrast, one of my interviewees had told me that the mall had caught fire because people broke in to cook food there because they had nothing to eat without power in their own homes, and that caused the fire. My neighbor told me that police had given his landlord permission to "shoot the niggers" and "just kick them to the curb" after looters had been shooting blindly into the air. Meanwhile, a co-worker from a neighborhood restaurant where I had worked told me that she had to leave after three days because the neighborhood was "too rough" and there were too many shootings happening. Amidst all these stories was a deep racial tension and hatred, stronger than I had ever observed in a decade living in the city.

Race relations weren't the only things changed after the storm—gender mattered now too. Walking home from a coffee shop during the first week that I was back in New Orleans, I was gawked at by relief workers—one so intently that I feared he might follow me home and attack me. There were very few women in the city in October 2005 (just two months after Katrina's landfall), making a woman very visible and potentially

vulnerable. Again, I had never felt unsafe in this way on public streets, especially places like Canal Street or Bourbon Street. In Katrina's wake, this all changed.

My beautiful city had become white, masculine and scary. Police-citizen interactions were laced with racial power. Citizen behavior was scrutinized. One day I was talking with a black neighbor and a police patrol car stopped beside us. We were grilled about why we were talking to each other. My neighbor said we were making lunch plans. We had actually been talking about her renter rights and whether ACORN²⁵ could help her fight eviction. In light of all of the tension in New Orleans, I began to stay home more often to avoid uncomfortable interactions with police, other first-responders and my community neighbors. When I learned about the one-year Visiting Instructor position at the University of Central Florida, I decided to apply and moved at the end of June, 2006. Amidst the corrosive environment in New Orleans, interviewing had become even more heartbreaking and painful. Life was just too difficult in a militarized city with such deep racial hatred and persistent reminders of destruction and death everywhere. I still feel a deep sense of loss over leaving New Orleans, even though it was the best choice I ever made.

²⁵ ACORN is the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now. Their mission is to promote stronger communities through petitioning for affordable housing, better schools and serving as a watchdog for fair housing law violations. Following Hurricane Katrina, ACORN was one of the few agencies fighting on behalf of the displaced homeowners, many of whose homes were going to be bulldozed before they were even allowed to return to the city to see them or retrieve any remaining possessions that they could. Similarly, they were supporting homeowners against talks of reclaiming low-lying land in New Orleans through the use of eminent demand. Sadly, they did not have any services for renters, whose housing rights were unprotected by the storm.

Research and Growth: Knowing when to be Silent

While the previous accounts of my time in New Orleans might suggest that I derived little that was positive from the post-Katrina interviews, I saw great resiliency and personal strength among women who had faced the worst Hurricane Katrina had to offer. With each interview, I was growing personally from seeing the courage and commitment of the women I interviewed. Just the same, two questions were particularly difficult for me as a researcher and most definitely for interviewees themselves: “Could you tell me about your evacuation experience?” and “What was your saddest disaster experience?” Some women rushed through their answers, others became upset, and a few cried and could not speak. When this happened, we stopped, talked off the record and then each woman decided for herself if she wanted to continue. In those moments, I suggested the counseling telephone numbers. In every case, my bias favored the interviewee—I never judged them, but observed the difficult position they were in, no matter what choice a woman made. This openness built rapport—something that benefitted both of us. When I lost part of an interview because a woman was unable to continue, I knew that an interviewee’s well-being came before my research: Some things in life are more important than data...

Perhaps the best strength I developed throughout this process was learning to listen. Normally, I talk too much. I learned the value of waiting for each woman to guide her own narrative—asking only minimal follow-up questions during a natural pause. I used these follow-up moments to clarify things I didn’t understand and to inquire further about specific points of interest. I was surprised at the end of an interview when several women expressed relief and appreciation that someone had listened to them. These

moments moved me forward even more than they impacted upon the completion of my research.

Analytic Strategy

In this section, I discuss the technicalities of the analysis. Eight sociological and anthropological literatures and their associated concepts guide this research: Poverty, chronic poverty, survival, survival strategies, evacuation, displacement, extended displacement and recovery. '*Poverty*' is defined conceptually as having an income that falls below the federal poverty threshold, as described above. '*Poverty*' is operationalized for this study by the variable "income category," which asks: "What was your total household income before taxes in 2004, the year before Katrina hit?" "Would you say it was: Less than \$20,000, Between \$20,000–\$40,000, Between \$40,000–\$60,000, Between \$60,000–\$80,000, More than \$80,000, Don't know, or Refused." Unfortunately, the response categories do not correspond with the federal poverty thresholds. However, since the 2004 poverty threshold for a four person family was \$19,223 (Census.gov), we can assume that respondents within the lowest income category are either poor or have a limited income at best—an important consideration in our forthcoming examination of recovery. This income assumption in the sample is verified by the fact that 90% of the sample had 2004 incomes between zero and twenty thousand dollars. Likewise several respondents reported social security and disability assistance as their only income source prior to the storm, neither of which offers generous benefits.

'Chronic poverty,' is defined conceptually as “poverty that persists across time or over generations and is to be distinguished from episodic poverty of the sort that results from short-term fluctuations in household composition or finances” (Devine and Wright 1993: 95). *Chronic poverty* is operationalized through a theoretical-logical argument that given the sample includes former and current public housing residents, and since public housing gives priority for residency to the lowest-income women with children, then the New Orleans public housing population in this sample is composed of low-income residents. At the time of the interview, 90.2% of women were renters, and most all resided in traditional public housing or a Section 8 rental. The mean residency for the pre-test sample was 4.74 years, while for the final sample the mean residency time was just at six years.

'Survival' is conceptually defined as the ability to meet one's basic needs of shelter, food, clothing and medical care and was operationalized as such based on the qualitative indicators. Shelter needs were measured by the open-ended items: “Since leaving New Orleans because of Katrina, how many places have you stayed?”, “How long did you stay at each?” and “How was your initial evacuation experience?” These indicators identified if the respondent was in a temporary or permanent housing situation, if they had received a voucher or were staying with friends, the city where they were and their duration at each location. The story of evacuation also elaborated many of the details and hassles these women faced in meeting their shelter needs. Food availability was assessed by the indicators: “Did you receive any food stamps? If so, how much?” and “Did you receive any food stamps before Katrina? If so, how much?” Clothing and medical care information was obtained through open-ended survey items.

'*Survival Strategies*' are defined conceptually as the techniques used to address and meet the basic needs mentioned above. *Survival strategies* were operationalized in this study in terms of three identified components (Edin and Lein, 1997): work-based, network-based and aid-based. Work-based survival strategies include work, whether in the formal or informal sectors. This component of survival strategies was operationalized for this study through seven questions: "Before Katrina hit, were you working for pay?;" "Were you self-employed?"; "How long did you work there?"; "How many hours did you work there for pay during an average week?"; "What industry was this in?"; "What was your job title?"; "In this job, did you have any of the following benefits: Paid sick leave? Health insurance? Retirement contributions?" Such questions, of course, focus on the means of survival available and utilized by respondents before Katrina. These questions were replicated for the post-Katrina period to compare survival strategies during both stages.

Another set of questions relating to work-based strategies asked about the respondent's work situation during evacuation, which varied as some respondents took on temporary jobs, while many attempted to receive social security and disability benefits as they had previously in New Orleans. These questions were worded as follows: "Which of the following best describes your situation while you were evacuated from the city? Were you: in the same job? In a new job with the same employer? Let go with employer-provided assistance? Let go with no employer-provided assistance?"; "Did you take another paying job while [being] evacuated?"; if the respondent answered "yes", they were probed with: "Compared to your job before the evacuation, would you say this job—in terms of benefits and pay—was better? Just as good? Or not as good?" Since

income is a necessity to afford housing, food and other basic needs, these indicators reveal how work-based strategies factored into the experience of disaster recovery.

Kin network survival strategies are conceptualized as assistance received from relatives, whether child care, temporary housing, money, or food (Stack 1974; Edin and Lein 1997). Kin-based network strategies were operationalized in this study by several indicators: “Did you already know someone living there?”—a follow up question to the indicator “In what city or town did you spend most of your time while you were evacuated?”; and the second follow-up question “how close were you to this person?” Additionally, the evacuation experience question: “How was your initial evacuation experience?” elicits a description of how family and friends helped during evacuation, displacement and recovery.

Aid-based survival strategies are defined conceptually as the use of such formal assistance programs as public housing, food stamps, welfare or social security, or the receipt of goods and services from such local non-profit agencies as church groups, food pantries or soup kitchens. Operationalization for this survival strategy included the following indicators: “Did you receive any cash, checks, debit cards, and/or gift certificates from any of the following sources: family and friends, Red Cross, FEMA, a religious organization, or other? And did you receive any non-cash assistance from the following sources: family and friends, Red Cross, FEMA, a religious organization, or other? Two other questions were used that combine survival strategy categories across answer categories: “Which of the following best describes where you were living during this time? A family or friend’s place? A place you rented? An emergency or temporary shelter? Or what?” and “How did you find that housing? By yourself? With the help of

family or friends? Through a newspaper ad or formal listing? With the help of a government agency or other organization? Or some other way?" Together, these sets of questions were used to understand whether displacement of networks shaped respondents' experiences of evacuation, extended displacement and recovery.

'*Evacuation*' is conceptually defined as the process of departing from a disaster threatened zone or a place in which a disaster has already occurred. *Evacuation* was operationally defined by several indicators, including: "How did you evacuate the city? In your own or a family member's car? A friend's car? By some other means?"; "When did you evacuate from the city?"; and "Were you rescued?" If "yes," "how many days [after Katrina had hit]?"; "When you first left New Orleans, did you go to a shelter, hotel/motel, family member's house, friend's house, or somewhere else?" These questions identified the role of economic structure on evacuation decision-making. Other indicators included: "When did you first learn about Hurricane Katrina?"; "Before anyone knew what would happen, how worried were you? Not at all worried, somewhat worried, worried or very worried?"; "Did you evacuate before the storm?" and "How was your initial evacuation experience? Could you describe it?"

'*Displacement*' is conceptually defined as the process by which:

...persons or groups of persons ... have ...[to] flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters... (Vincent 2001: 6).

Using this definition, the only difference between 'internal displacement' and 'displacement' in general, is whether the displaced person crosses an international border. For those who do cross borders, they are assured political asylum by international refugee law, while internally displaced persons—such as evacuees during Hurricane Katrina—are

unprotected by refugee law and must therefore rely on their national government to protect and assist them (Frederico et al 2007:172). *Displacement* is operationalized dichotomously, based on the following questions: “Did you evacuate before the storm?” and “When did you evacuate from the city?” Since evacuation was mandatory following the storm, every resident of the city, excepting emergency workers, was displaced.

Since some New Orleans neighborhoods were more severely damaged than others, it stands to reason that some residents experienced longer periods of displacement than others. However, the literature on internal displacement does not periodize the duration of displacement, instead generally maintaining the dichotomous categorization engaged above or arguing more or less time promotes a particular trend, at a general level of analysis. This is likely due to the fact that to periodize displacement is conceptually complicated by the fact that many refugees and internally displaced person may return and leave multiple times, or as is often the case, never return at all, potentially making the distinction meaningless (Sorenson 2001; Delgado and Laegreid 2001; Boutin and Nkurunziza 2001). However, these studies are largely in unindustrialized and under-industrialized nations, often amidst war. By contrast, the United States is an industrialized, wealthy nation, which arguably should be prepared to respond to a catastrophic disaster. It is within this context that the next concept, extended displacement, is developed.

‘Extended displacement’ is conceptually defined as displacement lasting in excess of six months. *Extended displacement* was operationalized for the purposes of this research as maintaining residence outside of one’s home community for a period of six or more months following a disaster. I argue that the concept bears salience in an

industrialized national context—as is the case of the United States—because the governmental structure to respond to a disaster event is already in place in the form of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Furthermore, as the duration of displacement lengthens, the more likely individuals are to assimilate to their new living environments, making a return home potentially less desirable or likely as they become integrated in new communities. Thus, I argue the United States should be capable of enabling evacuees to return within six months' time. Finally, as the majority of the data, approximately eighty percent, were collected beginning in March 2006, a full six months following the storm, this dataset allows the findings to assess the utility of this six-month, 'extended displacement' threshold. Extended displacement as a time-period is measured as follows: "How long were you evacuated from the city?"; "After the storm, when did you return to the city to live?" and "Will you return? Why or why not?"

'*Recovery*' is conceptually defined at two levels of analysis, structural and individual. At the structural level, 'recovery' refers to a reconstitution of the old community structure, and a modification of personal and collective life, including the return of government agencies, businesses, infrastructural services such as water and electricity, and other collective 'needs' for day-to-day community existence, such as groceries and hospitals (Couch 1996: 68-9). *Recovery* was operationalized in this study by assessing the qualitative data from the survey interviews. The analysis considers the role of shifting financial security such as having a home, possessions, car, or clothing; family (in)stability and deaths; and continued dislocation and housing (in)stability; and feelings of loss, homesickness, depression, trauma and anger, as well as physical effects such as weight loss, trouble sleeping, new or more severe medical and health problems

which occurred independent of displacement location. Together these realities reflect the degree to which life can return to ‘normal’ among the women in this sample—recognizing that “normal” in this case meant living in the city of New Orleans in a condition of chronic poverty, while seeking survival strategies to fortify their lives prior to the storm.

Recovery was also operationalized by the following quantitative indicators:

“Compared to before Katrina do you feel less financially secure, about the same, or more financially secure?”; “Are your bills more expensive now?” and “Are you ever worried about not being able to pay your bills?” to assess a respondent’s post-Katrina economic situation. In this way, the indicators assess whether women could recover by creating new survival systems after the storm to meet basic needs such as housing, food assistance and medical services. They also indicate if the cost of each was so prohibitive as to prevent enabling a transition to self-sufficiency or from returning to any semblance of pre-storm life.

Analytical Themes

Hurricane Katrina created a plethora of survival challenges from threat to aftermath, particularly for women as they navigated through the chronology of possibilities encompassed by their new lives. In the process of maneuvering to maintain their survival, five analytic themes dominate their narratives: creating and choosing, helping and believing, relying, hurting and healing, and living in uncertainty.²⁶ Each theme

²⁶ To aid in the coding and analysis process, I conducted all qualitative coding using the Atlas.ti qualitative computer software. This program allowed for thematic coding of data within a file, as well as data linkages

highlights women's lived experiences within the contexts of Hurricane Katrina's threat, their evacuation decisions and strategies, and their particular outcomes at each step in this process. In some cases, women are actors in their lives—creating and choosing, helping and believing, living in uncertainty—while at other times they rely, and hurt and heal—activities that have dual 'acted upon' and 'active' components. Taking each of the five themes of this study in order, I define each one:

- 1) *Creating and choosing* refers to the ways in which women formulate their perception of reality, then using that reality to decide on what actions they will next take in their lives. It is a way to frame their personal narratives, often while trying to make sense out of the chaos of the storm.
 - 2) *Helping and believing* includes activities women used to manage the disruptions created by Hurricane Katrina, often focusing on acts of care and sentiments of faith to manage the crisis.
 - 3) *Relying* involved engaging multiple survival strategies including help from kin, friends, strangers and formal institutions such as churches and government agencies to meet their short- and long-term needs.
 - 4) *Hurting and healing* refers to the emotional impediments and breakthroughs which framed the overall 'Katrina experience' for many women. While some predominately agonized over the storm and its aftermath, others had used their experience with Hurricane Katrina to create a new life in an improved location.
 - 5) *Living in uncertainty* explores the myriad of ways in which women's displacement experiences were temporal and fraught with emergent challenges.
- These experiences inhibited what other disaster research has shown to be the

‘traditional recovery’ path, particularly in terms of re-establishing housing stability, utilizing family networks and finding adequate employment.

Together, these themes create the interpretive framework within which my analysis develops. As women navigated the pre- and post-storm challenges within their own lives, there were multiple forks in the road, representing pathways of choice and force.

The chapters are organized around a chronology of possibilities which represent the different pathways evacuees could and did follow, from preparing for the storm to returning (or not) to their New Orleans home. All pathways begin with a single decision—whether to evacuate or ‘ride-out’ the storm. From this moment, some paths wind through periods of stable housing and recovery, while others push further into deeper displacement and uncertainty. This analysis considers each step along the way, from preparing for the storm (Chapter 4), to evacuating in advance (Chapter 5) or ‘riding-out’ the hurricane (Chapters 6 and 7), with the latter often leading to being stranded in New Orleans in the disaster’s aftermath, to eventually seeking shelter in new communities (Chapter 8) and living through displacement (Chapter 9). Ultimately, evacuees had to decide between returning home (Chapter 10) or remaining away from New Orleans. As the stories move further away from the storm itself, the women’s narratives merge, representing many more commonalities than differences in their unified struggles and patterns living outside of, as well as within, the city of New Orleans.

CHAPTER FOUR

GETTING READY FOR KATRINA

How low-income women defined the threat of Hurricane Katrina is a negotiated process: women created narratives for themselves based on their resources and situations, in relation to their perceptions of risk. Next, their narratives were challenged or confirmed through interactions with kin networks. These interactions transformed their evacuation decision into a negotiated process.

In this chapter, I analyze this collective process of storm preparation and evacuation, illustrating the interrelationship between social networks and evacuation decision-making. I find that when the storm's severity and threat were defined collectively within kin networks, evacuation became a viable and necessary option. I argue that the mechanism explaining this process can be understood in terms of "narrative creation," a process in which women created personal narratives about safety or threat, which then guided their choice of an evacuation pathway.

Narratives of safety function to minimize risk, justifying the decision long after the threat has passed. Narratives of threat also function to acknowledge risk, presupposing evacuation in most cases. This process of narrative creation suggests that low-income women are not, in fact, mere victims of their socio-economic status — poverty alone is not keeping them from evacuating — but rather empowered actors who

chose through a collective, negotiated process whether to evacuate or remain to ‘ride out the storm.’ Certainly, chronic poverty makes the “how” more complicated, yet, almost every woman in this study could have utilized the option of pooling resources with kin to access transportation and enable evacuation. Sadly, many simply elected not to do so.

It’s just a hurricane, right?

Narrating the storm as “safe”. On Saturday, August 27th, 2005, Hurricane Katrina — a dangerous category five storm — was on a direct track to New Orleans. Residents were encouraged to leave if they could, and in parishes surrounding the city, many were required to do so. On Sunday, the day prior to landfall, the city’s Mayor called for a mandatory evacuation, though at that point the storm had already weakened. Despite the Mayor’s increasingly dire warnings, many of those interviewed for this study did not initially perceive that they were in danger and at-risk. Katrina was “just another Betsy” — a big storm that would cause some flooding, but nothing to leave home over.

The women’s narratives about safety framed their decision to evacuate:

I said ‘oh, it wasn’t going to be nothing but a little rain and wind.’ The following day, that water was coming up, and I got really, really scared. I still can’t believe it. The water kept rising higher. (P52)

[I stayed] because I done been through a hurricane, and it was a bad hurricane. Because I’d been through them before, so I didn’t think nothing of it. (P41)

I thought it wasn’t gonna be that bad. It was just wind and rain at first, it wasn’t bad. Nothing had blown off; everything was okay, until the flood came. (P21)

Phrases like these illustrate the narrative of the storm as ‘safe’ that minimized the storm’s risk and justified the decision to remain in New Orleans.

Corresponding with the narrative of the storm as ‘safe’ is a general sense of disregard for the storm’s danger across the sample. When I asked how worried they had been before the storm, not even one-third of the women studied said that they were either ‘worried’ or ‘very worried’ — reflecting a high level of disregard for the storm’s risks. This narrative was so predominant that even when the option to evacuate *was* available, many women choose to stay, meaning their narratives of ‘safety’ functioned to prevent evacuation.

Balancing competing considerations. As women collectively created narratives to guide their assessments of danger, their construction of options was greatly influenced by three material considerations: evacuation expense, job security and health²⁷. In the context of chronic poverty, some low-income women assessed risk in terms of the financial costs of evacuation—could they afford to go? For Ebony, her chronic poverty stifled her capacity to leave New Orleans with her adult son. When asked “Did you stay in New Orleans because you couldn’t afford to go?”, she replied:

Yes. I had no other choice. I couldn’t afford to go. If I had money, I would have been gone. I didn’t have no transportation. My son didn’t have enough money to not go to work. He had a car, but no gas. It’s like you ain’t got nothing. (P33)

Without money for gas, food or shelter, the decision to remain was a non-decision. With limited social and kin networks, Ebony could not “pool” enough money to evacuate; it likewise complicated her decision that her son had work obligations to meet. For Ebony,

²⁷ Of the sample, one woman, P33, stated money specifically, while most stated that they just didn’t think the storm would be so bad, including some who left in advance (n=16): P2, P3, P8, P16, P21, P22, P25, P26, P30, P37, P39, P41, P44, P46, P47 and P52. Nine working women elected to stay in New Orleans through the storm. Of those, six reported work as the reason they remained: P16, P26, P35, P38, P47 and P51. P40 would have stayed, had she not been fired immediately before the storm. No women cited health as a reason to stay, though one woman left due to health concerns: P11.

the narrative that shaped her evacuation focused on the realities of her poverty, not on safety. Elaborating on this reasoning is Sarah, who identified how the economics of evacuation influenced the decision to evacuate:

With [Hurricane] Ivan [in 2004], more people left than this time — New Orleans barely had a sprinkle, so a lot of people feel it's wasted money and are not gonna want to leave. Nobody took [Katrina] as serious as it was! And by it's being the end of the month, a lot of people didn't have that money to leave. We had to pull our money together to go.

Evacuation expense represents a significant consideration, costing around \$300 for gas and food for a household and increasing when hotels are required. Among this sample, the modal annual income category was \$20,000 or less, meaning that even if a household earned \$1600 per month (near the top of the income bracket), a modest evacuation expense of \$300 would represent a fifth of the family's monthly income. Similarly, as monthly income declines, the proportional evacuation cost burden increases, further deterring evacuation.

A second material consideration that structured a woman's decision to evacuate was job security. At the time of Hurricane Katrina, 21 of 51 respondents reported working, representing 41.2% of the sample. For these women, they had to decide whether the evacuation from New Orleans was worth the possibility of lost wages or even their jobs. Illustrating the strain this decision creates is Faith, a 911 operator who was scheduled to work during the storm, but needed to assure her sons could leave the city for safety first:

(How did you decide to evacuate?) Well, I wasn't really planning on evacuating. I was essential personnel, so I couldn't leave. I had planned for my kids to leave with my parents. But [their] grandmother left before everybody, so [my kids] couldn't get out. I lost my job for taking them out the city. I had to take them out. (That's a difficult choice. Risk their lives or lose your job.)

[My employer] gave me a sob story. They say “what you gonna do for the city?” But you can’t take your kids to work, and you can’t leave them at the house by themselves. So, I told them “I will go to Baton Rouge and come back. I have a badge, so I can get back in.” But they said “No, we’ll call you,”²⁸ all the while I’m at Tulane and Broad answering 911 calls. So I went home and got my kids. I enjoyed my job, but they wasn’t working with me. They wouldn’t let me start an hour late on a 22-hour shift, just to get my kids to safety. (P40)

For Faith, her kin network failed her by leaving without her children, forcing her to choose between their short-term safety and her long-term work-based survival strategy for the entire family. At the cost of being fired, Faith narrated Katrina as a threat that merited the loss of employment in order to protect her children. Likewise, it is possible that her boss also entertained a narrative of threat, realizing that firing Faith would save three lives in the face of such risk. This is unknown, but those working in emergency management were most likely to narrate the storm as a threat, as did Faith despite her offer to return to work.

In contrast, Vanessa elected to ride out the storm, believing she would be able to go to work after it passed. Like so many women who engaged a narrative of the storm as ‘safe’, Vanessa did not take the storm “seriously” and ignored her family’s requests, deciding not to evacuate on account of her job:

Sunday they had called and said the hurricane was coming. I just didn’t think it was coming. My entire family evacuated except me. I thought it would pass over so I can go to work. (P26)

For Vanessa, work obligations outweighed her family’s warning, with dire consequences (see Chapter 6).

Yet, work was an important part of many women’s lives, in addition to being a pathway to self-sufficiency. For Giselle, remaining in the city was actually an ethical

²⁸ Researcher note: Respondent was fired on the spot.

decision she and her husband shared, volunteering to stay at the upscale elderly home where they both worked. For Giselle, her social ties at her job were the deciding factor to stay because “the residents, they were more like family. I developed a relationship with them. [Also,] the thought that it’d be such a big storm — I wanted to help them get out safe.” (P51). Unlike others who stayed based on a narrative of safety, Giselle acknowledged the storm’s risks: “Thank God I understood the damage a category five would do. And listening to people who dared not to move, saying it wasn’t going to be bad. I was horrified. This was a real eye opener.”

Giselle’s work was a way to serve her community and support her social network, by caring for elderly individuals whose families had left them behind, despite the strong sense of risk she felt prior to the storm. In this way, work prevented her evacuation, but not due to monetary constraints. Thus, for working women in this sample, each assessed Katrina’s danger relative to the economics of evacuation and sometimes to a sense of duty to the social network, grappling in the process with their need for long-term survival via employment versus the potential short-term threat to their lives and dwellings.

Not only did poverty and employment concerns structure a woman’s decision to remain in New Orleans, so also did health complications. The third structural consideration, health problems made travel difficult and dangerous for some women. For example, Ebony who stayed for the storm due to lack of money and transportation also suffered a heart attack while stranded and had pre-existing mobility problems based on her weight of nearly 400 pounds. Similarly, Lillian, who suffered from back and leg pain so intense she could not climb a flight of stairs or ride public transportation at the time of

our interview a few months after the storm, only evacuated because her daughter took her from the city as an act of care. In this way, health was an evacuation consideration.

While no woman in this study explicitly identified health as a reason they remained, 72 year old Violet's health was one of the reasons she evacuated with her family, since she "needed regular dialysis and [her] health was not very strong." In fact, just among the women in this sample, respondents reported such pre-existing medical conditions as physical disability, diabetes, high blood pressure, strokes, kidney damage, blindness, nagging cough, gallbladder problems, pneumonia and Lupus²⁹. Such medical problems reflect the health problems of America's poor, who have decreased access to proper healthcare and treatment based on their economic status and geographic locations (Kirby 2008) — an effect compounded when poverty and race intersect. According to Goldberg, Hayes and Huntley (2004), race, ethnicity, gender, income, sexual orientation and geography all cause health disparities in incidence rates of diseases including cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, HIV/Aids and infant mortality. They cite, for example, that cancer incidence is ten times more likely among African-Americans than whites, while death by cancer is thirty-five times more likely. Similarly, other diseases like diabetes have a death rate that is 27% higher for Blacks than whites, which is exacerbated when one considers the fact that 44 percent of working adult Blacks are below 200 percent of the poverty level versus 17 percent of whites (Goldberg, Hayes and Huntley 2004:4-8), making poor Blacks among the most vulnerable to negative health complications when compared to the population at large, and whites in particular.

²⁹ N=18: P2, P11, P13, P18, P20, P21, P22, P23, P25, P27, P29, P30, P31, P33, P37, P42, P43 and P50.

Thus, evacuation expense, job security and health represent three considerations which structured women's decisions to evacuate New Orleans in powerful ways. Through a balancing of each against the perceived danger of the storm, women weighed their well-being against the narratives they created. This internal conversation helped to shape an evacuation decision that was later challenged or supported by significant others within each woman's social network.

The Collective Narrative

Fortunately, women's singular voices were not the only ones in conversations about evacuation. Women exist within social networks and their resources are connected to those ties (Stack 1974; Anderson 1989, 1990, 1999; Dynes 2005; Dominguez and Watkins 2003). Within a disaster context, evacuation is a negotiated process — kin networks can promote or discourage evacuation (Dynes 2005; Drabek and Boggs 1968).

In this study, kin networks functioned to enable evacuation in two ways — first, by altering a woman's private narrative about the storm's severity and second, by offering a material, tangible evacuation option through the network.³⁰ This option was operationalized by pooling resources from network members such as cash, food, transportation and shelter to allow the entire network to evacuate, whereas an individual member could not have. By broadening the conversation to include new voices, actors and resources, evacuation became an available alternative for women, as kin networks

³⁰ Twenty-nine women evacuated themselves. Twenty-two women left before the storm and seven women left afterwards. Twenty-six specifically identified family or friends with whom they left in private vehicles.

created group possibilities that altered the parameters of the individual evacuation decision. Thelma, Perla, Ingrid and Callista, respectively, illustrate this transition:

I wasn't planning on evacuating. I never drank water, but I had stocked up on bottled water and canned food. I didn't think to prepare to evacuate. It wasn't until my granddaughter called, that I decided to leave. (P30)

Really, I had been hearing about the storm a couple of days. I didn't give it too much thought. The kids called, said it was a Category 5. I told my husband we should go. My husband was sick, real sick. I grabbed three pieces [of clothing] for myself, my grandbaby, and my husband. (P7)

I have a brother, if he don't say move, we don't move. My brother, he say "it's time to go." We don't be able to stay, and we go.

The most... that I can say is, initially... due to the information on the news, I didn't take [the hurricane] seriously. [Then on] the day of the hurricane...I saw how much damage, and the power outage, it had done. It was devastation. (How did you decide to evacuate?) My brother contacted me. He called me telling me to get out. (P22)

As the narrative of the storm as 'safe' dissolved under pressure from family members and friends, it was replaced by a new narrative: the storm as a "legitimate threat."

This transformation occurs through a process involving (what I label) "threat legitimization" — a redefinition of risk as negotiated by family and friends. Through threat legitimization, the women interviewed reshaped their assessments of safety and danger, reframing their decision to evacuate based on kin negotiation and the emerging risks following the storm (this was especially the case for women who evacuated late, like Callista). Once the risk was transformed into a "legitimate threat" and the narrative of safety discarded, choosing to evacuate, despite the potential costs, became much simpler.

Illustrating how threat legitimation and its preceding negotiation unfolded, I incorporate a conversation between Sarah and her aunt. Sarah, very worried about Katrina's danger even before the storm had hit New Orleans, begins:

I was focusing on [the hurricane] Thursday, Friday. I was still going to work, [but on] Friday I was ready to get up and get out. That's when I got very worried and I wanted to go.

But, of course, the decision-making process was neither as linear nor as singular as Sarah describes it. In those important days before landfall, Sarah and her family negotiated the evacuation decision, calling each other often "to see who could go with who," ultimately making a plan to leave Sunday morning. Sarah subsequently described the process to me, saying:

I talked to a lot of people at work before the storm. They weren't sure which way to go. I told them that if the storm goes this way, they needed to evacuate. When I talked to my aunt, she said 'God is gonna take care of me.' Then I said, 'But, if he's giving you a warning, you need to leave.'

At that point, Sarah explained, her aunt decided to evacuate with the family. Sarah added, "We had to pull our money together to go."

For Sarah, evacuation decision-making was a process between herself, her co-workers and her family. Like many evacuees, pre-existing social capital guided assessments of evacuation possibilities (Dynes 2005), reshaping a narrative of safety—in her aunt's words, "God is gonna take care of me."—into a legitimate threat. As those who communicated with trusted others found a new narrative voice that encouraged evacuation, engaging the network also provided tangible ways that evacuation could be rendered do-able. I call this process a "competition between narratives."

For Louisa, her individual narrative kept her in the city during the storm, staying in a downtown hotel where her adult son worked. This "vertical evacuation" kept her

safe initially, but after the first day, she received a call from her other adult son insisting she evacuate to his home on the city's Westbank because the floodwater in New Orleans proper was rising. As Louisa explains it:

A lot of people just don't want to go. I stayed where I was... I would have never gone, but the children said we not staying there this time. My son went to look [at the floodwater], came back and said "Water's coming on Claiborne." He said that, and I threw a few things in a bag [and left].

Through the insistence of loved ones, Louisa's narrative of safety was redefined to acknowledge the threat, legitimize it and encourage evacuation from the flooding city.

The competing narrative also connected her to new resources, including food, shelter and transportation from the city (see Chapter 8).

Just because evacuation decision-making can involve more than one voice, it does not guarantee that the best choices will be made. In fact, this process can function negatively when network pressure, although encouraging a woman to evacuate, is overridden by a woman's own narrative of safety:

It was the same day [as the evacuation order³¹]... I was at my job. They let us go home early. My mother said, "We have to evacuate," but I didn't think it was that serious. We went to the Superdome, and then there go Katrina. (P16)

Well, I was really scared, to tell you the truth, but I didn't show it. The Lord, he make a way for me, one way or another. I stayed home. I didn't know where to go and I had nobody to bring me out of town. My son, I didn't know where he was. My son's out in the East. [The storm] just got so strong, so I decided I'll stay in my apartment. Other people were here in they apartments, and I went downstairs and talked to them. (P18)

The evacuation decisions of these two women which favored remaining in New Orleans over leaving—even in the face of some urging to the contrary—nevertheless illustrate their connections to networks outside themselves. From enabling evacuation through a

³¹ Sunday, August 28th, 2005.

narrative of legitimate threat to creating a false narrative of safety, decisions were made within an interactive process, linking the outcomes of multiple lives to one another.

In the following section, I discuss how interviewees' interwoven linkages translated into material resources for storm survival and evacuation.

Interwoven Linkages as Material Resources

One of the key functions of kin networks during Hurricane Katrina preparation was to engage helping and belief systems that nurtured survival during the storm. Helping systems are activities women used to manage the disruptions created by Hurricane Katrina, often focusing on acts of care, while belief systems refer to sentiments of faith used to manage the crisis. The activities of helping systems included combining material resources —money, transportation, food, water and shelter — to facilitate evacuation or to secure temporary housing in a new location. Belief systems included dialogues and conversations that helped to minimize the stress and promote the idea that the trauma can be survived and things will be “okay” in the end.

For the women interviewed, a primary act of helping occurred when kin networks provided shelter at the “safest” location for those who did not evacuate:

My mom worked at a nursery, and heard about [Katrina] on the news [on] Friday [before landfall]. We prepared to go... [but] on Saturday³² the lights went out. We didn't know the extent of the hurricane. That Saturday, the children all met at my mom's house for the storm. The lights went off, then the phone went off, so we had no access to call no one. It was real, real bad. It was like a nightmare.
(P31)

³² The respondent indicated Saturday, but may have meant Sunday. She and her family lived in an uptown neighborhood, near Louisiana Avenue and St. Charles Avenue, in an area which floods regularly during normal thunderstorms. The area is also prone to power outages, which may explain the power outage prior to the storm's landfall.

Well, at first, me and my daughter — my youngest girl — we was going to go by her complex because she was on the second and third floor³³. My [other] daughter's house is flat, she was in the [New Orleans] East, so [then we decided] we were going to my granddaughter's in the East because she [is also] on the second and third floor.³⁴ Then, my granddaughter... [she called] Sunday morning, about 5:00 a.m. in the morning, [and said ...] “we leaving town. Get your things together and we will come and get you.”

It was her mama and dad in her car, and her two kids. I rode in a car with a friend of hers. She got me in her car. I took clothes for three days. At the end of the month I get my medicine, so I got insulin and left. Not sure how many hours it took us from the highway, but it was bumper to bumper. First, she said, ‘we going to Baton Rouge.’ We just kept riding and riding, and stopping on little stops when we can. (P30)

In both cases, kin networks came together to help family and friends in the emerging crisis. In the former case, the family came together to ride out the storm in the “safest” location. In the latter case, the granddaughter altered the narrative of safety to one of threat, which enabled evacuation. In a material way, she also enabled evacuation by offering a ride from the city and shelter once they found a final destination. Again, the pooling of resources created new survival-promoting narratives and tangible opportunities.

Once the collective network agreed upon a narrative of “legitimate threat,” they pooled resources such as cars, food and beverages. Similar to non-evacuating women who would gather at the safest location, networks choosing to leave would create a ‘caravan of kin.’ Asia, a 51 year old interviewee, described how the caravan system works:

³³ The daughter's apartment had a second floor entrance and was two-stories tall, making it located on both the second and third floors of the building.

³⁴ The granddaughter's apartment had a second floor entrance and was two-stories tall, making it located on both the second and third floors of the building.

It was unexpected. We left Saturday. We were worried about our family. (How worried were you?) We were worried, but not too much. I thought it would be like the other ones and we'd just turn around [and come home]. (Who did you evacuate with?) My son-in-law, and like 50 of them [other people, including] my daughter, her four kids, and one of my brothers. (P44)

The narrative of safety so dominated Asia's thinking that it kept her from initially evacuating. However, the narrative of threat, negotiated through the alternative discourses of significant others, ultimately determined her outcome — evacuation. In the next chapter, I examine the role of the 'caravan of kin' as part of the evacuation experience.

Throughout this chapter, women's narratives about the approaching storm's severity and their real capacity to leave guided their initial decision-making process. They created narratives of the storm as 'safe' in reaction to information at hand, as well as in relation to their own obligations to work and family. Yet, these narratives, through the process of creating and then choosing them over other emerging ones, included actors outside the interviewee herself. Since each woman was embedded within a social network, pre-existing social capital came into play as Katrina neared and other voices joined the conversation. Like Dynes (2005) and Drabek and Boggs (1968), I found that pre-existing social capital set the parameters of evacuation decision-making, while such material realities as income, housing and health status were mere considerations, rather than determinants. Most importantly, the competitive narratives kin provided helped to transform decision-making into a social interaction between an interviewee and those same kin. Through an interviewee's kin network, narratives about safety were translated into narratives about threat, or vice versa. While other narratives existed, safety and threat dominated interviewees' discourse. As such, the transformation of safety into

threat through kin network negotiations was an important mechanism in securing an in-town 'safe space' to weather the storm or to promote evacuation from the city entirely. Thus, as this chapter has illustrated, much more than material realities influenced an interviewee's decision to remain in New Orleans or evacuate from Hurricane Katrina.

CHAPTER FIVE

LEAVING HOME

Although many women in the sample maintained their narratives about Hurricane Katrina as a non-threat, their commitment to this assessment eroded as they interacted by phone or in person with family and friends who urged them to evacuate. In the end, negotiations with kin and friends saved lives by removing entire networks of people from harm's way, as just over forty percent of the women in this study decided to evacuate New Orleans in advance of the storm. By contrast, women without the resources to leave, or who came to a consensus that they would be safe during the storm, faced dire circumstances: they left New Orleans late, going through the long and arduous experience of evacuating after the storm had passed or they remained to wait for help, stranded, making their way through rising water to a 'shelter of last resort'—the New Orleans Convention Center or the Louisiana Superdome (See Chapters 6 and 7).

This chapter explores the lived experiences of the women who evacuated in advance of the storm (n=22), with particular attention on the role of the "kin caravan" in group survival. For many women, the caravan of kin reframed their narrative from one of safety to one of threat. The caravan also brought the network group together as a team fighting against the storm, helping each other along the way. Implicit in this relationship was the shared group belief that evacuation would be a temporary experience that would

end with their return home in just a few days. Through such a belief system, several families became strongly bonded and highly inclusive as they helped each other during evacuation. As in the previous chapter, I find that evacuation experiences are enmeshed within kin-based survival strategies, as members offered each other material support as part of a “kin caravan.”

Evacuating with a Caravan of Kin

The “kin caravan,” an emergent mechanism, was used by evacuating women to solidify a threat narrative before leaving the city, and, to facilitate the evacuation itself. The caravan represents a portable version of the well-studied kin-based survival strategies that poor women activate in their residential neighborhoods. The “kin caravan” manifested itself through acts of pooling food and water, securing and sharing transportation and splitting costs for short-term shelter, such as motels³⁵.

For many women who evacuated, the kin caravan was the tangible response to the new, collective narratives of threat that emerged due to the storm. Describing her evacuation in detail, Sarah left New Orleans in a caravan of three cars, after her family had reshaped her initial narratives about ‘storm safety’ into a framework that placed a premium on safety from the storm. Through telephone contacts, Sarah’s narrative shifted, and once this new definition of the situation had crystallized, Sarah’s network wasted no time in leaving:

³⁵ The following respondents left in a kin caravan prior to the storm (n=19): P1, P5, P6, P7, P8, P11, P12, P14, P19, P20, P22, P23, P28, P30, P36, P37, P40, P44 and P46. Caravan sizes ranged from 2 people to one group estimated between 80-100 people.

I wasn't in the storm, but I know it had to have been him [God] that made it possible for me to leave. I left with my sons and their children. We didn't think the car would make it. We had no gas money — everybody pulled together. We came to Tennessee, my other son went to Atlanta, then my car broke on him. It broke in Atlanta. [P6]

Despite her being employed, evacuating alone was beyond Sarah's budget. By using her family as a resource, Sarah's evacuation was reasonably smooth — except for the immense traffic jams that her kin caravan faced getting out of New Orleans.

Well, we left the day before the storm. We left around 12 o'clock to go to my sister's house in Waterproof, LA. It's usually about three and a half hours to get there. It took us fifteen hours. Traffic was bumper to bumper, and *it was hot!* We had two kids with us. When we left, we didn't expect a long trip. We had a bunch of food and put some in each car. We had sodas, food and other things in different cars, but our car had nothing. We had frozen food and clothes. We went out on Airline Highway — we followed my auntie in her car.

Once we crossed Carrollton Avenue [where it intersects Airline], we hit traffic. From Carrollton on it was backed up, bumper to bumper. I watched the traffic and it was so slow. It was so hot and we were so thirsty! The traffic was so slow that I was able to get out of the car, buy cups of soda and cups of ice [at a gas station]. I paid for it and got back to the car and [the cars had] only moved like six yards. That's how it was the whole way. You'd stop for five minutes, pull up two feet, stop for five minutes, pull up two feet, stop again. It was like this all the way to Natchitoches [Louisiana].

The traffic was the most traumatic thing — being afraid of being out of gas. We were all [almost] out of gas and we got kids and stuff in the car [but] we made it to a service station. We could buy gas, but the [convenience] store was locked. People were stopping...to use the bathroom. They wouldn't let you use the bathroom. People were going behind the station — there was a lot of space back there. People went [to the bathroom] behind the store. I thought that was terrible. That's how it was, they were only selling gas. That was my most devastating experience.

Sarah and her family had brought food and sodas for the evacuation, but these resources were not sufficient to last for the unexpectedly long drive to her sister's house in Waterproof. Yet, despite the hassle of a fifteen hour drive to Northern Louisiana, the alternative would have been worse: flooding with no safe escape from her Section 8 New

Orleans apartment. While Sarah and eleven of her family members had to sleep on her sister's living room floor for a few days, they were safe, sheltered and fed — all through the collective resources of Sarah's kin network.

In some cases the kin caravans were small — just a handful of cars leaving together; in other cases they were quite large, as extended families connected in the days surrounding the storm. For Vivienne, she first left New Orleans in a single car, early Monday morning — the day of the storm — with her mother, her niece and her daughter. Staying in a hotel in Conroe, Texas that night, she watched the storm's aftermath unfold on television. Over the next few days, she was in constant contact with her kin, including another niece:

My niece, she owns her home in Baton Rouge and they left also. They wound up being in Galveston, TX, and we were communicating with them through the phone in the hotel....

Once Vivienne's niece had returned to Baton Rouge and checked her home, she invited the extended kin network, including Vivienne, to stay.

[My niece] got her house together, then she come back to where we [were] at [in Conroe], so many of us.³⁶ Her husband's mother — his family — they went to Galveston with her. When she left and came back, she came to Conroe, TX, where it was my immediate family — my brother and his wife, and her mother and aunt.

At this point in time, the caravan began to roll, headed to stay with Vivienne's niece in Baton Rouge:

It was a caravan, a pile of people. (How many people were in the caravan?) Like 60-something people, a lot of them my sister-in-law's family, but we all did leave together. In cars, trucks, in vans... We [were] all in Conroe, Texas. (P20)

Together, this caravan pooled group resources, helping each other in the weeks following

³⁶ Other members of Vivienne's family had also evacuated to Conroe, TX.

the storm. For Vivienne, caring for her blind mother, her eleven year old daughter and her 16 years old niece³⁷, this resource provided her the time and shelter to figure out a longer term survival strategy for her family, who she eventually moved to Tyler, Texas.

Vivienne's caravan broke apart as members went to new destinations as time passed. After just two weeks, Vivienne left Baton Rouge because "It was overwhelming, you couldn't get anything done... I had to get out of Louisiana to get some help, even after I got some food stamps." Hence, to leave Louisiana meant Vivienne would gain access to better social support, including assistance from FEMA and the Red Cross, as well as a housing voucher and food stamps. In working to secure longer-term stability, Vivienne exited from the kin caravan to engage an aid-based survival strategy for her family's forthcoming displacement (See Chapter 9).

Among interviewees in this study it was common that when the kin caravan rolled, it collected as many kin members as it could, as demonstrated by Ingrid's evacuation experience:

We was on the highway 22 ½ hours...When we left, one followed another one to pick [people] up. They had not a dime in their pocket. We had nine cars on that highway, with sisters and brothers, nieces and nephews, great nieces and nephews... (P12)

Here the kin caravan performed an important survival function by providing real, material support to kin based on the belief that families have an obligation to help one another in a crisis. This helping ethic was especially important considering what the actual evacuation experience consisted of-waiting out uncertainty in painfully slow traffic to stay a few days in severely overcrowded motel rooms, evacuation shelters or in

³⁷ Vivienne's mother had legal custody of Vivienne's 16 year old niece.

relatives' homes. As Ingrid continued later in the interview, she explained the evacuation drive in greater detail:

[We were on the road] 22 ½ hours. Traffic was backed up, oh my Jesus, so backed up! People was breaking down and one of our vehicles broke down. It was a long, hard ride. [Traffic] was slow. It's sometimes like you pick up a little speed—20 or 35 miles [an hour], then next time you might be riding [at] ten [miles an hour]....

Once a caravan arrived at its destination, the entire kin group found itself crowded into shelters, motel rooms, or a friend or family member's house. For Ingrid, her husband, and their kin caravan, the final destination was her son's modest home:

There was like 65 of us in a 2 bedroom [house]. We were sleeping on floors, wherever. Anywhere you could sleep, you slept.

In this case, the caravan of kin provided transportation and shelter for Ingrid, her husband, and 65 kin members. It permitted them to leave before the storm, as a group, while having the added security of extra transportation if a car broke down during the evacuation. While the evacuation destination — Ingrid's son's home—was excessively crowded, everyone in the group was safe and sheltered while they waited to learn of Hurricane Katrina's effects.

Across the entire sample, 29 women left with kin to evacuate, which collectively moved approximately 330 individuals to safety. Despite difficult conditions, kin caravans enabled evacuation, pooled resources and illustrated how even low-income women can leave despite having few personal resources to do so. Whether providing food, transportation or shelter, kin caravans met immediate needs in the face of the disaster where the federal, state and local governments failed to do so.

It should be noted that neither the final decision to evacuate New Orleans nor the operation of a kin caravan were democratic: Not all voices were equal in the decision-

making process. In fact, it was often those offering the help — whether transportation or housing — that held greatest influence because they simultaneously resolved material issues discouraging evacuation. Additionally, men (n=7) and women (n=6) were reported in equal measure as encouraging evacuation, and many respondents (n=6) made the decision themselves and for their families.

Kin Outsiders: Left Behind

Kin networks are not impervious to dysfunctionality. As other research has demonstrated, kin systems can undermine individual-level social mobility, pressure individuals into bad choices, enable drug or alcohol abuse, refuse membership to outsiders and deny access to the group's resources (Domínguez and Watkins 2003; Anderson 1989, 1990, 1999)³⁸. For Ann, a middle-aged woman caring for her grandson, weak connections to her kin network meant that she and her grandson were left behind by the larger kin caravan.

Looking at the TV, [at the] the traffic leaving the city, [I got scared]. Family members hadn't offered me a ride. I have a sister, they left in a truck; they coulda took [my grandson] and myself. My brother drives a limo, so some of those wealthy white folks he knows put him up in a house in Texas. (P15)

Unable to evacuate New Orleans with siblings, Ann and her grandson sought safety at her daughter's high-rise, concrete public housing unit in the city. Together, they waited out the storm (Chapter 6).

Destiny's kin caravan consisted of multiples of kin and friends: "Me, my mama, my two brothers, my brother's girlfriend, my boyfriend, my children, my niece and her

³⁸ Several women stated they were left behind by kin or had nowhere to go (n=6): P15, P18, P27, P29, P45 and P48.

children” all left together in three cars. Destiny’s group departed “Saturday after we watched the news and how it would be with the water.” Safely outside the city after the levees had burst, Destiny described the evacuation itself to me:

Most of us had little children. We had to drive in three cars, there were 26 of us. As we watched what [had] happened it was hurt[ful]. We saw people we knew drowning [on television] — actually seen it on the news.

What made this experience most traumatic, however, was her father’s refusal to leave New Orleans with the group. As powerful as group solidarity and pressure could be to change narratives and encourage evacuation, it could also fail. As the caravan went through New Orleans picking up friends and kin, he refused to leave with the group, which concerned Destiny deeply:

It was awful. My daddy stayed, and we didn’t have a way to get him back with us. ...The phones went out [in New Orleans], power was out. The phones went out so I couldn’t contact my daddy to see if he safe. He used somebody’s cell phone and wind[ed] up calling up somebody who could take him somewhere and my sister knew where it was, so that’s how he came to be with us.

Wondering what factors might have influenced Destiny to leave and her father to remain, I asked Destiny whether she would have remained in the city if she did not have kids. She replied, “I think I probably still would have left. I think it was because [of what] they said about the water.”

As for Destiny’s father, luck had been on his side: Access to sporadic power allowed him to access members in his kin network who evacuated him from the city after the storm passed. His pre-Katrina personal storm narrative of hurricane safety was altered by his experience into a personal and collectively shaped narrative of threat. Though belated, by reuniting with his kin, Destiny’s father received help from his family in the face of ongoing displacement.

For many women who chose to evacuate the kin caravan provided additional assistance with transportation, food, water, and temporary shelter, enabling more women to leave when their personal circumstances and beliefs prevented them from choosing to do so. Through the alteration of the narrative of the storm as ‘safe’ to “threatening”, to the provision of tangible, material assistance, the kin caravan was an essential resource for women in the days surrounding the arrival of the storm.

While the concept of the kin caravan is not unique to Hurricane Katrina, it does demonstrate that low-income families engage this process in addition to those more affluent in society. Without the economic capacity to evacuate as single individuals, families and friends pooled funds, vehicles, knowledge, narratives and resources to render evacuation necessary (through a reshaping of a kin member’s narrative of safety into a collective narrative of threat) and viable (by providing the material resources to literally leave the city). In this way, the kin caravan represented unified teams of networked, low-income individuals working together to survive the storm.

What is most important about this finding is that low-income, urban families are often assumed to be largely restricted by the structural or psychological effects of their poverty, (Wilson 1987, 1996; Massey and Denton 1993; Murray 1984, Dreier, Mollenkopf and Swanstrom 2001) suggesting evacuation would be beyond their material means. However, when compared to prior evacuation research, the reactions of the families in this chapter to Hurricane Katrina parallel mainstream disaster threat responses seen within the disaster literature. For example, cross-sectional research by Drabek and Boggs found that families were instrumental in encouraging evacuation prior to a severe flood in Denver (1968). Using the same actions seen above, Denver families called each

other on the telephone, confirmed the warning of the forthcoming risk and left together in evacuation units (p. 446). This suggests the kin caravan demonstrates both agency and unity within interviewees' kin network and is a common response to danger across all social classes, with the poor having access to the same response mechanisms as the affluent, despite their penury.

CHAPTER SIX

STRANDED

Hurricane Katrina was a powerful storm. Its winds ripped walls off buildings and damaged roofs — even collapsing some homes — while its rain caused flooding throughout the region. Its storm surge forced water backward into Lake Pontchartrain and the Industrial Canal, breaking and breaching levees. In places like St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes, the storm’s wall of water submerged entire communities. In coastal Mississippi, residences and businesses were washed out to sea, while others were flooded extensively by the 30 foot storm surge which consumed the coastline. Hurricane Katrina was a very powerful storm.

Amidst this chaos, thousands of people were stranded, waiting for help once the winds ended and the storm surge receded. In New Orleans proper, the breach of the levees caused floodwaters to rise over the next several weeks, creating new crises in areas that otherwise weathered the storm’s wind and rain well.

In the next two chapters, I describe the lived experiences of women stranded in New Orleans after the storm³⁹. For a select few with access to automobiles, the

³⁹ Among the stranded were (n=21): P1, P2, P9, P13, P15, P16, P17, P21, P25, P26, P27, P31, P32, P33, P34, P35, P38, P39, P41, P42 and P52. Others also remained in the city, including those able to leave late (n=7) or those whom never faced any flooding. Additionally, 37.3% of all women (n=19) reported being “rescued” from their flooded homes.

deteriorating conditions following Katrina resulted in a redefinition of their narratives of safety into those of threat, resulting in late evacuations. For others, their geographic locations in homes and storm shelters mandated that they rely upon others, whether private individuals or militarized, government rescuers, to evacuate them from flooded houses, elevated highway overpasses and shelters of last resort. For all women of this study in the city at that time, their lived experiences of those days immediately following Katrina's landfall were dangerous, desperate and traumatic.

In this chapter, I examine the experiences of women who chose to remain in their homes to weather the storm. In the following chapter, I will return to discuss women who sought safe shelter in government operated "shelters of last resort" — the Louisiana Superdome and the New Orleans Convention Center — to protect their families from Hurricane Katrina's wrath and aftermath, respectively.

Throughout these experiences, women engaged in four processes to cope with emergent situations — creating and choosing narratives surrounding the storm, engaging in acts of helping others or of being helped, experiencing feelings of hurt and trauma and relying necessarily upon others and the government for food, water, shelter and transportation from the devastated city. Within this context, women engaged in, experienced and witnessed acts of courage and kindness, as well as violence, inhumanity and viciousness. For many, the days spent stranded caused a lasting trauma, one evident in the sound of women's voices as they recounted their stories during our interviews. This trauma was caused by the massive loss of life occurring before their eyes, the feelings of helplessness and despair as they waited indefinitely for help and the incivility of interactions with militarized assistance providers such as police and National

Guardsmen. Finally, the theme of relying enters the storm experience for the first time, as the extensiveness of the hurricane's impact exceeded what any individual family or individual could handle once stranded by the floodwater. Hurricane Katrina brought out the best and worst of humanity following its impact, all the while altering the lives of women and their families in fundamental, permanent ways.

Exposure to Danger: Wind, water and more water...

As Hurricane Katrina made landfall on August 29th, 2005, the unexpected power of her wind, rainfall and storm surge were undeniable. Whether women prepared in advance by gathering food and water or relocated with kin to the safest shelter available in the city, few were truly prepared for the experience that emerged.

Thea was not prepared, at all. The only woman in the sample who had no prior knowledge of the storm, she awoke expecting to go to work, when instead, Hurricane Katrina was bearing down on the city.

It was a horrible experience. I got up that morning about 4 or 4:30 [a.m.], but I was not expecting the storm. I made breakfast, and at about 5:07 [a.m.] the lights went off, then they came back on, then they went out three more times. By 5:30 [or] 6:00 a.m., the wind was picking up, and I had gassed my car for work, but it was so bad I just had to stay home and eat what I had.

With no action she could take, Thea waited:

I took some cans of food up to my bedroom and watched from upstairs. The water was rolling so fast I couldn't do nothing. Water was just pouring in, through the cracks in the window, under the doors; anyway it could come in, it did. I watched the water rising. It came up so fast, I thought it looked just like the water from the 17th Street canal. Then the boats came to rescue [me and my neighbors]. (P38)

Stranded in her public housing unit, Thea's only option was simple — to wait, relying on others to save her life. Eventually, Thea was evacuated to a bridge where she waited in

the intense heat for a bus to take her from the city, all the while watching people die in front of her eyes.

The severity of the storm surprised most women, regardless if they evacuated or not. Over and over again, women repeated the narrative of safety as they stated how they just didn't think the storm would be "that bad," including Vanessa:

Well, see the reason I stayed... you know New Orleans people, we thinking this thing, the storm, is gonna pass over. I hadn't been watching the news, so I got up, and started cooking. Then, the lights went off and my son... he said 'come see the water.' By the time we got there, there was no water. ... [Then,] he said "Come see the water" and this time we could see the water.

For women whose homes flooded, they were scared by the rapidity with which the water rose, in some cases entering their communities as a wave, while in others, rising at a steady pace. For Vanessa, whose apartment was very close to the Industrial Canal, the flooding of her community was an instantaneous, immediate threat.

My window was facing a train track, [and] we're watching and watching, and about two seconds later the water came over the train track and knocked the train car off the track. Then the water came up over the van in about five minutes. We just knew [it was bad] then. The phone was still on then, [and] we called the Coast Guard, but they never came to get us.

Like flooding in Denver or Buffalo Creek (Drabek and Boggs 1968, Erikson 1976, 1994), the wall of water was fierce, fast and had utter disregard for the lives in its path.

Immediately, Vanessa and her son ran downstairs to gather her neighbors, bringing them upstairs to her apartment for safety from the water.

The water was clear at first; then the water was black with fish and all kind of stuff. It was horrible, horrible. Everybody who was downstairs, they had to leave then — both the upstairs and downstairs apartment. The people downstairs came upstairs, 'cause the water was over their ceiling and up to our floor. (Were you upstairs?) On the second floor.

In the crisis, Vanessa's first instinct was to save her neighbors' lives — an act of helping that reflects a commitment to community regardless of social class. Living in a two story apartment where the first floor began on the second story of the building, Vanessa was able to provide precious high ground as the wall of water speed forward. As her narrative of safety was washed away, she did her best to help her neighbors and their children as they all faced the imminent threat together as a group.

[The water] came like a wave and it knocked a box car, a chemical car, [over] and we was choking. We could see some kind of chemical stuff on the water, and we was running, coughing and crying, and we just start praying. [The water] was at the door then.

Vanessa continued, elaborating her description of the floodwater wave, which was about ten feet tall — more than deep enough to drown the family with three small children living in the apartment below hers. In those desperate, dangerous moments as the water approached, Vanessa's priority was helping others by protecting everyone as best she could from the storm's wrath.

We was panicked, trying to get everyone together. We were trying to get everybody in one house. They were hysterical over there, and they had three little kids under the age of 7, like 7, 5, and 2. We were trying to plan about what to do with the children. After the rain stopped, we got together and came out on the porch. That's where we stayed... The water stayed up for like a day, then it slowly went down. That Monday, that Tuesday, there was no more water, and it went down by that Tuesday. (P26)

Vanessa's story touches so many of the themes throughout this collection of interviews. She and her kin went through the process of creating and choosing, as she defined the storm through a narrative of safety, only to end up in the direct path of the reality of its legitimate threat. Her kin came together to weather the storm in the "safest" location, pooling resources in advance, then sharing them with her downstairs neighbors after the wall of floodwater consumed their apartment. In the moment, the singular priority was

helping each other survive, a finding consistent with the disaster literature which finds that neighbors and community members come together spontaneously to help in the immediate storm aftermath (Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski 2006: 58; Rodríguez, Trainor and Quarantelli 2006). Lastly, Vanessa was forced to rely on others by eventually seeking new shelter at the Convention Center until formal, government-operated help arrived. Through these experiences, Vanessa typifies many of the women in this study as they, too, fought to survive the storm while stranded indefinitely in their homes.

A Second Chance to Evacuate: Leaving Late

Creating the narrative of safety and choosing to stay in the city had serious consequences for women and their families. First, living through this event was a challenge onto itself. Many women were not prepared for the wind and rain, let alone the long periods without electricity or water. Second, despite staying at the safest shelter available, this “safer” shelter did not always protect women and their kin, as sometimes the homes which seemed safest were, in fact, not safe at all. Several women reported roofs caving in or windows being blow out by the wind. Others had to wade through backed up sewerage and floodwaters, or were trapped in their homes until boats and helicopters rescued them. Frankly, no woman expected to be stranded as she was, or to face the challenges she did. For a very small minority, geography kept their homes and selected shelters from severe flooding, permitting them to alter their original narrative decisions and evacuate following the storm⁴⁰. Joanna is a case in point.

⁴⁰ Seven women left in caravans following the storm: P13, P25, P31, P41, P45, P47 and P48.

At 43 years old, Joanna had experienced some of the worst New Orleans had to offer. Growing up in the projects, she observed community violence in a direct, personal way. None of these experiences prepared her for Hurricane Katrina. In a small house in uptown, Joanna and her siblings gathered at her mother's for the storm, however, this was no safe haven:

That Monday, when we got up to brush our teeth, [and] the whole ceiling came down and it destroyed the whole room... The windows were shaking, and the ceiling came down in my mom's room, then my brother's room, then the sitting room. And the wind blew the door off the hinges. Then, a tree came and knocked off the side part of the house.

In the "safest" location, Joanna and her kin were trapped, and forced to ride out the storm in a wooden house that was literally falling down around them. Gathered together to pool resources like so many other families, Joanna's kin network was stranded as a collective:

It was like five of us, my mama's daughter, her brother, his wife, and my sister's kids. It was like [all] the rooms was collapsing. One collapsed that morning, one in the middle part of the day and one at night. (How many people were [staying] there total?) 13, we counted.

On Wednesday, as water began to rise in their uptown neighborhood, the family decided to attempt an evacuation after Joanna's nephew began to have seizures. Hearing her brother's car alarm go off, Joanna and her brother went outside to investigate, falling into dire circumstances:

What happened that night — [my brother] had put the car on higher ground and this young 16-year-old guy put a gun to his head. He wanted the radio from his car. We heard the car alarm, and I told my little brother that someone was by the car, 'cause we heard the alarm. We went out, and had a flashlight. Then the boy told me that if I didn't put the flashlight down, he'd blow his brains out. So we went back inside. [At that point,] my mom said we had to go.

Yet, leaving the collapsed, damaged house was no easy task with a sick nephew, young children and floodwaters all around. Joanna described how they made a makeshift raft to keep the children safe from the floodwaters:

We took the closet doors off the hinges and had the nephew of 7 months and [my] nieces and nephews — they like 7 years old — on the door, ‘cause they couldn’t walk in the water. We walked out through the water, and tried to get gas. When we tried to get gas, someone was demanding 20 dollars for each gallon. We was walking some more, walking some more, got to Napoleon, and this man, he got gas. My brother had to drive [us] across the river so we could stay at my sister’s. Then we called my [other] sister in Abbeville, and she came down and get us in pieces, some of us [in one trip], then [she’d] drive to Abbeville, then get some more people [and drive them there, too].

Using her sister’s house as a launching point, the family only made it to the city’s Westbank in their initial escape from New Orleans. Still, it was far enough to put them out of the danger they faced in their own neighborhood, and near enough for Joanna’s other sister to drive down and collect them “in pieces,” taking them back to her home outside the city. In this way, the kin network enabled evacuation after the storm and provided safe shelter and transportation outside of the city, illustrating the helping processes that characterize the positive functions of the low-income, urban kin network.

Fifty-seven year old Twila also chose to spend the storm with kin, ultimately evacuating to a kin member’s home less safe than her own. Choosing her daughter’s house to weather the storm due to its brick structure, Twila felt secure there, stating “We rode it out in my daughter’s house. I felt that I’d have been safe in the brick. Hers was brick. But mine didn’t get any damage, but hers did.” In fact, Twila’s daughter’s bedroom ceiling caved in, forcing the family to ride out the storm in the living room. Her power also shut down, leaving the home hot and crowded as Twila shared the space with her daughter’s family of four, and her other daughter and two month old grandchild.

That Tuesday we couldn't do anything. They had water, about two feet. Then that Wednesday, we went to my house because I have a gas stove and could light it with a match, so that's what we did, but the lights was still off. (Did your house have water?) No.

After just a day, Twila and her kin changed their narrative of safety to one of threat, deciding to leave the city in her daughter's car. Having been in contact with Twila's cousin, who offered a place to stay outside the city: "All seven of us left in one car [to go] to Lafayette... [My cousin] had called us and told us to leave and come over there." (P41). Quickly, they packed the car and took Highway 90 West to leave the flooded city.

Together, Twila's family enabled survival by helping each other through the uncertainty of the storm and its immediate impact. While her daughter provided transportation from the city, her cousin called, offering a place to stay for all seven family members who left the city that Thursday. Again, the kin network played a helping role, supporting survival by enabling a late evacuation and providing shelter in the immediate aftermath.

While both Twila and Joanna faced challenges based on the unlivable conditions of their family member's homes, for Sheila it was an encounter with the New Orleans police that forced her to leave, even though her neighborhood had no flooding. Initially, her decision to stay was based on a narrative of safety, combined with secondary considerations about money and transportation.

It was terrible... The car, it didn't have any air, and we was falling short on cash, it was just terrible. (So, you stayed? Why was that?) Yes, because I didn't think it would be as bad as it was. (How was the storm itself?) It was okay, we was just was riding it out... I stayed at my house.

As days passed, Sheila's advanced diabetes became an emergent threat to her well-being. With stores closed indefinitely, and her insulin supply running low, Sheila was becoming very sick.

I take insulin, and I ran out of insulin. Then I was, I had to really leave, 'cause I was assaulted by a police officer... What happened was, my son and his friend got a car, and it didn't belong to them. They went down by Walmart. They was trying to get me some insulin. The cop thought I had keys, which I didn't, and he hit me twice, knocked me down, was choking my son, and had a rifle to my son's head. It was a big ole mess. The friend took a chance with the car and left. The neighbors, they started hollering at [the cop], and his partner was telling him 'don't hurt that lady.'

After the encounter, Sheila and her son left the city to stay with a relative in Texas, having no problems leaving. Upon her return, however, she found her home trashed and looted.

Oh, when I returned, the same police — when I left, they ramshackled my house, threw my syringes, cut up my sofa, saying it was a crack house. They spray painted the front of the house, and broke the glasses. They stole my son's leather jacket, and his Playstation 2. They took everything out of there, 'cause nobody really was in our neighborhood.

For Sheila, the storm itself was not the source of her trauma, but rather the encounter with the police⁴¹ and the highly threatening nature of this interaction and the subsequent looting. Her narrative of safety was translated into one of threat, then of crisis, in the absence of a swift, immediate humanitarian response. Sheila could not rely on the government to provide her the needed insulin, so instead her son attempted to address the need. Ultimately, she had to go to Texas to get the healthcare she required.

I wound up going to the doctor for an infection in my eye. My vision was worse from glaucoma, but it was no problem. My vision is worse now...When I did get

⁴¹ Similar problematic encounters with first responders occurred for respondents P15, P16, P32, P42, P43 and P51.

back, the police had stolen from my house, and a neighbor seen it, so I filed complaints. It was terrible.

By living through the crisis, women like Sheila came to realize how significant Katrina's threat truly was. By creating a narrative of safety and choosing to stay, each woman endangered herself and her kin. Only four women identified a lack of transportation as the reason they remained in the city out of the 41% of women who were rescued by the National Guard. In this way, the narrative of the storm as 'safe' had a devastating effect on the safety, security and basic survival of the women and their kin who elected to remain behind.

Waiting for help, children in tow

One of the most complicated challenges for stranded women was caring for young children in the chaos of the storm⁴². More vulnerable to hunger, distress and fear, grandmothers and mothers alike worked hard to protect their grandchildren and children as much as they could. For many, this was an exceptional challenge as resources ran low and hours turned into days. Zarah, a mother and grandmother, became creative as she attempted to make her flooded home as bearable as possible for her three grandchildren.

I sure wasn't ready. The cans we did have, we ate that. We was using the bathroom, pouring water out of buckets, to keep the odor down. We was sprinkling Windex on our hands to sanitize our hands. I had three grandchildren there too, in the house... [It was] myself, my daughter, her two babies and my teenage granddaughter. My daughter flagged the helicopter. She put a sheet outside to get the helicopter to get rescued. It was a white spread. She had marked on it, "HELP! Have babies in the house."... [They didn't come until] Labor day, you know, Sept 5th. The boats and stuff had been passing, and we was still hoping the water would go down. We'd rub water on [the] kids, to keep them

⁴² Women with children who remained through the storm included (n=9): P16, P24, P25, P32, P35, P39, P42, P47, P48.

cool. We used Vaporub to help them sleep. We was fanning them with a board, cardboard, to help them sleep. It was miserable and hot. [10]

Stranded nearly a week, Zarah did her best to care for her family, with very limited resources. Her daughter focused her efforts on attracting help, while Zarah used common household items to keep the children cool and to kill bacteria that might make them sick. With deep floodwaters outside her home, Zarah improvised as best she could in the fearful moments following the storm. While she may have been prepared for 3 days without power, the extended wait was never anything she or her daughter had expected.

These acts of improvisation in the moment were common reactions among women as they lived in uncertainty in the days following the storm. Like Vanessa, who reacted to the levee break by gathering her neighbors to her apartment for safety, Regina's pregnant daughter became the focus of similar actions of community care in much the same way when she began to have labor pains while stranded by floodwater from the storm. During the storm, Regina was caring for her daughter and her grandkids, making them dinner.

We slept through the Storm. Sunday night my daughter come over with her kids, and she wanted some collard greens. She's pregnant. I made her the greens, and then we went to bed. When we woke Katrina had passed. We slept through it. I lived on the second floor, and the water was up when we woke. It was up to just below the second floor. We got scared. My daughter started pacing, and then she started having labor pains.

As her daughter began her labor, Regina was able to communicate the situation to her neighbor because the community had created a system of 'hollering out' to each other to make sure everyone was okay. Relaying the news that her daughter was ready to have her baby, her neighbor responded by creating a makeshift raft to seek help.

My neighbor, he took the door off his fridge to use as a boat. He got in and started off, but as he got to the gate, the fridge flipped. He got on top of a van,

and from there the rescue people saw him and got him. Then they came by and got my daughter with the guy from the van.

(Were there any more boats?) Nothing. An hour later a helicopter flew past, but there was nobody come by to pick anybody up. There was just the paddle boat that my daughter was in. (Who had the boat? Was it the police or the coast guard?) They was volunteers, strangers. They just had a boat with paddles. It wasn't an airboat or anything like that.

Through the helping behaviors of a neighbor and complete strangers, Regina's daughter was transported to a hospital, where she had a safe delivery of her newborn son. Regina, however, remained in her flooded home with her grandsons for several more days, listening to the radio for updates. In an effort to stay safe from the dangerous waters, the family elected to remain in their house, doors closed, despite the sweltering heat.

It was hell. It was hell. From my apartment building, which is right off Reed Boulevard, I couldn't see the Walmart. I couldn't see nothing no more. I had my grandkids — we didn't know how the water was getting up. We shut the doors. We heard on the radio that the gators from the zoo got loose. We were scared to open the doors. We didn't know what would happen. My grandkids were so hot, I was wiping them with towels to cool them off. We were afraid to go outside, even though it was so hot.

As she waited and waited for help for herself and her grandchildren, Regina's hopes were raised when City Councilman Oliver Thomas passed by in a boat, proclaiming help would arrive soon. Yet as several more days passed, Regina's hope began to waiver.

Oliver Thomas passed by on a boat and my grandson hollered to him. He said "We be back, little man." He didn't come back. It was two or three days later when a helicopter came by. ...They was red and white... They had a basket and wanted me to get in, but I wouldn't leave my grandsons. They took them too, and a neighbor. There were five of us in the helicopter. They just dropped us off in a field... They took the sick to another place. They had that brown bag military food... It was the worst thing that ever happened to me. We was living outdoors. We had to sleep in an open field. We was like those people at the border (Illegal immigrants?) Yeah, we could have just gotten shot out there...

For Regina, the entire situations was traumatic — from the flooding of her community and her daughter's unexpected labor, to being stranded indefinitely and then left in a field

with her grandchildren and a few MREs to survive. From the moment the floodwater rose, her family's lives were in the hands of complete strangers, from the boat of humanitarian by-passers who took her pregnant daughter to the hospital, to the Coast Guard who picked her family up and took them to safety. For Regina, she was forced to rely on the generosity of others to protect herself and kin in the aftermath of the storm.

For so many women, had the levees not broken, there never would have been a need to rely on the government or perfect strangers for help, rescue, food, water or shelter in the days following the storm. Without the massive flooding, people would have returned home, stores reopened, jobs and businesses continued, with a just short pause that soon would be forgotten. However, the inconceivable nature of Katrina's technological devastation forced dependency upon the stranded, within which context women did what they could to hold just a small piece of control and agency whenever possible. For Mary, a 44 year old grandmother, this meant sheltering her grandchildren from the sight of floating, drowned bodies as they were evacuated from her apartment by boat. She began her story by explaining the family's experience with the storm's passing — 4 days stranded, with no water or electricity, in a home with broken windows and rain saturated carpets, furniture, walls and ceilings:

Oh, the wind was blowing hard. Water was coming in the window, [and it] broke the windows. We was huddled in the hallway. Water came in the roof, and you could hear the wind tearing the top of the roof off. We watched all the rest of it, then it died down, and we laid back in bed. Water was coming from everywhere. Lord, where water come from like that, I don't know, but I know Katrina didn't do that. We had [flood]water to the second floor. We had to go underwater to get into the boat.

Mary was especially vigilant in her protective actions as she and her grandchildren were being evacuated:

Rescue men took us in a [small] boat, and took another family. The kids were scared. People in the water drowning, Miss. We made the kids sit in the bottom of the boat to not see. There were bodies floating in the water, people on top of roofs. We was on top of City Park, that's how high that water was. Miss, that was something...

Mary's experience with her family reflects the challenges of living in uncertainty in the days following the storm — stranded on an upper floor, Mary and her kin were lucky to have elevation on their side. Yet, for four days they waited, relying on pure faith that help would come, evacuating them from the dilapidation Katrina created in their home. Amidst windows and leaking ceilings, Mary kept her focus on helping her family as much as she could — cooking while at home, then sheltering the children from the death that was floating just outside in the murky floodwater. Four days passed until they were rescued; next, the family stayed on a bridge, like so many other families, relying on their government to rescue them from the city itself.

[We went] to a bridge — we was on Jefferson Highway. We was on a bridge waiting for buses. We waited for a day. There was a lot of people. People was just falling out, they packed like sardines. And it was stinking, 'cause everybody sweating. It was a mess. A mess, Miss.

(How did you finally get off the bridge?) A man come, but he didn't have a CDL license. [I think] he must of [had a license] because he was working for this company, so they sent him to drive. When we got to Baton Rouge, the police drew guns on us, and said we wasn't going anywhere until the head man came. They said they gonna arrest the man and everything. They had him on the wall, handcuffed, with their guns drawn. When we pulled up to the gas station, the police came with guns out, and made everybody get off the bus. Man, did they hate all us. Then another bus, a greyhound bus came, and then they took us to Houston. [31]

Ultimately, Mary had to rely on a civilian, acting disobediently, to rescue her from the city. This man commandeered a bus, drove it to where people were gathered and took them safely from the city. He was rewarded with rifles and arrest, but in the process he saved lives. By contrast, the federal response was slow and disorderly in regard to

organizing buses and shelters, and in terms of the actual act of evacuating people from the city once they were rescued by the Coast Guard. For Mary, she was just happy to get her family out of New Orleans alive.

Collectively, the stories of those who left late, or were stranded in their homes, represent the first few inconceivably atrocious ways to experience the storm aftermath. The final way was to rely on the city government by seeking shelter at the Superdome, or congregating at the convention center, as instructed by law enforcement following the storm. Stranded in your own home, you have privacy amidst your misery. Stranded at the Superdome, you must protect yourself and your kin from waves of mass hysteria and lawlessness while being caged inside without any power to leave.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SHELTERS OF LAST RESORT

Historically, the city of New Orleans had a pattern of refusing to open storm shelters in the face of the hurricane, only to open them at the very last minute. The Louisiana Superdome is the classic example of this pattern. For Hurricanes George, Ivan and countless other threats, the Superdome had become the ‘shelter of last resort’ — a hurricane shelter that community members rely on when they absolutely cannot evacuate.

During Hurricane Katrina, the situation was no different. After a day and a half insisting the city would not open the Superdome as a shelter, they opened the Superdome to special needs groups, including the elderly, poor and those medically disabled. Yet, what did differ was the unexpected flooding, the lack of state and federal assistance to provide food and water to people after the storm passed and the failure to implement a timely post-storm evacuation plan.

In this chapter, women’s stories about their experiences in the Superdome and Convention Center demonstrate the danger of relying on local government to protect them following the storm⁴³. In fact, for many women, their reliance on government

⁴³ Seven women stayed at the Superdome or the Convention Center during the storm or its aftermath: P15, P16, P18, P26, P29, P32 and P49. One additional woman declined the interview because she did not want to talk about her time at the Superdome.

assistance for shelter put them at greater risk than they would have been if they evacuated, and in some cases, than if they had weathered the storm at their own homes.

Trauma in a ‘Safe’ Place — the Louisiana Superdome...

The happenings at the Louisiana Superdome in the days following the storm represent the worst of humanity. There were reports of violence, including killings, rapes, suicides, fights and shootings, as well as drug and alcohol use. There were reports of people being locked in the building, not allowed to leave even if family could drive them from the center. There was a lack of food, of water, of properly functioning sewerage. There was absolute darkness as the lights went out and generators failed.

While the details of these reports are varied, the women who stayed at the Superdome created a consensus that the dominant characteristic of the experience was one of chaotic crisis. Unlike the acts of helping other women experienced as they faced dangerous flooding, within the Superdome, the threat was not the storm and its wrath, but the people with whom so many were sheltered. In this context, the narrative of crisis emerged, exacerbated by the slow federal response.

Alika dismissed the storm’s seriousness. Engaging a narrative of safety, Alika ignored her mother’s plea, deciding against evacuation. She expected Katrina would blow over, and she could resume working, but did agree to go to the Superdome based on the seriousness her workplace gave the storm, sending them home early the day before. Again, competing narratives helped define the storm from being safe to being a threat — albeit a minor threat in Alika’s eyes.

It was the same day [as the storm], well when ... the first day, I was at my job. They let us go home early. My mother said “we have to evacuate”, but I didn’t think it was that serious. We went to the Superdome, and then there go Katrina.

At the time, the Superdome seemed a safe place — it was large, concrete and spacious. Its multistory design meant it provided safety in case of flooding. As Alika checked in with her mother and her daughter, they had no idea their shelter would become a center of social disorder.

It was like a hell hole ma'am, excuse me, but it was hell. I talk about it every day. ... (Did you bring any supplies to the superdome?) We had a little Vienna sausage, crackers, water — we didn't think we'd be there that long. We had enough to last two days, but that's about it. Chips, pickles, sandwiches.

Initially, the experience was much like camping, with food, water and blankets prepared for a short excursion. However, once the storm made landfall, conditions began to deteriorate rapidly as the fierce, wicked winds ripped apart the building's roof.

When we first got in there, we get in a line, then we had to get in a seat. After we sat down, we were just talking and waiting until the storm pass over. We wait for like an hour or two, Katrina was coming, and she start tearing the roof off the Superdome. She took a panel, then she like peel off the rest, [taking] like five or six panels off the roof.

With the wind peeling off pieces of the roof, the ceiling inside collapsed — an image broadcast on television for evacuees to see until broadcast transmissions went out. Yet, within the Superdome, information was largely controlled, contributing to a sense of true fear, which was exacerbated by the transition of the collective narrative of safety into a narrative of crisis. Quickly, Hurricane Katrina's risks became real.

With the storm raging outside, and nowhere to go while the building crumbled before people's eyes, a wave of panic washed over the space as people's individual fight or flight responses initiated, causing them to respond with fear and irrationality.

Everyone just started running. It was like a stampede. Then we heard like a loud boom, and maybe like another boom and we heard the boom. It was hectic, people's killing themselves; raping little children. I had to hold on to my daughter, I didn't let go of her. They keep telling us we'd be rescued, that

people's coming. I knew we gotta get out of New Orleans. After the last day we gave up on it, got up and got out of New Orleans. I will never go to the Superdome no more in New Orleans. It's cursed.

In the face of the indefinite crisis, the evacuees in the Superdome did not coalesce to perform helping behaviors like sharing food resources, but rather, as an institutionalized population, they responded by becoming severely polarized, protecting themselves as family units while the guards began to treat them like prisoners, not citizens. Alika describes these conditions:

The violence? I'll tell you; it ain't no secret. It was very bad. They had drugs, people selling food to people. All types of stuff. A lot of stuff going on, and the guards weren't doing nothing, but looking; they had their guns pointed to keep you in... They attacking, raping, killing, raping the childrens. People jumping off the Superdome, killing themselves; killing the guards. I'm comfortable talking about it.

As time progressed, the relationship between guards and evacuees took on several similar characteristics to the transformation of relations between guard and prisoner during the Zimbardo prison experiment — evacuees were dehumanized, incarcerated within the building's confines and treated like animals to be controlled, rather than citizens seeking shelter:

I felt like dirt when I was in the Superdome, I was treated just like everybody else was treated, like animals, like we was caged and couldn't go nowhere. Everybody feel like dirt... those folks from other states, they came to rescue us. But Bush wasn't trying to do nothing. We need to do something with him. He's no good. I put him in the Lord's hands, the Lord take care of him now.

For Alika, protecting her daughter became her priority within this context of lawlessness and chaos. Waiting nearly a week to leave, Alika's narrative was one of crisis and resentment. She resented her forced reliance on the federal response, which put her family's lives at risk. Had she the choice, she would have left on her own. Yet, threatened at gunpoint, she was helpless to evacuate by herself or her family.

I keep my daughter stuck to me like glue. The guard or whatever you call them army people, they didn't do nothing, they wasn't trying to do nothing. We survived on our own. No one can tell us we ain't survivors, we survived six days without eating, and there was hardly any water that they gave us. (Who came first after the storm, was it the police, or the National Guard?) I never saw the police, not before, not since. We just saw like 100 Army men surround the whole Superdome. (Were you allowed to leave?) No. They would not let us leave the Superdome — in fact, they putting more people on the Superdome to get raped and killed. People was coming in the Superdome instead of out the Superdome.

Even Alika's language reflects the militarized mentality of the National Guard, who "surrounded" the Superdome, as if they were taking over a village in a war zone, rather than bringing much needed food and water to human beings — American citizens, in fact — in the middle of a humanitarian crisis. Evacuees at the Superdome were 'rounded up,' remained nameless and kept on the premises in much the same ways as refugees are (Harrell-Bond 1999), essentially stripping them of their civil and human rights.

It should be noted that in this highly militarized environment, there were serious acts of ongoing violence, including sniper fire near hospitals and the Superdome. For Alika, these acts affected her directly as she attempted to board an evacuation bus with her daughter after five or six days. I began by asking if she had been separated from her kin:

We ain't got separated — they would have had to cut my arm off. Some man on top of the roof, he was trying to get through to where the buses were going out, he shooting, and they told us to duck, and so [the National Guard] shot him in the head. He fell in the water. He was shooting, and he fell down, in the water. There was shooting all over the place. We had to get down, 'cause snipers [were] set on trying to shoot us before we got on the bus. Then, they said it was women and children [on the buses] first, but them men didn't care. They was running over the women and children [to get on the bus]. It was more the men, them men took over. More the men than the women. The men really took over. [005]

Through suicides, rapes, collapsing roof tiles and sniper fire, Alika managed to protect her mother and daughter, eventually working her way onto a bus, which took her family

to the Reliant Center in Houston. Once on the bus, they received some food, as well as candy and crackers. Finally, the storm had passed.

Throughout the stories of women who went to the shelters of last resort, there was a repetitive theme of hurting and trauma — that having borne witness to such atrocities at the hand of man scarred the soul, searing the pain like a brand on the heart. For Barbara Jean, whose husband worked for the levee board, she chose to evacuate to the Superdome with her sisters and their family. Like Alika, the narrative of ‘safe’ shelter was redefined immediately to a narrative of crisis as the ceiling crumbled overhead:

I get upset every time I talk about it. I’m gonna tell you what I went through. After we got into the Dome, and [were there a while, the] wind started [howling]. We was sitting in the aisle, looking at the hole [where the ceiling fell in]. Big pieces ripped through, so we all moved up the ramps, into the bleachers. The water started coming up on the floor. We got through that. Then the lights [went] out.

Powerless, with the wind howling and the ceiling collapsing, Barbara Jean and her family were trapped, with nothing to do but wait. In this context of crisis, fellow evacuees began to respond with desperation, then violence. Quickly, and with minimalist explanation, Barbara Jean described to me what happened next:

There was rapes and killings. A baby was raped, and it was right down from us. (I had heard it was a lie.) The baby was raped, and killed, and then set on a pile of trash. A fifteen year old girl was raped, the man was beaten bloody. The man had his throat split, from ear to ear. A man jumped off the balcony, but then he lived. There was one whole family who got killed. There was a six year old boy who got raped, and beaten. One of the guards got shot. It was horrible in there. You had to be in there to see it. They had gangs, and homosexuals, and drugs. What you thought went on, it did. It was like animals in there. A lot of people had been sick and were elderly. There was nothing you could do. You couldn’t get out. It was hot, and they had the care rations. And water. You know. [38]

So deep is the trauma for Barbara Jean that her description lacks all sense of time, identifying a string of horrors she personally observed. One does not easily forget a dead

baby laid on the trash, or a suicide attempt that was unsuccessful. Sadly, these stories are consistent with those of other evacuees who were at the Superdome. Perhaps the one mercy for Barbara Jean was being part of the kin network, which shared the responsibility of protecting each other and the children. Like families who used the caravan of kin to evacuate from the city, Barbara Jean's internal evacuation engaged the caravan concept within the Superdome in order to survive. Among her caravan were "my two sisters, my niece, her three children, my son, his wife, his three children, and two more who stay with me," for a total of eight children and six adults. While everyone was "alive" and "came through it," Barbara Jean's experience was permeated with fear for her husband, who was working for the levee board, and her mother, who was in a local hospital. In the end, both were safe, located by the Red Cross once Barbara Jean and her family were taken to a shelter in Texas. Yet, while stranded, she had no way to know what was happening throughout the city, because all news coming into the Superdome was censored by the guards:

At the Superdome, you couldn't go out for a couple of days. They wouldn't let you out. We were all on the TVs. But they wasn't letting you see anything on TV. They weren't telling us anything. Even when we were in Houston, they wouldn't say what was going on. (38)

As we finished the interview, Barbara Jean expressed her inability to comprehend how people could act as they did, in such a crisis: "You just don't understand. I don't know how people can treat each other like that in a time of need. How can they rape? How can they be killing, beating each other?"

Disorganized Assistance — Waiting at the Convention Center

As floodwaters rose throughout New Orleans, people were forced to seek higher ground and new shelter. While some had the option of going to a family member's house or engaging a late evacuation, most were directed to walk to either the Superdome or Convention Center to wait for help from the National Guard. Sadly, neither venue was prepared to address the enormity of need as tens of thousands of stranded New Orleanians gathered at the doors.

As Vanessa arrived at the convention center with her kin and neighbors, she was unprepared for the level of social disorder and desperation they encountered:

Yes, we went to the Convention Center on Wednesday morning. We had no food, no water. They had so many people out there, maybe a thousand, two, three thousand. Some was laying down in the convention center, 'cause it was hot. And it was the most horrible smell you'd ever smell, and elderly was dying, folks having hallucinations, children gone missing.

More upsetting was the exposure to death and violence she faced:

One guy, he was killed by the cops, and the body just laid there until somebody put a blanket over him. You had kids getting raped — it was just chaos until the army came and put some structure in the thing... You'd pass the dead bodies. This one guy laid in the middle of street, and nobody picked them up. Somebody was in the median, with a yellow blanket on them. There was maggots and flies all over the bodies, and people on the side of the convention center, they were dead.

For Vanessa, the experience was desperate, as she and her family hadn't eaten for four days. This desperation permeated the Convention Center, which led to waves of periodic panic as rumors of approaching floodwaters scared evacuees.

I had a wheelchair and I fell out of the chair, because they stampeded, and everybody was running, and they knocked me out of the chair. I had a bruise on my leg for a month or so... Someone said something about the water, that is was coming and everybody panicked, and was running, but we didn't know what we [were] running from. ...My son broke his toe. There were little babies out there that didn't have no water, and it was hot, and we were hungry until the army came

and gave out rations. And there was a lot of looting and stuff. They went to a local hotel, to get blankets and pillows. It was so horrible in there, we slept under the bridge. There was no place to use the bathroom. (How long were you there?) Wednesday morning to Saturday evening.

Within this context of crisis, Vanessa and her family were relieved to leave the city, even though they had no knowledge of where the buses were to take them. In those days, the goal was to survive, holding out long enough for the evacuation bus to arrive.

As more and more people gathered at the Convention Center, the severity of the conditions increased, with fewer resources for more individuals. When Jada arrived, the building was already in a state of disrepair:

First, when we got there inside, it was crazy. Then the lights went out, the air conditioning went out. The bathrooms was smelling, and it was crazy, crazy wild. We had to move outside. One part was the air. At least everything was open on the outside. Only one side of the convention center had that smell. The smell was in certain areas, and then there was the heat.

Undoubtedly, this experience was incredibly draining — For Jada, it was a matter of keeping herself moving, in large part for her children’s sake:

I think I was at my breaking point. I made myself walk, but I was so drained. I made myself walk even though I was ready to lay down. I could have been dehydrated. There was so much heat and no water, and it was real hectic. You could see it in the kids, one night they sleeping in a bed, then the next night they sleeping on the street. It was a hurting thing also, because they wasn’t used to that. [21]

Just to get to the convention center, Jada and her children had to walk across town, over several bridges. Once they arrived, “We were there 4 days and 4 nights before we got food and water. You had to live on your own. There were no police. You had to get food and stuff where you could.” Once the National Guard did arrive, they quickly established a sense of order. However, it came with a significant price — being treated badly, as if the victims of the storm had caused its destruction. As Jada explains,

Then the policemen came. The National Guard came and treated us like we was bad, bad people, pointing at us with guns. After that, they gave us food, and we spent one last night and got on the bus.

This ill treatment by the same militarized aid workers was fairly consistent for women, whether they were stranded at the Superdome, Convention Center or in other staging areas as they awaited buses to take them to shelters. Again, it mirrors the poor treatment refugees receive when they are forced into refugee camps internationally (Callamard 1999; Harrell-Bond 1999). Perhaps the aid workers were reacting to media images of the lawlessness of the city, or to real, tangible acts of violence and looting occurring all around. For many women, though, the militarized nature of the aid work created new sources of trauma, rather than relieving it.

For Ann, the military presence and deplorable conditions at the convention center led her to take a “stopping by” approach as she awaited evacuation from the Convention Center. Living in the nearby River Gardens community, her home had no damage, though the power was out. Initially, she weathered the storm with her daughter, evacuating to her apartment in a high-rise public housing building. From the elevated apartment she observed the Superdome’s roof as it was ripped to pieces by the wind. After the storm itself passed, Ann went home with her grandson, passing “brick walls, power lines and trees. I didn’t see any water — it came a couple days after Katrina. I was hearing about it, but did not have any water.” After another day passed, Ann ventured out to check on her mother’s apartment, which was on a second floor, but in a flooded area. Travelling through waist deep water, she found no damages and returned home.

After we went home, soldiers were riding around in Jeeps and things; they had guns pointed at you, it was just ridiculous. It was more frightening than anything.

The police was rolling around all day and all night. Wal-mart had the doors open, but when I got there, there was no food at all. There was no water, no canned goods on the shelf.

[Did you find any water?] I met a guy that I knew, we rolled around and tried to find something that may have been open. There was a grocery store, we call it 2000 Magazine, but they didn't have the door open. You went up and they got you something, and they wouldn't charge you.

Despite the lack of water and food from the militarized aid workers, local community members helped out by providing free food and juices, reflecting a commitment to the larger community in the face of the disaster. Yet, by day five, Ann's resources were lacking, and she was forced to steal in order to have something to drink for herself and her grandson.

We went into [a local bar], and that's where we got the juices, and milks and orange juice. Then I rolled out by the convention center looking for my daughter. And the little babies, they had no water, no milk, so we was just giving it to them, wasn't selling it or anything. I had to do something for the babies, they was new born babies, and I felt bad for the elderly ... We was at the convention center, not the Superdome. I had a shopping cart I took to the Convention Center, and you can't imagine the stench of it. They had the doors cracked open, then the second time we went by they was fighting in the dark. You could hear them in the dark, but can't see them. It was very frightening.

Despite Ann's lack of food and drinks, she too engaged in helping activities as she gave many of the drinks she scavenged to others at the convention center, particularly those with vulnerable children and babies. Thus, local community members did what they could to help each other, while the earliest National Guard units failed to provide food and water as they entered the city, establishing a military presence first, rather than a humanitarian one.

As for Ann, by living so close to downtown, she chose to go home rather than wait for help there due to the stench and chaos at that time, as she describes further,

stating “It’s something you can hear about, but to experience it ... I left and came back home, I came back home.”

The presence of the militarized assistance was perpetual once it arrived, but was barely reassuring as Ann explains: “there were all these helicopters at night, and the police would come by” never to check on her or her grandson, but rather to show their presence as a deterrent to civil disobedience. In fact, this militarized response continued right up until their evacuation.

A third time we left [for the Convention Center], not knowing where we was going. ...The polices and National Guard were very nasty, very, very nasty. [What were some things the National Guard and police did?] Well one time we went to Convention Center around this time of the evening [about 5:00 p.m.], the police stopped us on Tchoupitoulas, before we can go to the Convention Center, they was searching our bags. They were looking for guns, and I have a gun but I left it back at home. They said “You know you’re not going to need all these things.” But I don’t know if I was going back home, and I did not know if I could buy clothes, and I knew we had to evacuate so I started packing my bag and Devon’s bag.

For Ann, the storm experience itself was intense and traumatic. Protecting herself and her grandson by staying away from the Convention Center until as late as possible, she minimized her exposure to the desperation and despair. Then, even when her chance for evacuation did occur, she and her grandson were searched and stripped at the airport before they could board a plane. Throughout the experience, it was interactions with first responders that were humiliating, leaving her, and many others, feeling less than human.

For many who chose to stay behind, the stranded experience, especially in the shelters of last resort, meant putting oneself at risk of great personal harm, from both strangers and the aid workers. Literally, being stranded equated to being held in place, at gunpoint, indefinitely. So severe was the desire to leave the city and be anywhere but

there, that one respondent explained the situation thusly: “They just stuck us on a plane. There could have been a plane ride to hell and we would have gone.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

SEEKING SHELTER AND GETTING SETTLED

Once women were safely out of the city, and it was clear that a return home would take some time, the task of finding both temporary and permanent shelter began. For the majority of women, housing stability was an uncertain experience, with unexpected challenges disrupting seemingly stable arrangements.

In this chapter, I consider women's housing experiences specifically, showing how formal shelters, kin networks and federal housing assistance formed the foundations with which women attempted to establish housing security for themselves and their families⁴⁴. I argue housing stability is essential and necessary for disaster recovery — without a “home” one is still experiencing the disaster itself. Using these three forms of temporary housing, women would alternate as necessary to maintain consistent shelter, even though no single form provided true housing stability.

This pattern of alternating between one source of shelter to the next is illustrated by Keebra, a 31 year old mother. In telling me her evacuation story, she recounted the

⁴⁴ The modal experience was to stay in a shelter (43.1%). About a fifth of the entire sample was fortunate enough to secure a hotel upon first leaving the city. Just over a third stayed with a family member or friend (33.4%). Two respondents slept outdoors when they first evacuated, one in her car, and a second who was left in a field by first responders to await transportation from New Orleans.

numerous places she lived before returning to New Orleans — a choice she was ambivalent about:

Well we left [to evacuate], trying to make it to Beaumont, TX. I was going with my mother, 'cause my car was totaled that Friday, so I had to leave with my mother and my sister. We stayed in Jennings, LA. We stayed in a shelter — a multipurpose building gave us shelter. We stayed a week, then went to Houston. Then, we split up, and I went to Houston, got a hotel, and my mom went to my brother's, so my mom, she staying out there. This apartment is new, and I had no damages and I didn't lose anything. So, I just came home [to New Orleans]. I tried, but I couldn't find an apartment in Houston. I was just so disgusted and I was ready to come home, so I came home. (P19)

Keebra evacuated in a caravan of kin, then utilized a temporary shelter until securing a voucher to pay for a hotel in Houston. Her New Orleans home undamaged, Keebra was able to return to New Orleans with her children soon thereafter. Meanwhile, her mother used the kin network to stay with family outside of the city. Keebra's case illustrates this process of alternation, as women created consistent housing even when individual housing sources themselves were unstable, reflecting an emergent survival strategy as they navigated the uncertainty of their displacement.⁴⁵

Shelters: Liminal Spaces for Survival

From helicopters, buses and planes, evacuees from the city were shuffled to numerous temporary shelters around the country, from coast to coast. Ultimately, evacuees landed in almost every state, as hundreds of temporary shelters were opened in civic centers, arenas, auditoriums and churches. Offering basic services such as food, clothing and

⁴⁵ For the sample as a whole, the mean number of places stayed at the time of interview was 3.74, with a standard deviation of 1.79. By contrast, when displacement status is accounted for, displaced respondents (less than 6 months) resided at an average of 2.42 places, while respondents who experienced extended displacement (greater than 6 months) averaged 4.31 distinct housing locations, reflecting a greater amount of housing disruption.

medical care, shelters became bureaucratic systems funneling evacuees through a flow of check-points and sign-ups for assistance. Sharon described her shelter life as follows:

We were in Dallas, and they had food, hot food, and tables set up, and bracelets set up. They served us food, and it was real nice. They don't have beds, but they was telling us they hope to get some, and they had portable showers. Everyone was really nice.

From portable showers to other basics like clothing and beds, the shelters offered the first semblance of regular life for women and their children, as Sharon continues:

I don't know what time it was, I lost track, but they bring in blow up beds, and shoes, socks and new clothes. I had a few clothes, but not that much. I was cold, and my legs were real sore. Then they brought in more clothes from everywhere, and beds. They told everybody to get blankets and stuff like that, and the next day they had places for medication. They had places for help with housing, public housing — Section 8 vouchers — to place you in housing. When they brought us to the housing authority, the people worked Monday through Sunday, nonstop, around the clock. They was trying to find you housing if you wanted it.

Sharon was fortunate, arriving in a shelter which had streamlined its services into an assembly line and was prepared for the evacuees. Sharon received assistance quickly and generously. Additionally, she met a woman named Meredith who took a personal interest in helping her and her daughter get settled in the area.

My daughter, she didn't want to go to the shelter or the convention center [in Houston]. So Meredith brought her to another town, in [Texas]. She stopped at a doctor's office, then had her ID taken, and then we went to a church in a [third town]. We all have to be searched, then we could go in. When we got in, they had everything we needed. They had hot food, and it was one or two in the morning. They had a shower and rooms upstairs. It was better 'cause we was separated. They put families in the room upstairs. Then in the middle of the room, it was maybe like two people together, with their beds in the middle. It was much better. We stayed there about three weeks.

Here, Meredith helped relocate the family to a small church, where the services were more personalized, and families were able to stay together in semi-private spaces.

Through Meredith's personalized interest in Sharon's family, Sharon received extra

assistance locating stable housing, showing again how even total strangers engaged in collective helping behavior following the storm.

Meredith started to get us help, and found my daughter a place on [Maple Street]. Then she found me a place across the street, and I live on [Oak Street]. Then they gave us a sponsor, so then I got a bed, a table, and a television first, then a washer and a dryer. I had other people who helped too. One lady at the shelter, she had seen me, and said she had a computer. She didn't want to bring it to the shelter, so when I got a place, she brought it to me. I had tables, pillows, and other materials. You know, stuff for your house. (P43)

Here, the receiving community provided support for evacuee families, donating bedding, furniture, and other household extras. Through these acts of caring and kindness, Sharon made the transition from evacuation to recovery. With access to stable shelter and simple amenities like toothpaste, clothing and furniture, Sharon's recovery began as she settled into a small apartment centrally located near her daughter and a bus stop.

Ann also had a similar shelter experience in Texas, where the generosity of strangers was a gift after her ordeal waiting for help in New Orleans. As best they could, the local community came together to help the evacuees, gathering needed goods. Yet, Ann's shelter experience also reflects an emergent challenge in the shelters: alcohol abuse.

In Lubbock, Texas, everything was beautiful, the people was beautiful. We all had our own mattresses, with bedspreads that Wal-Mart donated. It was a religious little town; there was no alcohol at all. People was looking for alcohol, but there was none. It was very nice.

As evacuees piled into havens of safe refuge, they brought with them their old problems, as well as their own coping mechanisms for dealing with the trauma, in this case, the use of alcohol.

As time passed, and the reality of the trauma of Hurricane Katrina began to register, many women reported a shift in the nature of the shelters where they stayed. As

liminal spaces that were always destined to close, the emergence of social problems like drinking, drug use, theft and sexual violence transformed these spaces of helping to places of unsafe haven. For Linda, she blames these problems on the arrival of a new wave of evacuees, stating: “We didn’t start having problems until later on. They shut down one shelter, then people come over to our shelter, and they starting in, stealing the clothes we had” (P17). This experience of a disintegrating shelter culture of helping in exchange for one of trauma, desperation and disrespect was mirrored at Angela’s shelter:

When we was the first to arrive we was alright, then when the second and third crew came, it wasn’t too good. I mean, they took good care of us, it was just the people that was in there — they made it worse... they was rude, ignorant, sloppy, trashing [the shelter]. They was thinking about themselves, and wasn’t watching their children. The women were tending to the men, not the children, with the place looking raggedy.

When I asked Angela if there were problems of theft or violence at her shelter, she stated “no,” but then recounted an incident of domestic violence. She also continued, identifying her manner of coping with the newcomers.

I was looking, like, how this young dude would beat up his girlfriends, how the womens were disrespectful with cursing and hooting and hollering. They would voice opinions, but I’d stay quiet most of the time. I’d get up in the morning, tend to my business, get a bus pass and don’t come back until late... you know you had all that loudness, and kids making noise, since they parents not minding them. I was trying to mind the children, ‘cause they trying to cope the best way they could. They trying to deal with it. (P27)

Here, Angela responded by either leaving the shelter, or by helping others through providing small forms of child care, so as to keep tabs on the smaller children, whose mothers, she felt, were too distracted to do it themselves. Again, despite her criticism, Angela’s behaviors support a helping ethic, one directed toward the most vulnerable of evacuees — the children.

For some women, the shift in the shelter experience was a motivator to seek new accommodations and safer living situations. In others, women had no choice but to stay where they were as they worked to find permanent housing. In either case, women attempted to rely on kin and government-provided assistance to address their housing needs, to varying degrees of success. As was the case with shelter housing, both alternatives lacked a true sense of stability, as women were forced to rely on the will of others to continue providing that support. Still, despite these challenges, no woman reported sleeping on the streets during this time, meaning their survival strategies to secure housing — however unstable — were still minimally viable in their new displacement contexts.

Kin Shelter Mechanism: Doubling Up

Throughout the poverty literature, women engage in the practice of ‘doubling up’ as a survival strategy to prevent homelessness for themselves and their children (Edin and Lein 1997). By moving in temporarily with family members or friends, women reduce the costs of maintaining a household by half, while still providing shelter and food for their children. In Katrina’s aftermath, just over a quarter of women choose to double up with family and friends, while nearly one-third spent the majority of their displacement doing the same.

For families evacuating in advance of the storm, doubling up was often an extension of the evacuation caravan, as households combined to get basic shelter in apartments or houses, until receiving FEMA money or housing assistance to move into separate apartments. In this way, ‘the household’ expanded to include multiple families

until enough time passed and individual families could branch off, establishing new households of their own. For women who began in shelters, hotels, or even private rentals which they found for themselves, doubling up was often the bridge they needed to prevent living on the streets when they changed housing programs, waited for their own assistance to be approved or transferred, or as they moved from one city to another to expedite their family's recovery.

For Louisa, her housing pathway began with a kin caravan which pooled resources for a hotel, providing shelter for just the first few days. Quickly, this arrangement became untenable, as finances ran low. With the help of the hotel's desk clerk, the group was directed to a local church for assistance. Once there, they had space and beds for everyone.

We got a room at the hotel. They only had two rooms, so the men were in one and the women in the other. We paid \$60 a night [at the hotel], and the woman told us we had to go to the First Baptist Church. The Pastor was very nice, told us to go talk with the secretary, and gave us cots to sleep on. I'm a little heavy, so I couldn't sleep on a cot, so I slept on the pool table. I went to the bathroom a lot because I'm on meds that make me need the bathroom. We was there and then they had these mattresses, you know with the air... and we slept there. We stayed there, and they fed us three meals a day. Then we took over the kitchen one day and we cooked a meal for 100 people.

Here, the generosity of the local ministry enabled Louisa's kin to access free shelter, preserving their limited financial resources for other needs. In gratitude, Louisa and her kin prepared dinner for everyone visiting the shelter for meals at that time. For Louisa and her kin, this assistance was priceless, especially given their sizable kin caravan:

At the hotel, we had like 15-20 people in those two rooms, with the men and women separate. There were two beds and a sofa, with two or three people in each bed. (How many people were your relatives?) ...My relatives? It was my... grandson, daughter, my son and his wife, so seven relatives. All the rest of the people, my son just took people with him.

As seen previously, again, in the face of devastation, Louisa's son gathered as many people as he could to evacuate, demonstrating the helping ethic as pervasive even among those with the least in resources.

Yet hotels and motels were not viable long-term solutions as the disaster expanded and monetary resources ran low; nor were shelters. For Louisa, the church shelter was the transitional space necessary to meet her family's shelter needs until she made arrangements to stay with her sister.

I went to my sister's house in Laplace, my son went to his house in Gretna, and my daughter stayed behind. I was in my granddaughter's bed in my sister's house — so, we had a choice of people we could live with. Everything was fine. She had an extra bedroom, and I stayed there, then I came by my daughter's house [to stay] because my brother got out of the hospital, so he stayed there, and I stayed by my daughter. (P13)

During this time, Louisa was waiting to hear if she could return to New Orleans. In this way, her housing was consistent, but not stable. She managed her housing instability by shifting spaces and doubling up, avoiding homelessness in the process. To survive, Louisa combined formal shelter usage with kin accommodations to keep sheltered throughout her displacement, successfully creating housing continuity while never actually having a home of her own.

While network ties can support housing continuity, they can also become a source of instability as the pressure of housing evacuees puts the hosts at odds with the kin they are trying to help. For Faith, who was fired from her job as a 911 operator for taking her children out of harm's way, the offer of housing from her cousin became very complicated as she was unable to locate an apartment of her own. Evacuating to Baton Rouge, she found a safe haven for her family at a local shelter, commenting:

People were very friendly, I must say. In the shelter in Baton Rouge, they made

sure the kids and elderly sick got first priority in everything. We had enough food, clean linens, and no one slept on the floor. It was comfortable.

Immediately after the storm, Faith's cousin contacted her, insisting she bring her children to stay. Given the option for greater privacy while living with family, Faith decided to leave the shelter. Very close to her cousin prior to the storm, Faith received a warm initial welcome, with much assistance to learn the geography of the town, enroll her children in school, and find other important places. Within a month's time, however, the crowded living conditions and unexpectedly long displacement began to strain their relationship, causing a previously strong network tie to unravel. An experience that was once "welcoming," had become "horrible:"

My experience was horrible. Me and my cousin, before the storm we talked, we joked. We even talked two or three times a week. We had to use her kitchen at a certain time; we couldn't cook after six o'clock. It was so bad, my kids wanted to sleep in a tent. We were in a three bedroom trailer. There was no A/C, and she took the screens off — it was so bad we was about to go to the shelter, 'cause we was treated better at the shelter.

When I asked Faith why her cousins' behavior had changed, she became defensive:

I don't know if it was just the time length; we was only there for a month and a half, or two months, and nobody expected to be there that long. We only had clothes for two days. I don't know if it was her trying to cope with us being there. So, we headed to Texas. If there's ever a next time, when it comes to a family member, I will not go to them.

Later in the interview, Faith explained more of the circumstances surrounding her housing situation at her cousin's home. Over time, the burden of helping her kin had left Faith's cousin to take passive actions to encourage them to leave, reflecting the disintegration of the kin network.

A month, two, three weeks later, everybody was fighting. It was like an attitude that just progressed. [My cousin would] wake up, get her coffee, then go to her room and lock the bedroom door. She disconnected the water in the ice maker in the fridge. Then she don't want us cooking anything after 6 o'clock, and she'd

lock up her clean linens. It was like giving us signs to get out. We was looking for apartments there, but with everybody evacuating [to Baton Rouge], it was hard to find one. I found something in Alexandria, then [my] Mom and Dad got in the queue to come home, so we all packed up [and came back to New Orleans]. We had three families in a two bedroom house [in Baton Rouge].

Overcrowded was a primary characteristic of Faith's temporary living arrangement.

Among her evacuation caravan alone was herself, her four children and her parents.

Additionally, her cousin had also invited other kin to live at the home, including Faith's brother, his wife and their two children. Faith's eldest brother, who was handicapped and required special care, also stayed in the trailer. Collectively, her cousin and her son were hosting 11 people in a three bedroom trailer, for nearly two months. This burden exceeded the strength of the kin network, breaking its bonds. In response, Faith too was embittered, stating: "I'm telling you she called everyone, then we got there and it was like hell."

Overall, kin networks functioned best at providing short term shelter, where women would stay for a month or less, then move on quickly to a new location. In fact, several women identified brewing tensions and massive overcrowding in their kin accommodations that encouraged them to leave for the next temporary location:

It was okay [at my cousin's house]. ...We was crowded in there [and] it caused problems in the end [when] people just started fussing. They getting frustrated, [and] her and my sister's daughter was fussing. [30]

We had no electricity, no water. And the heat... it was a bunch of people, and attitudes changing, personalities changed. ...You couldn't stay in house, it was overheated. So we were ate up by mosquitoes. (Did you have power?) No, no, no! That's why we left... There was a lot of cursing, and talking about hitting one another. And the condition in the house — inside, it was a four bedroom and three bathroom home. The bathrooms were a mess, with that many people. The children, from my sister-in-law, they can't find the bathroom. So there was feces and urine on the floor. It was disgusting. [11]

My niece, she say ‘you could stay here.’ It was all of us in the house. Thank God, it was a big beautiful house. The house is very big, but you know, I had to make a move. Basically, the depressing part was not being cluttered; it just bothered me living in somebody’s house. [09]

My mom didn’t want to stay by other people. It was like living on eggs, on eggshells. It wasn’t the lady, it was her mom. We bought our own food, cleaned the bathroom, the kitchen and any food we cooked. The lady was evicted, but she come home to the house being clean, clothes was washed. Like my mom said, we used to living on our own. We had 20 people in one place, waiting to use the bathroom. We had to wash towels for days, it was real hard. [P31]

For women who had been living independently, albeit with housing subsidies, the loss of freedom which doubling up entailed encouraged them to seek their own apartments, especially as FEMA rental assistance and HUD disaster vouchers became universally available. In the end, relying on the government for housing proved the most stable arrangement, since FEMA rental assistance was pledged for 12 months, while the HUD-based disaster voucher programs were guaranteed for 18 months. Since many women planned to return to New Orleans, these programs provided the duration of assistance necessary to wait out the city’s anticipated initial recovery.

Formal Federal Assistance

Following the storm, three housing programs provided shelter to evacuees: FEMA’s IHP program, the KDHAP program and HUD’s DVP program⁴⁶. The primary difference

⁴⁶Initially, all housing assistance was administered through FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Their first program, the Individuals and Households Program (IHP) provided rental assistance and trailers, as well as money for other basic needs and expenses, a standard FEMA post-disaster assistance package (FEMA 10/1/03). Assistance was assured for 1 year. To participate, applicants would receive approval from FEMA; then locate a private rental. FEMA would pay the landlord directly on their behalf, with no required contribution for residents (FEMA 10/1/03). This program was the standard assistance for housing after the storm.

Recognizing that low-income families have special needs and greater challenges to recovery following a disaster, the (Katrina) Disaster Housing Assistance Program was created to provide housing

between the programs is that FEMA assistance was granted for one year, while the disaster vouchers were provided for 18 months. As shelters closed and kin networks were strained, most women shifted into one of these programs to establish more stable housing.

Illustrating this pattern is Jada, age 31, who had lived in her same public housing unit for eleven years and was a mother of four, ages 3, 6, 11, and 14. After being evacuated to a military base in Arkansas, she was relocated to Virginia, where she stayed with her brother and his wife. While her experience there had been positive and supportive, she decided to move to Texas near her mother because Jada's six year old, Terrance, was having behavioral problems resulting from his separation from Jada's grandmother, a stable figure in his life prior to the storm.

In mid-February 2006, the family moved in with Jada's mother for about six weeks, until Jada could get established in an apartment of her own. For Jada's family, in the seven months since their evacuation, they had moved four different times. With each move, Jada had to reestablish her housing, her children's schooling, her food stamps, and any other benefits she was receiving. Participating in the disaster voucher program in Texas, Jada was finally able to find housing stability.

Jada's "dance" to secure viable housing for her family was performed time and time again by many women in this study. Yet, housing vouchers and FEMA aid were not a panacea of recovery for all women. For 45 year old Linda, who evacuated with a (now

assistance for public housing residents and homeless families (HUD 2005). Known as the KDHAP or 'DHAP' program, it provided a special housing voucher structured similar to that of Section 8. The DHAP voucher had no required rental payment, though its value was limited to HUD's fair market rent standards and families paid any amount beyond the voucher's value. Several months into the program, DHAP was replaced with the DVP or disaster voucher program (HUD 1/23/06). Disaster vouchers were identical to DHAP vouchers, with an assistance for a period of 18 months (HUD 1/23/06). Eligibility for DVP was limited to prior public housing residents (HUD 1/23/06), excluding the homeless who were part of the DHAP legislation.

ex-) boyfriend and then moved in with her son, the frustration of being without stable housing was mounting as she had stayed at *nine* different places by May of 2006. This persistent instability was triggered by the rescission of her FEMA rental aid:

...when they set up an apt, the apartment was supposed to be for a year, I signed a lease for a year, and was living there for 5 months. That put the most stress on you, 'cause you have to find a place to live. Before, I was feeling like 'I'm on a lease for a year, that give me a chance to pull it together,' just feeling like 70% better, even though everybody was separated ... but only 5 months lasted and we had to find somewhere else to go... FEMA stopped paying for it... They stopped paying for it because the rent was so high. They told me I have to find somewhere else to go, and I've been going from house to house ever since then. (P17)

Linda's housing struggle originated from a high demand for private market housing, which drove rents higher in areas flooded with evacuees. Since she is located in an "evacuee flood zone," her ability to find more "affordable" housing is very unlikely, especially in states like Texas and Georgia, where she stayed. In response, Linda bounced between kin accommodations wherever she could:

[We go] from house to house, sometimes we go from state to state trying to find a place to go. First we go to Georgia, but the kids, they are bad...they can't sleep, can't rest, so we had to find somewhere else to go.

The displacement continued as Linda received a KDHAP voucher, only to find "now a lot of places is not accepting it no more, some take it, but some not accepting it. There's a waiting list." Again, like FEMA, the HUD-based voucher did not materialize into the physical housing source Linda and her family needed to recover from the storm. Instead, housing instability dominated Linda's family life, the frustrations of which she expressed by saying "There's always something, something, something. We need help, Miss. There's always something."

Like Linda, nearly a third of the overall sample stayed at five or more places by the time of their interview⁴⁷, with three being the modal category. Among those with high housing instability, 90% were living an extended displacement. In their need to survive, women repeatedly moved like water between formal shelters, kin housing, and voucher subsidized independent residences, combining and dissolving households as circumstance required. Except the motion between housing spaces was not fluid, but rather an alternation between periods of calm stability and unexpected rapid change as a single HUD or FEMA notification could force another move and erase much of the progress toward recovery a woman and her family had made.

Exacerbating the tumultuous nature of women's displacements was the short durations of those stable times. On average, respondents spent 139 days living in a single residence, or about four and half months. For those lucky enough to return to the city within six months, they tended to spend about 3 months (102 days) in a single place, then, they went "home" to the city to live. For the extendedly displaced, their most stable housing situations averaged 199 days — or about six and a half months.⁴⁸ But, the challenge for the extendedly displaced is that the longer they were away from New Orleans, the more they moved around, so they never really got "settled" even though they were able to stay in a single place for longer periods of time. In this way, women who returned to the city had less housing instability and a shorter average duration in their temporary living circumstances than those living an extended displacement. In short,

⁴⁷ N=16: P1, P2, P4, P8, P9, P13, P17, P20, P22, P24, P26, P29, P32, P39, P42 and P47

⁴⁸ Comparing the group means for those who were displaced less than six months and those displaced longer than six months, there is a statistically significant difference in longest one-time housing duration.

extended displacement leads to more frequent housing moves, but also to longer average durations in any single residence.

For many women, their experience with finding stable housing was a perpetual challenge which had not been resolved at the time of our interviews. In fact, every woman who received a voucher was left in uncertainty as to what would transpire when the assistance ended. Based on the findings here, the kin network would likely accommodate them to prevent homelessness, but in the long run, their housing stability remains uncertain. What is known, though, is that housing was not the only survival challenge women faced while they were displaced from the city. In fact, for many, housing was the easy part... paying the rest of the bills, however, was another matter.

CHAPTER NINE

LIVING DISPLACEMENT

Surviving on a day to day basis involves more than securing and maintaining stable housing. It also includes meeting other basic needs, like paying the light bill, feeding your children, having clothing to wear and being able to afford doctors and prescriptions. In a typical poverty situation, women meet these needs through work, kin help and formal assistance in programs like food stamps and Medicaid.

In this chapter, I examine how women met their non-shelter needs during their displacements. For many women, displacement meant facing new levels of poverty, as they were challenged to pay new bills while often receiving less formal assistance or work income. Forced to rely on government aid, many women fell short financially as they struggled to find work or survive on tightly limited, fixed incomes.

Everyday Survival: Bills, bills and more bills

My whole life [has changed since the storm]. In New Orleans, I had it easy. Now, I have it hard... I didn't have as much bills. I had money. I could take the kids out to eat, to do things. I had money. Now, all my money is spent on bills. I had a car but only paid [for] insurance, and low light bills. Now I have a light bill, a car note and insurance. I can't win for losing. I'm not going to let that get me down. I will fight until I don't have anything else in me. Out here, you need a car. You trying to catch the bus, and it's in triple digits [the temperature] out here. You need a car. I would never make it because I have kids.

For most women, displacement meant taking on new, unexpected expenses. With the massive flooding, most women who had cars lost them to the water, along with all their furniture, clothing, appliances and other resources that they needed for daily living or as items to pawn in a crisis. For the women in this study, like so many others in the city, Hurricane Katrina destroyed every possession and material resource they had. At ground zero, the only “tools” for survival were their kin and the federal disaster aid they received.

So pernicious was the financial effect of the storm, that when asked, 69.4% of the women stated that they felt less financially secure, while another fifth felt about the same, and just 10% felt they were in a better financial position after the storm (n = 49).

Considering the deep poverty of these women to begin, with most making less than \$20,000 per year, the idea of being less financially secure suggests they are at exceptional risk of falling into dire conditions, including extreme poverty⁴⁹ or homelessness. Among the sample, over three quarters of women stated they had more expensive bills, which was a significant source of stress in their new lives. Amaya, a thirty-six year old mother, explains this new challenge:

I'm just saying that, 'is they gonna give us any kind of help, financial-wise?' I can't afford to buy my children nothing for Christmas. With every check there's some kind of bill you got to pay. I never enjoyed a check since I got it. Not to treat myself to anything. It is all bills, bills, bills, bills, bills, bills. They supposed to help for the utilities. Now they said 'if I'm eligible'. It's on the man to say 'you eligible' now. So, I don't know. 'Cause if I try to get another job, I'll be up on my feet and I'll never get no rest. If I got another job, I'll never have time to relax. I might be off on one job, but not on the other job. (P47)

⁴⁹ Income at 50% of the federal poverty line or less.

Again, increased costs made living through displacement more challenging than pre-storm life. For Thelma, a 71-year-old stable Section 8 resident for ten years before the storm, things were not going well at the time of our interview:

With housing you get a voucher for 18 months, then what you going to do? Food is so high, but now I'm on the same income. If people are working, that's different. But you on a fixed income and medicine costs keep going up. What you going to do? I have \$1000 in medical bills; I don't have the money to pay for anything. I have a Wal-Mart credit card to buy food. I have to pay that. The only thing I have is a bed to sleep in, that's it. (P30)

Thelma's recovery was challenging as she addressed her food and medical costs, barely making it work. On a fixed income, she was forced to rely on her voucher to cover her housing costs, but also recognized this assistance would end after 18 months. While she was housed, fed, and getting necessary medications at the time of our interview, she knew her patchwork of survival resources would inevitably shred in the future when her voucher payments stop, stifling her recovery in the process. Under pressures similar to Thelma's, 82.4% of women reported being worried about not being able to pay their bills. Since most of their network members were also in a similar predicament and scattered about geographically, the kin "pooling" system was dismantled to varying degrees during displacement, because "it's hard to ask for help, to ask a family member. They have family, too." So, women got creative.

So desperate were the challenges of making the bills that Mary, a 44 year old grandmother, actually began to reverse her recovery by selling off the few things she bought with her FEMA assistance following the storm.

It just messed up everything. Everything. Nothing is going right for me. My family, they all apart. My son is in Florida, my daughter, they got their house together. They got a little money from FEMA. I had to spend it all on life, clothes, to start all over. Then what I did buy, I had to pawn it all. Just to pay bills! Miss, I had a deep freezer, I had to pawn that too. \$50 for a deep freezer! I

lost everything in the pawn shop. I hope I can make it home, and get that freezer back. Then I got grandkids, and they want a snack, they want this and that. They cut the food stamps off. It's been two months. It's been the hardest two months. I can't even buy anything 'cause nobody's got room to put food in their icebox. (P42)

Living most of her life in poverty, and six years in public housing before the storm, Mary demonstrates the immediacy of needs as she described the prior two months as the “hardest.” Due to her increased bills, her previous strategy of buying food in bulk and freezing it has been dismantled by having to pawn her deep freezer for money to buy food at all. Her food stamps before the storm were reduced by almost a hundred dollars per month after the storm, and then eliminated altogether. Deeply concerned about caring for her grandchildren, ages 12 and 13, she is displaced in Houston unable to afford the transition from the subsidized housing and included utilities she relied on for daily survival in New Orleans to paying many of these bills herself, especially as she attempts to do so with fewer resources than ever before. Mary and her family are not recovering from the storm.

Across the sample, many women found their basic costs increasing after the storm. Among the most challenging to overcome were increases in rent, utilities and food — necessities that cannot be eliminated. Beyond rent, which increased from an average of \$262 prior to the storm to \$567 dollars after⁵⁰, once settled into new homes, electricity and utilities became the bill that was most challenging for women to pay, as

⁵⁰ This difference between before and after Katrina increased by \$305 per month, which equates to an additional \$3,660 per annum. Since the majority of women earned less than \$20,000 in annual income, the new rental “burden” consumes 18.3% of that salary. Likewise, the high standard deviation, \$398 dollars, reflects an extreme range of rents, from as low as \$25 in New Orleans traditional public housing to a high of \$1600 per month in a private rental. By contrast, the rent range before the storm was between \$25 and \$650. Such extreme increases stifle recovery by reducing or eliminating money for extras, as well as the basics, such as food, medicine or clothing.

31.5% identified this as their biggest bill after the storm. Illustrating the gravity of this challenge is Mary, who had hit a new level of desperation in the face of having her lights turned off for the first time in her life:

The way I'm living now, I've never lived like this. I never lived like this. I'm not able to pay my bills. When I was in the projects I didn't have a light bill. But even when I was in New Orleans in a house, I never had my lights off.... Every month my lights is turned off. I'm under a lot of stress. I worry. How we gonna eat, when we got no lights today? It's a mess. My life is in shambles, it is.... I have a \$222 dollar water bill. I can't pay it, Miss...I don't ask for money. I'm not getting nothing for me, for my grandkids... I need to get some income. It's hard for me, it's rough. (P42)

As the bills pile up, recovery is questionable for Mary and her grandkids, who were isolated from her kin as well, once regular sources of assistance and support. For her, life after Katrina did not include recovery, but new, more entrenched life difficulties and no financial stability.

Food availability. Despite devastating increases in rent and utilities, respondents did receive increased food stamp allocations following Katrina. Comparing food stamps before and after the storm, there is a net increase of \$19.33, and participation in the program increased from 67.7% of the full sample prior to the hurricane to 78.4% after the storm. Unfortunately though, this increase in amount and participation is deceptive, since most families received immediate, post-disaster relief, which was terminated shortly thereafter, or reduced significantly as federal budget cuts to the long term food stamp program decreased regular assistance levels (Dreier 2006), by as much as \$248 in one case in this study. Many families combined households across generations out of necessity, with household size increasing by .18 persons on average, which increased allocations by as much as \$151. This household recombination in conjunction with the

presence of short term relief and program restructuring explains, in part, the changes in food stamp allocations. The other determinant affecting food stamp allocations is the displacement location, since non-disaster food stamp allocations are distributed through local jurisdictions, which can apply local level criteria for program participants.⁵¹ This pattern is illustrated by Ingrid, a married woman who lived in public housing with her husband:

Well, my husband and I, we went to Texas.... He applied for food stamps, and they gave him food stamps for him, then when we went to Virginia, the food stamps stopped. Then he applied in December, and they gave him \$10, which was a big step down from \$150. That's to feed two people! I was getting \$198 [before the storm]. (P23)

Here, changing locations resulted in a loss of assistance as the family transitioned from the disaster food stamp allocation of \$150 to the local allocation of \$10, both of which pale in comparison to what the family was accustomed to receiving prior to the storm in Louisiana.

In Althea's case, the reduction of food stamps was from approximately one hundred dollars a month, down to a mere \$48. This reflects a devastating loss of nearly half her assistance amount. The importance of food stamps in making ends meet is best articulated by Mary:

Before Katrina, I was paying \$35 per month for rent, then \$75. I was paying for the phone. Now, I ain't getting no income. I can't get a job here. They cut me off [food stamps], but my children have to eat too. I have to suffer and my grandkids have to suffer. And we lost our food stamps. (P42)

So, it is not merely the loss of food stamps, but the combination of reduced food stamps with increased housing costs and a decreased income that has left Mary desperate as she

⁵¹ As constructed, the indicator does not specify between food stamps received immediately after the storm, versus those at the time of interview.

attempts rather unsuccessfully to re-establish a working budget for her family.

Considering how unfortunate daily life in poverty is in general, for her to state she is suffering, along with her family, suggests a much more severe level of tragedy than she ever experienced prior to the storm.

Meeting medical needs. Unlike so many places, New Orleans had an extensive charitable hospital system, allowing low-income individuals access to medical care at reduced, if any, cost. This was not the case in new evacuation locations, transforming access to medical care and prescriptions into an emergent survival challenge for women in this study. As Joanna explains:

When we came down here, I was used to going to Charity [Hospital]. My medicine got wet, and I have 10 types of pills. This woman asked if I was working, then she said ‘I’m sorry, you can’t be seen.’ (P31)

In this interaction, Joanna was denied access to healthcare because she was not employed, which surprised her based on her expectations on free access to medical care. This surprise extended when Joanna learned she was no longer eligible for Medicaid due to her FEMA assistance money counting as “income.” These unexpected changes in her status challenged her disaster recovery, as she continued her effort to reestablish stability in meeting her medical needs:

On February 6th, I got so sick, I passed out. I didn’t want to tell my mom. I thought it was a heart attack. I had to call the ambulance. I thought it was my appendix. Then the doorbell rang. It was my mom’s nurse. I had passed out ‘cause my gallstones ruptured. After that I went to social services, and tried for a Medicaid card. I was turned down because of the \$2000 I got from FEMA. I reapplied, but then I had a problem because of my income tax. There’s just all kinds of situations, they keep you going to the bottom of the ditch. I need to go to Dallas. There’s a hospital where they do it for free, and I’m trying to see about the procedure. My last ultrasound, they said I needed surgery, to have my gallbladder removed. I’m still trying to get a Medicaid card. (P31)

In short, if Joanna cannot secure a Medicaid card, nor get to Dallas for free surgery, she will eventually face declining health and risk death. In this way, the transition into longer term survival under displacement requires a degree of finesse to layer the correct assistances in an ever-moving current of contradictions.

Since programs such as food stamps and Medicaid are administered at the state-level, what is allowed in one state may disqualify a participant in another, meaning knowledge from Louisiana's assistance system is not directly transferrable to Texas, Alabama, or any other state in the nation, supporting Downing's argument that survival skills are not transferrable across contexts (1996). While the broad survival typologies (kin-, aid- and work-based) do transfer, the specifics of programs and payments do not.

Thelma summarizes this place-based fickleness quite well:

For me, it's like my medical needs — in New Orleans, the doctors I had been seeing were the same for years. They would give me samples of medicine. It's so expensive now. I'm on about 14 medications, and it runs out quicker on me than it do for someone on one or two medications. They gave me a medical card, but here they only give you three medications. And it's only for four or five months.

While Thelma had some medical security after the storm from receiving Medicare in Louisiana, her benefits were rescinded when she moved to Texas and applied for Medicare there (as required by law).

My biggest problem now [is I have no coverage], seeing Louisiana was paying my Medicare premium, so my FEMA doctor is sending me all my bills. I had to apply with Texas. But when I applied for Texas, Medicare in Louisiana dropped me. I got a letter saying [Louisiana is] taking my premiums from my FEMA money, but I have a letter saying Texas will pay the premiums... Texas is paying my Medicare payments. Social Security tells me it takes a while to get it straight, but it's been four months. They're only sending \$500 and something a month now. The medicine cost is almost that. I offered to fax them my letter, but they told me it must come directly from the state of Texas. (P30)

In this way, Thelma's pre-Katrina, aid-based survival strategy of using Louisiana's Medicaid program combined with free samples from doctors has dissolved into a pile of bills and delays until the Texas system adds her to their program, and social security incorporates the transition into their system. In the meantime, Louisiana is garnering Thelma's social security payments to cover her medical expenses which should be covered by her Medicare. Thelma must also decide which three out of fourteen medications are most important for her to take, while trying to afford the rest in addition to her other bills, despite the fact her medicine costs are equivalent to her monthly social security benefit. Thelma is not recovering from the storm.

Strategy Dismantled: Jobless in New Labor Markets

For working women, 41.2% percent of the sample, finding a new job was a top priority as they settled into their new locations. In the Pre-Katrina New Orleans job market, women were employed largely in the medical profession and government institutions, holding positions such as a certified nursing assistant, home help aid, retirement community staff member, 911 operator and public school teacher. Just two women held service jobs, including a position in food services and a retail shop. Yet, following their evacuation, it was much more difficult for women to locate work, as only 7.8% of women reported working at the time of interview, disabling work as a survival strategy for low-income women⁵².

⁵² Several women reported discrimination against evacuees as a reason they could not secure work (n=6): P9, P31, P32, P42, P43, P45 and P47.

The loss of work not only affected income, but also reduced other resources women could rely upon to reestablish their independence. First, work had been a consistent experience for previously employed women, who had a mean working time 6.22 years and averaged 37.5 hours per week. As a collective, these women had been stably employed, reliable workers. Additionally, since almost all were full time employees, several had benefits such as sick leave (53.3%), health insurance (40%) and retirement contributions (26.7%) through their employers. Work enabled these women to move toward self-sufficiency, while Katrina forced them back into reliance on the government.

Leaving New Orleans to survive the storm meant leaving access to their employer and employment opportunities. When asked about their working situations during their evacuation, just one women reported having the same job, while 73.3% of working women reported being let go (n=15) and only three women received employer assistance. Yet, the loss of employment did not result in many women securing new jobs. Instead, just three women secured a new job during their evacuation, representing a meager 6% of the total sample.⁵³ At the time of interview, just 8% (n=4) had found work. Among these women, all reported the job being better or just as good as before. Still, with the vast majority of working women unemployed during their evacuation and displacement periods, a vast 92% of the full sample either chose not to work or could not locate a job at the time of her interview.

Among previously working women, there were two common explanations for

⁵³ Women were asked about their employment status at three points in time — before Katrina, while evacuated from New Orleans and at the time of the interview.

their extensive unemployment. The first was the presence of a split labor market, especially in communities such as Houston with a large Latino worker base (Bonacich 1972; Davis 2000). In these cases, the New Orleans women anticipated higher wages based on their experience in New Orleans than were available. They were not prepared, however, to face competition for those jobs in a market with so many immigrant workers willing to accept minimum wage or below. For many evacuee women, they could not demand a livable wage, or secure the position. Regina and Mary each describe this situation in detail:

It's hard out here [to find a job]. It's hard once they see you from New Orleans... I'm looking, everyday. They prefer the Mexican workers. They still making five dollars out here. They don't want to give you what you paid before. Here they pay like five dollars, or five thirty-five. (P9)

In this instance, the split labor market divides the workers, pricing this evacuee out of the position altogether, in favor of a Mexican worker who will accept minimum wage pay.

For Mary, she understands that low-educational levels may disqualify her as an applicant, but ultimately identified the split labor market to explain her unemployment:

It's hard to get a job with no high school diploma. If you want a good job, that's what you need. I took a temp job. I was working every week. I made \$260 per week, and it was some help, and every two weeks I was getting paid. One week, I even made \$407 in one week. I'd take no doze, but I can't get to the job. I have no transport. I tried to call a ride line. They say if you can't get a ride, then they would get you there. But it was too far out. I was working for a mail packing company. I was the stamper. (P42)

Here, Mary identifies her unemployment as a result of her lack of transportation. As the interview progresses, though, she edits her reasoning to address the issue of ethnic preference by employers:

A lot of people had good jobs, now they give them to Mexicans. Cousins, aunties, they don't want them for their job because Mexicans take less money.

They have to be deported and so they can't get their jobs. They give it to somebody else working for lesser pay. We behind all them here, you know? And they gotta start all over. They was set up to retire, you know? (P42)

In this way, there is resentment towards Mexicans, and the lower cost labor they represent.

Yet, it is unclear if the real issue is race, or just a more generalized discrimination.

Towards the end of the interview, Mary replaces the split labor market explanation with a more generalized one about discrimination against evacuees from New Orleans:

[Why do you think you can't find a job?] They don't want to hire you when they find out you from New Orleans. I even got a Texas ID. I went to Burger King the other day [and talked to the manager], just to give her an application and she said she'll call. I know what that means. She's not gonna call. And she ain't called me yet. (P42)

For low-income women with limited job skills, the split labor market in places like Texas presents a tangible barrier to gainful employment. However, the evacuee "stigma" that encouraged discrimination was much more insidious, since it was often dismissed as "playing the victim." For Jada, she too faced the New Orleans "stigma" in her job search in Texas:

I just want to go home. I don't see how I can make it out here. I can't get a job, and there's nothing but Mexicans here, and I guess since we looking like we come from New Orleans, there's not a lot of people who are hiring us. I'm still trying, I'm not going to give up, but it gets frustrating sometimes....When I came here, I applied for a correctional officer position, I applied at Office Depot, I applied at a gas station, and I still didn't get a job. I passed the test, interviewed at the sheriff's office, finished the physical, passed the drug test and did everything. It's a matter of them calling me. Today I got a call from a security job — they called me to fill out an application. I guess they want to hire me, because they called twice. Hopefully, that will pan out. But I'm looking. (P32)

It is not a lack of effort on Jada's part that has kept her unemployed. While she still is somewhat reluctant to identify her experience as one of discrimination, other respondents, such as Miss Jean, are not. Stated bluntly:

The ones from Louisiana, they definitely didn't get hired. I had one lady tell me from the outreach center that she thinks Louisiana people have been there long enough to get jobs. I reminded her. I agree most people should have gotten jobs. But I have a grandson, a daughter, a granddaughter.... They get 4 hours a week, then they not on the schedule. They can't live off of the jobs they get. You know! I mean, before you talk, you do some research! I'd like to get something I can do. I just need a car. I'll be okay. (P43)

In small ways, discrimination can unfold — being hired, but “fired” in a de facto manner through the reduction of hours is one mechanism. More classic forms include saying a position is filled, when it is not. While each of these stories could be argued as a biased report from the victim, implicit prejudice theory is consistent with these women's claims of discrimination (Quillian 2006; Gladwell 2005). With media coverage of Katrina “refugees” as dangerous looters who were shooting the same relief workers trying to help them, employers, service workers and others in receiving communities were “primed” to assume the worst of all evacuees, and thus became resistant to hiring them. Layering on society's well-known bias for low-income individuals and ethnic minorities, it is logical the women of this study, moreso than others, would face discrimination in hiring.

So challenging was the act of finding a job in Texas, Julia, a 46 year old mother of a small child ultimately returned to New Orleans just to find work.

Well, I didn't like where I was at in Texas... If I wouldn't have came back, I'd probably be homeless myself... 'cause FEMA ain't paying no money. It's hard to find a job out there. I knew the jobs was here. I had to get back to find a job, where I was they didn't have none... Well, I really can't say [why I couldn't find a job]. When I went to apply, they didn't have no openings. We 'New Orleans evacuees'. I hate to be labeled, but that's the way it was, so I had to get home to take care of my grandchild and daughter and more... I'm a working person, I just want to live, work and be peaceful. That's all I ask for.

While the most women did not work during their evacuation and extended displacement, it was not because they preferred to “live off the dole.” They were simply not hired,

despite being qualified.

When women could, they worked, relying on kin and aid-based assistance to *compensate* for the inability to locate a job in areas that had both a pre-existing split labor market, as well as active discrimination caused by the “evacuee stigma.” Women actively attempted to translate their work-based survival strategies in new locations only to find them ineffective in the face of employment discrimination.

In sum, women used the same aid-based survival strategies in new locations, but with no guarantee that doing so would actually help them make ends meet. For the sample as a whole, it is apparent that they are recovering in terms of having housing and receiving food assistance, but struggling to pay increased utilities or meet other needs like clothing, medical and school supplies. With work dismantled as a displacement survival strategy due to rampant and unexpected discrimination, women were increasingly forced to rely on kin- or aid-assistance when they could. When they could not, as was frequently the case in a network where everyone was strained, women were forced to do without — including electricity and medicine — or to sell their limited possessions for cash to pay bills, supporting Downing’s finding that survival strategies are non-transferrable across contexts and locations (1996). When these strategies failed, women who were able to return to New Orleans would, where the primary limitation to getting hired was actually finding a job for which to apply.

CHAPTER TEN

REBUILDING COMMUNITIES

As women lived their displacements, they had one crucial choice that was always looming: whether or not to return to New Orleans. Despite the unexpected nature of their evacuation, there was a common ambivalence about the feasibility of going “home.” Women based their decisions on several factors: stories from neighbors and friends about the conditions of the city, the lack of affordable housing, the loss of jobs and the limited access to medical services. Together these considerations determined if women would build their lives anew in displacement communities or return “home” to a place with challenges of its own to overcome.

In this chapter, I examine the nature of this ambivalence to identify the narratives women engaged while making their decisions to return to the city or stay away indefinitely. Next, I examine what happened to women who came back to live in the community at large, followed by those returning to the River Gardens, a HOPE VI public housing community which had no structural damage or flooding.

Through these examinations, it became clear that returning to the city made no guarantee of a recovery, since the new geography of post-Katrina New Orleans had just as many challenges in daily life as living elsewhere during this time. As a result, recovery — in the sense of a restoration to one’s status prior to the event — simply was

not available for any of the women in this study. Instead, they lived in uncertainty, struggling to piece together new systems of survival in a post-Katrina world... to limited success.

Ambivalence: Is it safe to go home?

Just as women narrated the storm as ‘safe’ or ‘threatening’ to create a social reality and define their evacuation choices, when it came time to decide upon returning, a similar process took place. After the trauma of being stranded, or of watching events unfold on television, most women developed a sense of ambivalence toward living in the “new” New Orleans. The storm’s damage and flooding, combined with threatening and abrasive evacuation experiences, shattered these women’s sense of security and trust in the levees and government. Coupled with a return of high levels of violent crime, the loss of community and neighbors, and lacking healthcare, employment and housing, women created continued narratives of threat that discouraged them from returning to the city. When I asked each woman if she would return to the city, Linda, Violet and Sarah expressed their sense of fear to return:

Um, once it gets built up better than what it was. Right now, they still acting crazy down there. The least thing you do, they take you to jail. No, not now. The levees not fixed. I will go back, but the city will have to get a whole lot better before I return there. (P17)

Not this year. Not this year. I’m a teacher in the New Orleans public schools, and there’s no jobs. And we have health issues, with my mom. There’s no hospitals or dialysis centers. She needs dialysis a couple times a week. There’s a lack of health care right now... I think the “new” New Orleans will be for my grandchildren. It’ll be 20-25 years before the city will be operational. By operational I mean with healthcare, education, higher education. (P11)

I’m missing New Orleans. The New Orleans there is not the New Orleans I left. As of now, I can’t say. Maybe by then I’d really be content here. The longer I’m

away and in another place and get established I'm not going to want to go back — you become satisfied where you are. (P6)

While each woman had general ideas about the city's recovery and livability, for Regina, the deciding factor to stay away from the city was a vicious run-in with the New Orleans police. Returning to visit for Mardi Gras, Regina's altercation forced her to withstand direct harassment and racism:

Like at the parades, I went to Endymion and Bacchus. At Endymion, they would overlook the black kids. We were between St. Andrew and Josephine [Street]. There was nothing for the kids. I used to love Endymion, it was always a favorite but... Everybody said they didn't want to come back no more. They should have not even had Mardi Gras. They stopped Zulu at 6 o'clock. We went to Orleans and Claiborne and the police was cursing at us. They told us to "go the fuck back where you came from." How did they know we not even from town? ...They don't gotta worry about me no more! (P9)

Previously ambivalent, Regina's visit to the city in February 2006 solidified her decision to remain in Texas and rebuild a new life there.

Among her Texas-based social circle, this sentiment was dominant as "Other families I know here, they not coming back either." It also sparked anger toward political figures such as the mayor, whom she felt "sold out," yet still visited Texas churches — including hers — to pander for electoral votes.

They didn't care about us in New Orleans. Don't come out here to sit in church! Nagin — nobody want him. He sold out on the Blacks 'cause he didn't know what he was doing in the first place... He sold out not knowing what he was getting himself into — he's getting a free ride. He has a house out here all paid for, so if it doesn't work out... He sold out, too, to get federal money.

Again, themes of government mismanagement and mistrust, combined with a loss of pre-existing community permeate this expression of anger, as well as guide the decision to resettle elsewhere, and thus, make extended displacement a new form of recovery.

Regina continues:

There's NOPD police here in jail. They might as well close it [New Orleans] down. There's hotels closing, filing for bankruptcy. I know like six women, they work for hotels, they back in town and they got laid off. People need money for a living. Even welfare — you gotta go to Houston, you go to Atlanta — just to get a little help.

Regina's comments identify very serious, persistent issues that continue into the present. First, the city did not court low-income families to return to the city, despite their low-wage labor being an asset in the city's tourism and health services economies. Next, Regina notes the economic shifts that affect her friends who have returned, mainly that without tourists, there is no tourism industry and no need for numerous workers in a post-Katrina economy. This trend also destabilizes low-income families since their skills are limited and low-wage work is what they are primarily qualified to do.

Finally, in making comparisons across locations about the welfare system and assistance variability, she illustrates the manner in which some locations and states are more 'evacuee friendly' — offering superior services and assistance 'packages' — than others, particularly Louisiana. For example, offers of free housing and services made Colorado an attractive state to which to relocate, as evacuees "...heard through the "evacuee grapevine" that Denver was a good place to be: there were far fewer evacuees and thus there was less perceived competition for jobs and other resources" (Peek n.d.). This last factor, the inconsistent implementation of federal programs and social services, can become a key pull or push factor for evacuees. In states with more generous assistance, evacuees are pulled to move there, while hostile environments with low levels of services push residents to return to the city.

This same pattern of push/pull relations existed within New Orleans itself, following the storm. For Regina, despite being in Texas where many other respondents

reported tensions, discrimination and hostility, her experience in New Orleans was so racist, hostile and assertive that it determined her future residency, despite having long-standing ties to the city prior to Katrina. In this way, the new city is also a place of displacement in and of itself, with new social boundaries which may hinder recovery for low-income families who elect to return.

Given the violent crime, loss of community, lack of services and absence of affordable housing, are women willing to return? Yes. At the completion of interviews, just under half of women in the sample were already living in the city, with another third willing to come home⁵⁴. For many, New Orleans is their only home — the one place they feel they belong. The unique culture of the city makes it easy to romanticize, but for many, it's almost a matter of tradition. When asked “will you return?,” women often replied with enthusiasm and adamancy:

Yeah, I love New Orleans. Only thing I know is New Orleans. Everywhere I go, it ain't like home. P18

Eventually. Might not be all direct into New Orleans, but I'll be so close, I'll be able to smell it. (Why?) There's no place like home. P23

Yes. I would love it, if I am able to. P34

Um, 'cause I like being in New Orleans. I've been there 42 years. I don't think there's anywhere else I could go stay right now. My son is trying to get me to move to Texas [but I don't want to go]. P41

Yes I will. (Why?) 'Cause that's my home and I miss it, and I'd like to get back there today. I'll be there, I would have been in there, 'cause that's my home and I miss home. I miss home. It's where I was born and raised. And I want to go back home. Ain't nothing like home. P42

⁵⁴ While many women were optimistic, they still stated several concerns about returning, or staying in the city to live. Six mentioned crime: P12, P14, P19, P27, P40 and P51. Four mentioned the cost of living: P8, P29, P31 and P34. Lastly, three mentioned negative interactions with the police since the storm: P10, P12 and P19.

I was homesick. This was, I don't, I feel like I can't live nowhere else but New Orleans. (P46).

Yet, amidst this narrative of longing, no one woman provided concrete reasons for returning, such as a house, a job, or even family. Rather, respondents with those reasons had already returned, so among the extendedly displaced, the narrative of longing was the primary incentive to return.

Surviving in the 'New' New Orleans

While recovery implies returning to your community and working to rebuild it, returning to New Orleans did not guarantee a woman would heal from her trauma and material destitution. Rather, New Orleans after the storm was its own new environment. As the first woman in this study returning to live in New Orleans after Katrina, Olivia's story demonstrates many of the structural and personal reasons why women remained in extended displacement — returning home was fraught with new challenges. Evacuating nearby to a small town in Cajun country, Olivia was able to return to New Orleans at the end of September, just a month following the storm. When she arrived, she found “my door busted wide-open, rats in the house, leaves and everything up in here.” After cleaning up her home, it became the primary residence for six of her kin — a sharp contrast to her lifestyle of single living prior to the storm. Immediately, her return was not a reconstitution of life before the storm, as Olivia explained the changes to her neighborhood:

It's not the same, but it's been okay... The people, the people different. I don't feel like I felt before... I don't, I don't know, I just feel that way. It just feels like something different. I can't explain that. (P14)

Later in the interview, Olivia told me the cause of her disillusionment with post-disaster New Orleans: "... now it's bad with the murders here. [You] can't walk outside your door now." In these few comments, Olivia's story illustrates three major themes that dominated the decision-making process for women deciding whether to return home: catastrophic damage, overcrowded housing and an altered community life with increased violence.

Women's ambivalence toward returning to a disorganized social structure was a continual narrative as they discussed their futures during the interviews. Simone, a New Orleans native and resident her entire life, was even thinking of leaving the city, though she had already returned:

Well, for one thing, they don't have enough cooperation from the police department, it's too... things just not like they was before. Then here, I'm by myself. I'd like to be closer to family. I'm getting older in age, I'll be 69 next month, and I'd like to be closer to family so if I get sick, they can look after me. My two sons are here, and they stop in, but they not like ladies. My five daughters are all in Indiana... That [is one reason] and it's not the city it used to be — I don't like it no more. I mean I like it because I was born here. I like Indiana, and other places I've seen too. The crime rate is so bad in the city. It's worse than it was — now they shoot back at the police. They lost all respect, now they shoot at the police. I'm near the French Quarter and they don't care about this place. There's more crime. (P12)

While displaced, Simone was able to reunite with her daughters, some of whom lived in Indiana prior to the storm. Though she had returned to her public housing unit where she'd lived for 6 years, the benefits of having a network of "ladies" while displaced made the return home bittersweet. While she retained network ties with her sons, these were not supportive enough to outweigh the uncertainty she felt over the crime and the police, who were non-responsive in her community. Through a narrative of the city as "threatening," Simone was beginning to seriously consider a permanent relocation.

The non-responsiveness of the police was a source of great personal strife for many residents, including Faith who returned to New Orleans to care for her aging parents. After her complicated stay with her cousin, Faith thought the return home would usher in a quiet period of recovery. Instead, her life was altered in a devastating way:

[My son] was at a friend's house, out in Central City. He's at a friend's, and they were out on the porch, playing monopoly. Then they took the dice, and were playing dice. It wasn't for money. It wasn't like they was gambling.

I've heard three different stories. One is that they were playing dice, and another boy got mad, he left, and later on came back with three guys, they pulled guns and started shooting. Another story, [my son] was mistaken for someone else. He was with four other guys. No one will say nothing. They all playing dice, but nobody saw who started shooting.

He died before my insurance policy took effect. I had to raise money to bury him. I didn't have anything when I got back. FEMA didn't do anything until months later — not until after my son's funeral. I had to bury him with a closed casket 'cause 90% of his face was gone. The mortician tried to reconstruct it, but you couldn't recognize him. It's still an open case — no suspects, no leads.

For Faith, this ill-fated loss was an affront against her decision to return to care for her parents. She had planned to move her children to Alexandria upon leaving her cousin's trailer. She had found an apartment there. Instead, the loss rippled through her family, leaving each member saddened, even reversing the parent/children dynamic as her remaining children attempted to care for her, while she attempted to “keep it together” for them, in return.

I tend to them, I tend to them, and they tell me to just go to bed. They is trying to help me deal with everything. If I break down, they break down, and I can't afford it. They can't afford it. I ask God to help me through it.

Faith's response to trauma is tempered by her need to care for her kids. Rather than dwell in the moment, she is insistent and focused on caring for her other children by providing housing, and doing what she can to cover her bills.

In the ‘new New Orleans’, those bills are much more expensive, layering material difficulty on top of emotional. When asked if there was any positive outcome from the storm, Faith had little to say, returning to the death of her son and its devastating effects:

Positive? No not really. My job, the only good thing is leniency. With the police department, you couldn’t leave if your child is sick and you need to get them from school. Here, I can leave and come as I want. I’m my own boss. Nothing other than that. I have to pay \$540 more for rent, the light bill is extremely high — now it’s \$400 per month — and I’m struggling with my son even after. Then [I’m still] dealing with him, and anger management, and how to cope with different things. People tell me I need to seek counseling. But, if I can’t work, I can’t provide for them [her other children]. They struggling and hurting. I gotta be strong for them.

From Katrina’s wrath to her own family’s struggles, Faith and her family have never had enough stability to begin their recovery. With the killing of her son, it seems unlikely to occur soon, as many of Faith’s questions remain unanswered:

I bury my son with ‘ifs, ands, and buts’. They [the police] can’t even say why [he was shot] — I can’t close the case. I can’t say they did a good job. This detective on my son’s case is on 50, 60 or more cases. How can he find a killer? I try not to let them [her children] see me break down. If they see me crying, then they crying all over, and they go through the same trauma. I can’t say some nights I’m not in my bed crying. I can’t let them see it. I have two girls and a boy. If they see you crying, they depressed for the rest of the day. [29]

In the face of trauma, Faith continues her survival.

From start of finish, Katrina was cruel to Faith, as she lost her job in order to evacuate her children to safety from the storm, lived in an overcrowded trailer with a lock on the fridge, and then returned to the city out of duty to her parents, only to lose her son. Faith’s story shows the intricate and complicated nature of recovery, and the unexpected forces which encompass it in a devastated, urban environment. It also weaves together common themes for all women recovering after the storm — creating and choosing

narratives, helping others, living in uncertainty, and hurting and healing. Only for Faith, there has been no healing.

Market Tensions at the River Gardens

For many women, living in displacement became a way to recover and rebuild following the storm. But when they could, most women returned to New Orleans to live. In the case of women residing in the River Gardens HOPE VI community (formerly St. Thomas public housing)⁵⁵, each had to return to prevent eviction from their apartments. With minimal wind damage and no flooding, the newly constructed housing became a profit magnet in the tight and limited housing market that emerged after the storm. The effect on subsidized renters, however, was harassment by management and active efforts to force them out in exchange for higher-rent occupants. This contentious relationship emerged due to a loophole in the HOPE VI legislation which stipulates that if a management company cannot locate qualified, subsidized families, they can fill subsidized units with market rate renters. In New Orleans, this created a not-so-subtle campaign to remove low-income families from undamaged HOPE VI units.

One of the primary ways the private management company pressured women to move out was by vigorous enforcement of the tenancy rules. Upon return, women began receiving violation notices at unequal rates to their market rent neighbors. One specific problem was doubling up, as relatives stayed temporarily to repair old units or seek new housing. Betsy described the inequities regarding the management's response to

⁵⁵ 26 women in this study lived in the St. Thomas housing before the HOPE VI redevelopment, representing 50.9% of the sample. Of these, 22 women had returned to the city to live after the storm. Five women reported harassment from the management at River Gardens: P15, P19, P22, P40 and P45. Additionally, four women felt discouraged by HANO when they inquired about returning home.

doubling-up, framing it as an issue of Section 8 regulations. When asked, “Do you think St. Thomas people will be there in five years?,” Betsy replied:

They have some people from the old St. Thomas now, and some want to come back, but they can't come back. High paying people come in and pay rent, and they [the management company] let the people come. But they don't want fixed income people, 'cause it's \$250 versus \$1400. ... People that used to stay here didn't have any problems coming back, but they getting kicked out because they have family members staying with them, but they like parents and have nowhere to go. They stuck with the section 8 rules.

When I asked if the market rate people were getting the same treatment, such as being evicted for having family living with them without being on the lease, Betsy was quick and firm to reply, “Nope. Nope. Not at all. I see it with my own eyes. Not at all.” (P40).

With competition for rental housing at unprecedented heights, the subsidized residents for whom the project was built to house became secondary to private renters who generated greater revenue. Therefore, it was in the interest of the management company to chase out and discourage public housing residents from returning or applying for the subsidized units at all, so as to garner greater profits from the tight rental market.

While enforcing occupancy rules is a legitimate management practice, the techniques used by the management company at River Gardens were infuriating to families attempting to recover. For Keebra, a 31 year old mother of three, this constant harassment made her want to move, though financially, she could not.

Well basically, it practically... you know this the River Garden?... So nothing — it's a mixed community. It's a great neighborhood, but I don't know it, it's... I don't... I'd really like to buy my own. ... It's the management, all the rules and regulations. They always harassing me. I get picked on here. I still with public housing, it disgusts me to stay here. I can't afford to move, but I have to stay and make the best of it. It's a real headache out here.

I asked Keebra to explain how she was being “picked on”:

Okay, I was... by me being with HOPE VI — like two doors down my neighbors, they allowed to have BBQs or other functions, have company over. If I had something, I'd get a letter saying they observed I was outside. Like they say I was outside of the unit using profanity, which is a lie. Or the garbage, they pass only once out of a weekend. You get a can, but sometimes you have more garbage than a can. Then, you get a letter. The people with HOPE VI...everything is just on us. I understand they pay more than we pay, but they don't get stupid letters, or 90-day probation...

Keebra's explanation continues, identifying the issues as one of race, class and money:

If I had a job I'd have to constantly take off to go to the River Garden office. Everything you do is a problem, you get a note. Nobody else gets no notes. We the only ones being harassed. ... It like this every day, for everybody. They begged us to live here. We moved back and they just bugging us out. I think it's different at Desire... Ain't no white people going to live in Desire, and the crime rate is higher. But this the 'Garden District', so we facing police harassment... Like the tenants' children, what they can't do. They aware, they knew we had kids. It's rough. I don't want to come back here. It's stressful, it's too stressful. (P19)

Here Keebra demonstrates how returning home has not permitted recovery from the disaster, but instead has left her living in uncertainty in her own community and prevented her recovery. As her basic tenant rights are restricted, she cannot use her own yard space, have company to visit, or put trash outside, while these same activities are tolerated by management among the market-rate renters. This form of harassment is so aggravating that Keebra wants to leave, despite having no alternate housing options.

So persistent was the problem that a local lawyer, Laura Tuggle, was preparing a class-action lawsuit on behalf of the subsidized residents against the management company for their harassing actions in River Gardens at the time of my interviews. For Ann, her troubles with management began while she was still displaced from the city, because her daughter was staying at her New Orleans apartment during the nights. In response, Ann was put on an eviction list, forcing her to move back to the city in early November of 2005 or lose her unit:

River Gardens put up a notice to evict, stating that they noticed that someone has been living in my apartment, and I am not at home and will be evicted if I don't return as soon as possible. I couldn't get assistance [to return or to move], thinking I'm on a housing authority lease.... The[se] Rules. Where I'm at now—the[se] rules — it's bearish...

Illustrating the trivial nature of the alleged violations against low-income renters, Ann provided numerous examples from her personal experience:

The management agency, they just put a flyer out telling me my Christmas decorations have to come down. Or the wind chimes. ... They said I had to take the wind chimes down, 'cause they was by the light fixture. When I moved here I wanted to put a flagpole up, but 'no' — they say you can't have nothing tacked to the building. For the 4th of July, I wanted to put a big flag up... Or outside. My grandson can't play ball outside. ... On the block where I live at, Miss June, you have to go through her to go through anybody. She just moved on the block a year ago. She stopped the kids from playing.

For Ann, she is still living in uncertainty, even in her own home from before the storm.

Yet, the harassment was taking a toll on her health and emotional well-being.

...I plan on staying here another year. They just pick things. I got that letter, now I'm just trying to stay here. When they put in flyers, you don't know who. They run up, ring the bell, leave a flyer and then run away. They got garbage men putting out flyers... Eviction notices — they put them on people's doors without facing them... I got a notice for my Christmas decorations, and because I had a shopping cart I use for Wal-Mart back by the A/C. They said it was a violation. It's nit, nil, nit-picking things. They get you aggravated, so you can move. The people [from St. Thomas] all moving. They help with putting you out.

On a personal level, Ann has also had problems with Miss June and other community members who serve as “watchdogs” for the management company. In May of 2006, a neighbor confronted Ann's mother who asked the neighbor to move her car from in front of Ann's driveway. They argued, and the neighbor called the police. Two days later, Miss June called the police again to have Ann falsely arrested on drug possession charges after a visitor of hers was seen smoking marijuana while parked in her

driveway after he left her house. Ann was evicted, refused to move and chose to fight the drug charge and the eviction with the help of a lawyer, and won:

I didn't have drugs, we don't do drugs. You see when they send the eviction notice, I had to move in 10 days. I didn't go anywhere. I got me a lawyer, and Miss June, she tried to throw out things that I said to the judge. And I told the judge I said those things, but I wasn't under the impression they had no drugs. I thought they gone [home]. (P15)

Ann does not believe her actions have violated her lease, or were extreme enough to merit the constant barrage of notices she received. Without hesitation, Ann identified the real issues — profit and social class discrimination:

What it really is, is 'cause I'm listed with the housing authority. I only pay \$65, while some folks pay \$1800, and they trying to get rid of our asses, pardon my language. ...Sydney Bartholemy, a bunch of polices, firemens, they all live here. They want our asses out! They want to rent it for more money, that's the bottom line.

Sadly, management was prevailing. At the time we spoke, Ann was trying to get her name on a list to return to traditional public housing, or at least another development without the pressure of management constantly forcing her out. Through the persistent threat of eviction, Ann's recovery was stifled by the politics of profit, as her family's housing stability lingered in perpetual uncertainty.

While profit is a motive for Ann's eviction, the actions of her neighbors also reflect ongoing discrimination against the poor — Ann represents the underclass of society, which devalues by its presence an otherwise new, beautiful, upscale community in the Garden District, or so the argument goes. Despite the fact that HOPE VI was designed to provide high quality housing for the poor and restricts occupancy to the most stable low-income tenants (NHLP 2002), the post-Katrina context has provided thousands of unsubsidized renters who make more “desirable” neighbors. As fair market

rent residents in River Gardens have a parallel interest with management to run-off low-income families, their actions as described above were reminiscent of the ways white families ran-off blacks families entering their residential communities through acts of intimidation during desegregation (Massey and Denton 1993; Gotham 2002).

The result of this harassment and intimidation for Ann has actually been a reversal of her recovery. Since returning home, she describes her life thusly:

I've been so stressed, I don't eat — can't eat. I gotta get back to mental health. I'm waking up in the middle of the night. I'm very stressed out — trying to be evicted from them. They were saying the drugs was from my apartment, but my apartment was not searched. It should have been searched. They could have gotten a warrant if they were suspicious. I don't have any drugs here. I had company to see me, but I'm not with the two other guys. Like I said, the house is nice, everyone wants a brand new place. I always lived on the old side, I never had nothing brand new. I thought I will raise my grandson in a different atmosphere. I was totally wrong. (P15)

Harassment was prevalent in the River Gardens community, from preventing children from playing games in the street, to attempting to evict a resident for an unsubstantiated drug charge. Clearly, there was directed animosity towards low-income tenants within this mixed-income community. Yet, Ann and others recognize that these actions were motivated by money. While the HOPE VI promise is supposed to provide a better life for the privileged poor, in River Gardens, it has been manipulated as yet another way to remove low-income residents from the rosters of public housing, further devolving responsibility for public housing away from the public sector and into the private sector, which persistently fails to provide affordable housing at all (Pardee and Gotham 2005).

Collectively, these cases encompass the difficulty public housing residents are facing across the city as they attempt to recover from the storm. They have no entitlement to their units, lease or not, and often face evictions, ultimatums and short

deadlines. This rigidity reinforces the sentiment that they are not wanted as members of the ‘new’ New Orleans community. So intensive is the message that even public housing residents stranded outside the city take notice. As Miss Allisha states:

If something could be done about the housing authority to make it easier for the people out of state, even if they could do it over the phone or something. Now you have to go to New Orleans to get a voucher, the voucher is only good for 30 days, and you have no place to live. If you have no hotel or money, [and you can’t go there to search], how will you find a place if you are living out of state?

(Do you think the city wants public housing residents back?) It seems that they don’t. ...They always put it on the project. It’s not the project, it’s the people. Half the people come into the project and do things. Where I was staying, in Lafitte, it was mostly elderly, and we looked out for each other. The younger people respect us, and I only lived there not because I wanted to live there, it was because I couldn’t do no better. (P19)

Through poor organization during the city’s recovery, assertive management and direct public comments, residents from public housing understood they were not to be part of the ‘new’ New Orleans. Instead, to stake a claim to their prior lives and rights, they required legal counsel to fight against the same housing authority that was created to help assure access to secure, sanitary, reliable housing. In these ways, competition and profit combine to solidify the barriers to stable housing, such that returning home to New Orleans did not, in fact, encourage recovery, but was another direct challenge to it.

Thus, despite the fact that returning to one’s home is typically considered a form of recovery, for women returning to New Orleans, doing so seemed to create more damage to their lives than staying away might have. With a lack of social services, medical services, housing and employment, New Orleans offered little structure for women to heal after the storm. Instead, returning home meant living in uncertainty, with attention focused on meeting basic needs like shelter security, rather than returning to one’s pre-storm life and the sense of stability it offered. As such, current conceptions of

recovery in the disaster literature are inadequate to explain the lived experiences of low-income women after disaster. In the next chapter, I develop a new theorization of this concept.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONCLUSION

Disaster preparation, response and recovery among low-income women are three areas of study that have lacked formal theorization within the disaster literature. With decades of work on evacuation and recovery patterns, few studies have considered the plight of the poor specifically in the process of disaster recovery. In response, this study examined three key phases in the disaster experience — evacuation, displacement and recovery — to theorize the lived experiences of women and their families following the Hurricane Katrina disaster.

During evacuation, women tended to use narratives to explain the disaster. For many women, a narrative of safety dominated their thinking. This narrative was based on utter incomprehension of the true threat the storm posed, particularly its potential damage to the levees. It was also based on a legacy of false calls, including Hurricanes George and Ivan in prior years. Fortunately, for many women, their kin networks offered competing narratives, and altered the narrative to one of threat, as evacuation was decided by consensus (Dynes 2005; Drabek and Boggs 1968). They also enabled evacuation materially through the caravan of kin, which represented a material pooling of available resources like transportation, food, water, beverages, money and shelter. When women were engaged in the caravan of kin, evacuation became an option that was not

previously available to them individually. The caravan of kin also became a short-term strategy for temporary shelter, as families bundled into hotels and shelters, using their collected resources to provide for, and protect, their kin.

The kin network, however, is not a universal solution to evacuation planning or disaster response and recovery. In fact, the kin network has limits and can function negatively (Anderson 1989, 1990, 1999; Domínguez and Watkins 2003), draining resources and impeding evacuation altogether, as seen in the prior chapters.

Additionally, low-income kin networks in this study functioned best when the help they offered was short-term and temporary. Since low-income women tended to have low-income networks, after a few weeks, the support these networks could afford to provide became severely limited, and most women were forced to seek out new arrangements either with other kin, or by shifting into government sponsored housing programs.

While government disaster aid did provide women some semblance of stability, their limited resources and efforts to rebuild their lives in proximity to the kin who helped them prior to the disaster challenged the capacity of existing policy to truly assist the least resourced. Since most disaster allocations were devolved to the local level, each time women moved, they had to reapply for all of their assistances. This inconsistency in support meant they faced significant, repeated gaps in coverage. Additionally, the devolution of programs like food stamps, housing vouchers and Medicaid meant that most women's survival systems were defunct when they attempted to re-establish them in new locations (a la Downing 1996), particularly as they learned that benefit levels for the same programs were highly variable by location. In this way, women were forced to rely on these assistances, but could never know if they would coalesce to provide a stable

source of income until they had already made the move to the next town or state to establish a more permanent residence.

While prior to the storm many women would address shortfalls in aid assistance with work, finding steady employment during their displacements was a persistent challenge for low-income women. With or without credentials, women faced extensive discrimination in hiring, exacerbated by the evacuee “stigma” that emerged in many cities with large evacuee populations. Women also struggled to compete with existing labor, finding it difficult to locate jobs in labor markets flooded with immigrants. Due to the split labor market in many places (Bonacich 1972; Davis 2000), women were frustrated at not being hired or being offered wages that were in some cases almost half what they had made in similar jobs prior to the storm. As a result, only a handful of women returned to working at the time of our interviews, while others had addressed the dearth of income by combining households with older kin who drew social security or other assistances. While this emergent strategy did allow survival, it did not permit disaster recovery.

Which begs the important question — what is the meaning of disaster recovery for low-income women? Among this sample, traditional recovery did not happen. No woman was able to return to a reconstituted community, even when they did return to the city proper. In New Orleans, the collective social structure was so fundamentally altered and the destruction so severe that recovery had not occurred during this time. For women who remained displaced, many had begun to build lives elsewhere, but still longed to come home. Patterns did emerge, though, that represent the beginning seeds of the *process* of recovery: 1) displaced women reunited with the kin who were part of their

daily survival systems, 2) women continued to use the same programs that helped them survive poverty prior to the storm, to limited degrees of success and 3) women made decisions about moving their families based on how to best meet their daily needs.

Throughout the sample, women bounced around between various forms of shelter to create housing consistency. As more time passed, women tended to settle where their closest kin were — those kin who helped them survive on a day to day basis. So, while extended kin encouraged evacuation and offered temporary shelter from the storm, they did not provide long-term care. Instead, women reunited with the kin whom were primary sources of daily support to help them as time went on.

Next, while devolution of federal assistance programs results in regional variations in assistance levels and participation criteria, women still utilized these resources whenever they could to meet a portion of their daily needs. Even for women with fixed social security incomes, none were able to cover their regular expenses without some additional form of disaster relief after the storm. In fact, many women were living in more extreme poverty, doing without food or selling off possessions to find money to pay the bills. As a result, women continued to engage aid-based assistance when they could to assure their survival.

Finally, as women debated whether to return to New Orleans, they carefully weighed their options before making a move. Though many wanted to return and others had, most used information from friends and family before attempting to make ends meet in the city that was in and of itself a new environment. This decision-making process parallels how women navigated daily poverty challenges (Edin and Lein 1993). With skyrocketing rents, limited medical and social services, and neighborhoods filled with

abandoned housing and unknown neighbors, women quickly observed that they could not return to their old lives — not anytime soon anyway. So for many, at the time we spoke, they made due with where they were, piecing together their survival day by day.

In light of women's struggles to recover, the standard definition does not apply. What can be said is that if low-income women can recover from catastrophic disasters, they, like the city itself, need extensive time to do so. Current estimates for the city suggest it will be *eight to eleven years* before a full recovery occurs (Kates et al 2006). For the women of this study, one must wonder if their recovery will be the same.

This is not to say that low-income public housing women in New Orleans were living wonderful lives before the storm, but all were paying their bills, living in stable housing, eating regularly and receiving basic medical care. Among younger women, many were also working and assuming more financial responsibility for themselves and their children as they sought independence from government aid. In the face of Katrina's aftermath, many of these basic forms of mediated independence were dissolved, pushing women back into complete dependence, though the programs available to serve them were less generous, less reliable, and more punitive than ever before. In this context, the recovery question becomes one of the future — can women recover over time? For now, they have but the seeds of that possibility in their path.

APPENDIX 1

CHAPMAN'S NATURAL DISASTER STAGE MODEL

Stage: Warning	Definition: In this stage, the potential for a disaster is made known by authorities
↓	
Threat	The threat stage is characterized by signs which indicate an impending event
↓	
Impact	The threat becomes a reality, and the actual disaster event occurs.
↓	
Inventory	Survivors assess losses, and gradually piece together a picture of what has happened
↓	
Rescue	Survivor groups emerge spontaneously to help the wounded, extinguish fires and free trapped victims
↓	
Remedy	Outside agencies assume control, formalizing inventory and rescue activities
↓	
Recovery	Reconstitution of the old community structure, possible modification of personal and collective life
↓	
Rehabilitation	A return normal, pre-disaster functioning

Source: Couch 1996. Fig 3.3

APPENDIX 2

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

TO PRESERVE CONFIDENTIALITY THIS PAGE IS REMOVED BY PROJECT COORDINATOR PRIOR TO DATA ENTRY NCS Cover Page

Interviewers: <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin: 5px 0;"/> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin: 5px 0;"/>	Observations: Check if interview conducted with trailer resident: <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
--	--

CONFIDENTIAL RESPONDENT INFO

Date/Time	Name/Address	Phone	Status

Status Codes: (1) Interview Completed; (2) Interview scheduled; (3) Refused

Instructions to Interviewer - Typeface Conventions:

1. **10-Point Boldface material: To be read to respondent**
2. *8-Point and 9-Point Italicized material: For interviewer completion, instructions, answer categories, probing notes and skip patterns*

May I please speak with [Resp. name]? Hi! My name is [name] and I'm a graduate student at Tulane University. I'm calling because I'm doing a study of former public housing residents from the St. Thomas and Desire housing, and I'm trying to find out how these families have managed since Hurricane Katrina. I was wondering if I have the right person. [yes/no; end/ continue].

So you know, the survey focuses on Katrina's impact on housing and work in New Orleans, especially how neighborhoods change. It asks about your life before the storm, as well as in the weeks that followed. You have the right to refuse to answer any question, or stop the interview at any time. If you want to participate, I have two phone numbers for free counseling that I can give you in case you'd like them. I'll also give you my cell phone number to call if you have any questions later on. Would you like these numbers? Counseling: 1-800-273-TALK and 1-800-749-COPE. Cell is 504-453-9816.

The survey takes about 45 minutes to complete and is confidential and anonymous. Your name and address will be kept on a separate page from your answers. If you do participate, I'll also give you a \$20 gift card for Wal-Mart/Home Depot. Do you think you might be interesting in talking with me? [yes/no] Do you have any questions before we begin? ...

Now, I'd like to start by asking you some questions about your housing situation before Katrina.

Pi. What was your old address?

Pij. I'd like to calculate how far most people have moved since the storm. If you don't mind telling me: What is your current address?

COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE CHECKED BY PROJECT SUPERVISOR:

INITIALS

DATE

INTERVIEW NUMBER

Housing - Prior to Evacuation

Do Not Write in Column
For Office Use Only

1. Where were you living late August when Katrina hit?* [RECODE FROM PRIOR PAGE]

Block Number: _____ /City: _____ Town _____

[For example, 4212 Laurel = "4200 Block of Laurel"]

2. Thinking about your old address, how long did you live there?

_____ [Clarify in terms of years and/or months]

3. [Do/did] you or an immediate family member own [that] housing?

[] No [] Yes

P8. NO -> rental?

[] No [] Yes

P8 .Yes Rent->What type? 1)Public housing 2)Sect. 8 3)On own

4. Excluding you, how many other people were living in your household just before the storm? _____

Do Not Write in Column
For Office Use Only

5. How many of these people were your relatives? _____

[Relatives defined at respondent's whim/understanding]

[If respondent was living in an area not affected by Hurricane Katrina, check here [] and skip to Q17]
[If unsure about area, ask respondent]

6. How much damage did the storm do to your old address? Would you say it was:

- [] damaged so badly that you couldn't live in it?
- [] damaged, but someone could still live in it?
- [] or not damaged at all?
- [] Unaware of condition or DONT KNOW

7. Did you have any of the following types of insurance coverage?

- Homeowner's insurance? [] No [] Yes
- Renter's insurance? [] No [] Yes
- Flood insurance? [] No [] Yes

[Note: Only ask Q8 if respondent indicated having insurance of any of the above types.]

8. What percentage of your losses do you expect to be covered by insurance? _____ %

P77. Compared to before Katrina, do you feel less financially secure, about the same, or more financially secure?

- 1 Less secure 2 About the Same 3 More Secure

P78. Are your bills more expensive now? [] No [] Yes

P79. Are you ever worried about not being able to pay your bills?

[] No [] Yes

P23. Before the storm, what was your biggest bill each month? _____

b. [If rent] how much? _____

P23.5 And now? _____

b. [If rent] how much? _____

During Evacuation

Now, I'd like to ask you about your evacuation experience. I'll also be asking you to describe your experiences in detail at the end of the interview, so if there are some things I haven't asked about, you'll have a chance to tell me then as well, okay?

P26. When did you first learn about Hurricane Katrina? _____

P27. Before anyone knew what would happen, how worried were you before the storm?
1 Not at all worried 2 Somewhat worried 3 Worried 4 Very worried

P28. Did you evacuate before the storm? No Yes

9a. Hurricane Katrina hit on Monday, August 29th. When did you evacuate the city?
_____ [Month _____ Day _____]

[Note: Probe if necessary. Later convert answer into month and day, i.e., Aug 27]

P29b. Where you rescued? No Yes

P29c. YES → How many days? _____

never evacuated → b. Have you lived at your current address the whole time? No → Skip to Q19/ Yes → Skip to Q20

10. How did you evacuate the city?

in your own or a family member's car?

a friend's car?

or by some other means?

[Specify below] ↓

P30. When you very first left New Orleans, did you go to a shelter, hotel/motel, family member's house, friend's house, or somewhere else?

1 Shelter 2 Hotel/Motel 3 Family 4 Friend 5 Never Left
6 Other:

11. How long were you evacuated from the city?

[Interpretation up to respondent; convert answer and record as number of days]

P33. Since leaving New Orleans because of Katrina, how many places have you stayed? _____

P34. How long did you stay at each? (List where and duration)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

12. In what city or town did you spend most of your time while you were evacuated? [Record town/city name and state]

13. Did you already know someone living there?

Yes No → Skip to Q15

14. How close were you to [this person/these people] before the storm?
Would you say:

Not close at all?
 Somewhat close?
 Close?

15. Which of the following best describes where you were living during this time? Was it in:

a family or friend's place?
 a place you rented?
 in an emergency or temporary shelter?
 or what? *[Probe and specify]:* _____

16. How did you find that housing? Was it:

By yourself?
 With the help of family or friends?
 Through a newspaper ad or formal listing?
 With the help of a government agency or other organization?
 Or some other way?
[Probe and specify]: _____

Upon Return

17. Now I'd like to ask you about your return to New Orleans after the storm:
After the storm, when did you return to the city to live?

_____ [Month _____ Day _____]

[Note: Probe if necessary. Later convert answer into month and day, i.e., Aug 27]

if back only temporarily, check box and skip to Q24

18. Was it to your address from before Katrina? No Yes → skip to Q20

19. When did you move to your current address?

_____ [Month _____ Day _____]

[Note: Probe if necessary. Later convert answer into month and day, i.e., Aug 27]

20. Excluding yourself, how many other people currently live here? _____

21. How many of these people are your relatives?
[Relative defined at respondent's whim/understanding] _____

22. Do you or your family own this housing?

No Yes → skip to Q24

23. How did you find this place. Was it through:

a personal connection?
 a newspaper, rental listing, or sign?
 or some other way?

Specify → _____

can't remember

24. Do you see yourself living in this neighborhood a year from now?

No Yes → skip to Q26

25. Do you see yourself living in New Orleans a year from now?

No Yes

Employment: Prior to Evacuation

26. Now, we would like to ask you some questions about your employment situation before and after Katrina:

Before Katrina hit, were you working for pay?

Yes No → skip to Q36

27. Were you self-employed?

Yes No

28. How long did you work there?

[Interpretation up to respondent; convert to number of months] _____

29. How many hours did you work for pay during an average week? _____

30. What industry was this in? _____

[For example: restaurant, hotel, education, government, manufacturing, retail, etc.]

31. What was your job title? _____

32. In this job, did you have any of the following benefits?

Paid sick leave?	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Health insurance?	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Retirement contributions?	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes

Employment: During Evacuation

33. Now, we would like to ask you some questions about your employment situation during your evacuation:

Which of the following best describes your job situation while you were evacuated from the city? Were you:

- in the same job? → → → → skip to Q36
- in a new job with the same employer? → skip to Q36
- let go with employer-provided assistance?
- let go with no employer-provided assistance?
- or, other?

→ [Probe to specify: _____]

34. Did you take another paying job while you were evacuated?

Yes No → skip to Q36

35. Compared to your job before the evacuation, would you say this job--in terms of pay and benefits--was:

- better?
- just as good?
- or not as good?

Current Employment

36. Now we'd like to ask you about your current job situation:

Are you currently employed? Yes No → Skip to Q46

[Only ask Q37 if the respondent indicated that they were employed before the storm (per Q26), otherwise skip to Q46]

37. Is this with the same employer as before the storm?

No Yes → Skip to Q46

38. Is this job with an employer you started working for during your evacuation?

No Yes

39. In this job, are you self-employed?

No Yes

40. How many hours do you usually work each week for pay? _____

41. What industry are you working in now?

[For example: restaurant, hotel, education, government, manufacturing, retail, etc.] _____

42. What is your current job title?

[Probe for official job title] _____

43. In this job, do you have any of the following benefits?

Paid sick leave? No Yes
 Health insurance? No Yes
 Retirement contributions? No Yes

44. How did you find this new job? Was it through:

someone already working there?
 someone else?
 an ad or other formal job listing?
 the help of a government agency?
 some other way [specify: ↓ _____]

[Only ask Q45 if respondent indicated that they were previously employed before the storm (per Q26), otherwise skip to Q46]

45. Compared with your job before the storm, would you say that your current job is: [If needed, prompt: "... in terms of pay and benefits"]

better?
 just as good?
 or not as good?

--- Assistance and Networks ---

46. Now I'd like to ask you about help you may have received after the storm.

Did you receive cash, checks, debit cards, and/or gift certificates from any of the following sources: *[check all that apply.]*

- Family or friends? Yes No DK/NA
- Red Cross? Yes No DK/NA
- FEMA? Yes No DK/NA
- A religious organization? Yes No DK/NA
- Other? *[specify:]* Yes No DK/NA

47. Did you receive **non-cash** assistance from any of the following sources: *[Check all that apply.]*

- Family or friends? Yes No DK/NA
- Red Cross? Yes No DK/NA
- FEMA? Yes No DK/NA
- A religious organization? Yes No DK/NA
- Other? *[specify:]* Yes No DK/NA

P25c. Did you receive any food stamps? Yes No *How much?* _____

P41k. Did you receive any food stamps before Katrina? Yes No *How much?* _____

Now, we'd like to ask you to think about some people who might have helped you in certain ways before the hurricane, during the evacuation period, and since.

48. Who, if anyone, helped you without pay with storm preparations before the storm? (For example, stocking up on food or supplies; boarding windows; gathering belongings; arranging a place to stay)

<i>Check (☑) if response is "no one", and move on to next question in table</i>	What is the Individual's First name? <i>(for reference in this conversation only)</i>	What is/was your relationship with this person? <i>(circle category that fits best)</i>		Was this person a resident of New Orleans before the storm? <i>(circle y/n)</i>	
	1.	Family	Friend	Y	N
	2.	Family	Friend	Y	N
	3.	Family	Friend	Y	N
		Neighbor	Other		
		Neighbor	Other		
		Neighbor	Other		

49. Who, if anyone, helped without pay during your evacuation from the city? (For example, with a place to stay, with caring for family or pets).

<i>Check (☑) if response is "no one", and move on to next question in table</i>	What is the Individual's First name? <i>(for reference in this conversation only)</i>	What is/was your relationship with this person? <i>(circle category that fits best)</i>		Was this person a resident of New Orleans before the storm? <i>(circle y/n)</i>	
	1.	Family	Friend	Y	N
	2.	Family	Friend	Y	N
	3.	Family	Friend	Y	N
		Neighbor	Other		
		Neighbor	Other		
		Neighbor	Other		

50. Who, if anyone, has helped you without pay with recovery activities? (For example, with cleaning up, repairing your home, caring for family members or pets, finding a home or job in New Orleans).

Check (✓) if response is "no one", and move on to next question in table	What is the Individual's First name? (for reference in this conversation only)	What is/was your relationship with this person? (circle category that fits best)		Was this person a resident of New Orleans before the storm? (circle y/n)	
	1.	Family	Friend	Y	N
	2.	Neighbor	Other		
	3.	Family	Friend	Y	N
		Neighbor	Other		

51. Who, if anyone, has helped you emotionally to get through this difficult time?

Check (✓) if response is "no one", and move on to next question in table	What is the Individual's First name? (for reference in this conversation only)	What is/was your relationship with this person? (circle category that fits best)		Was this person a resident of New Orleans before the storm? (circle y/n)	
	1.	Family	Friend	Y	N
	2.	Neighbor	Other		
	3.	Family	Friend	Y	N
		Neighbor	Other		

--- Demographics ---

D1. [Do not ask, but check gender] Male Female

We've got just two sections left. I'm going to ask a few demographic questions for statistical purposes, and then you'll be able to tell me about your experience in your own words. Okay?

D2. Can you please tell me your age:
 [Record actual number] _____ [Record: 99 or older = 99
 DON'T KNOW, REFUSED, NA = 00]

D3. What is your race or ethnicity?
 White African-American Mixed/Other
 Asian Latino/Hispanic REFUSED

D4. Do you have any children under age 18?
 Yes No → Skip to D8

↓
 D5. How old are they? [Record each age of child in years]
 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____
 5. _____ 6. _____ 7. _____ 8. _____

D6. Were any of them living with you before the storm?
 Yes No → Skip to D8

D7. Are any of them currently living with you?
 Yes No

D8. What is your current marital status? [Check appropriate category.]

- Single Married Divorced Separated
 Cohabiting Widowed Refused

D9. What is your highest educational degree?

- No degree Graduate or professional
 High school or GED Other
 Associates degree (A.A.) Refused
 College degree (BA, BS)

D10. What was your total household income before taxes in 2004, the year before Katrina hit? Would you say it was: [Read and circle indicated category]

- | | | | |
|----|------------------------------|----|------------|
| 01 | Less than \$20,000? | | |
| 02 | Between \$20,000 - \$40,000? | | |
| 03 | Between \$40,000 - \$60,000? | 09 | DON'T KNOW |
| 04 | Between \$60,000 - \$80,000? | 00 | REFUSED |
| 05 | More than \$80,000? | | |

D12. Can you tell me when the following services resumed at your current address:

- | | | | |
|--------------|-------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Electricity? | date: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Not yet | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know |
| Water? | date: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Not yet | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know |
| Phone? | date: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Not yet | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know |

Final questions-Qualitative subset

This last section is designed for you to tell me anything else I haven't covered about your experiences since Katrina in your own words. The questions are open ended, so you can give as much or as little information as you feel comfortable with. Are you ready?

P94. How was your initial evacuation experience? Could you describe it?

P95. What was the saddest thing about the storm aftermath for you?

P96. What was the most positive thing about the storm aftermath for you?

P97. What has changed most in your life since the storm?

P7b. Do you feel closer to God since the storm happened?

P98. Did anyone you know pass away during the storm? Do you know what happened?

P99. What do you think will happen to your old neighborhood in New Orleans?

P100. Who do you think will most important in the redevelopment of your old neighborhood?

b. Follow-up: All in all, what role will the residents have in determining how the new community will be?

P93. How good a job do you think different people did before and following the storm, like the mayor, governor, the FEMA director, and president?

Kids *** (no kids, skip to 101).

P82. How did your children react to the storm?

P86. Have any of your children behaved any differently since the storm? Could you describe it?

P87. How much school did your children miss any because of the storm?

P88. Do your children like their new schools?

P101. Will you return? b. Why or why not?

P102. Is there anything else I need to know?

Two last questions: [REMOVE THIS PAGE FOR PRIVACY]

Would you be interested in talking with me in about two years and telling me have things are going for you then? YES NO

Contact Name	Phone #

Lastly, do you know any other former public housing residents? < Pause >
 Would you be willing to share their names and phone numbers so that we could see if they would be willing to talk with me about their experiences?

Name	Phone #

That completes the interview. Thank you. Now, you'll be receiving the \$20 gift card in 3-6 weeks, but I need to just verify your address to make sure I got it right. Also, would you prefer a Home Depot or a Walmart gift card?

Thank you for your time today. I really appreciate you telling me about your experiences and opinions. Do you have any questions before we go?

Thank you so much! Have a great day!

Interviewers: Jot down any relevant notes, explanations, observations in this box.

APPENDIX 3

TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE PRETEST AND FINAL SAMPLES

Variable	Pretest N=10	Final N=41
Sex		
Female	100% (n = 10)	100% (n = 41)
Age		
mean	55.6	51.20
s.d.	14.65	14.075
Race		
Black	100% (n = 10)	100% (n = 41)
Kids		
mean	3.10	n/a
s.d.	1.37	n/a
Marital Status		
Single	60% (n = 6)	53.7% (n = 22)
Cohabiting	–	2.4% (n = 1)
Married	20% (n = 2)	9.8% (n = 4)
Widowed	–	14.6% (n = 6)
Divorced	10% (n = 1)	17.1% (n = 7)
Separated	10% (n = 1)	2.4% (n = 1)
Educational Degree		
No degree	40% (n = 4)	41.5% (n = 17)
High school or GED	30% (n = 3)	51.2% (n = 21)
Assoc./Bach. degree	30% (n = 3)	4.9% (n = 2)
Graduate degree	–	2.4% (n = 1)
Income category		
0-\$20,000	100% (n=10)	87.8% (n = 36)
\$20,000-\$40,000	–	12.2% (n = 5)
Homeownership		
No	n/a	90.2% (n = 37)
Yes	n/a	9.8% (n = 4)
Length of residency in pre-Katrina housing in years		
Mean	4.74	6.02
s.d.	1.82	7.15

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BIOGRAPHY

Jessica Warner Pardee was born in New London, CT on February 22, 1977, much to the chagrin of her mother who was disappointed at missing the conclusion of the TV mini-series “Roots.” Perhaps this was an omen – Ms. Pardee was introduced to the world amidst the realities of racial intolerance, albeit through the media, to then study the same travesties in a modern context some thirty years later.

The oldest of five children in a step-family, she was the first in her family to attend and complete college, earning her Bachelor’s degree in Sociology at Newcomb College, Tulane University in the Spring of 1999. This opportunity was the result of her hard work, urging by her family to earn good grades, the selling of thousands of scoops of ice cream as a Friendly’s Ice Cream Corporation employee and the generous financial aid Tulane offered. The following autumn, Ms. Pardee began her graduate studies in Sociology at Tulane University, earning her Master’s degree in 2001 and remaining there throughout her graduate career.

During this time, Ms. Pardee was the president of the Graduate School Student Association, a programming chair within the Sociology Department and a member of several professional organizations including the American Sociological Association, the Southern Sociological Society, the mid-South Sociological Society and the Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology, to name a few. She also published three journal

articles, five book chapters and presented her research at numerous conferences over the years.

In the Autumn of 2005, her tenure was extended due to the Hurricane Katrina disaster which devastated the city of New Orleans and reshaped the future of Ms. Pardee's research, focusing it on poor women's survival strategies amidst urban disaster. Currently, Ms. Pardee is a visiting instructor at the University of Central Florida, where she has been teaching since the Fall of 2006, while completing her doctoral dissertation.