

**“EVERY HURRICANE LEAVES YOU WITH DIFFERENT PRIORITIES”:
PREPARATION, CULTURAL RESPONSE, AND NARRATIVE ENTITLEMENT**

by

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ABSTRACT

The United States Gulf Coast is a region with a long-standing history of hurricanes. As such, the residents of this region have a wide variety of experiences in dealing with the threats and actualities of hurricanes. Although the region has experienced numerous storms in its history, this discussion focuses on Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (2005) and Hurricane Ike (2008).

Central to this discussion is the idea that safety is a concern important to all people involved before a hurricane but that the expressions of this concern can vary both on an institutional and individual level. In this way, this thesis looks at preparation both from a media perspective (as media presents a construction of preparation based upon using official sources) and from the residents' perspectives. News articles from the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* and the *Houston Chronicle* are drawn from the days leading up to hurricane landfall—the period when preparation messaging is prominent in the media. Content analysis of these articles (influenced by Zhang and Fleming 2005 and Choi and Lin 2008) develops a sense of the media narrative of preparation. In juxtaposition, this thesis also examines residents' approaches of hurricane preparation through analysis of personal experience narratives. Through fieldwork interviews and archival research, this thesis analyzes narratives from the Greater New Orleans and Houston areas. The analysis of the media narratives and the personal narratives underscore that preparation is a complex issue. Using the concepts of master narrative (e.g., Lyotard 1979, Lawless 2001 and 2003) and narrative entitlement (e.g., Shuman 2005 and 2006), this thesis proposes

that there are areas of resistance and cooperation between the two kinds of narratives. The media narrative, which is often constructed using the perspectives of “officials” (government, meteorologists, etc.), creates an “authoritative” messaging of how residents should prepare, but the residents’ themselves, with experiences of their own to draw from and their own perspectives on the appropriate responses to storm threats, may respond in ways that do not align with the official recommendation. As part of this interplay between official and lay narratives, the discussion proposes the idea that the “narrative of pre-victimization” may be at play in some official communications. This narrative places residents within a narrative space in which they may be doomed to fall prey to a hurricane if they do not follow official recommendations.

This thesis adds to the disaster folklore literature by extending research on hurricanes by considering multiple storms in its scope. It contributes to the discussion of interactions between media and personal narrative. This discussion also opens up the discussion of hurricane stories to include preparation as a useful area of narrative study.

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Prologue

On September 21, 2005, I found myself preparing to evacuate my apartment in Houston, Texas to travel to my parents' home in a suburb northwest of the city. At that time, many Houston residents were leaving the city in the before the predicted landfall of Hurricane Rita. I knew that my apartment was near White Oak Bayou, a part of the city that was prone to flooding, and I knew from Tropical Storm Allison in 2001 that parts of the area surrounding my apartment had flooded badly in the past. I attempted to take as much as I could off of the floor in case of flooding, and I brought loose items from my porch into my home in case high winds came. I had news on in the background as I went about my preparations. Before packing some possessions in my car, including one bewildered cat, I took a few pictures around my apartment to document its contents. This image was one of them:



Figure 1. My apartment before evacuating for Hurricane Rita.

In this picture is captured my actions to prepare for the storm, specifically trying to get items off of the floor, alongside information from the news media coming into my home. At this time, I could not know for sure whether the actions I was taking would ensure the preservation of my property after Rita passed. Simultaneously, having never experienced storm destruction myself (even my previous apartment in the area had not been damaged by Allison), I had trouble imagining what might happen with Rita. My parents' home had not flooded in hurricanes past, however, so my plan to go there seemed to be my best bet.

I packed up and began the traffic-riddled drive to my parents' home and remained there until after Rita passed.

As a former resident of the Gulf Coast, specifically the Greater Houston area, for thirty years, the issue of hurricane preparation is one in which I have had firsthand experience. At the same time, I have been fortunate not to have experienced some of the aftermath of storms that other residents have. Years later, coming to issues of hurricane preparation as a researcher, I inhabit a blended positioning to the subject, having both in-group and out-group status (Modan and Shuman 2011). That positioning led me to value the importance of preparation as both a subject of academic analysis as a folklorist but also as a necessary act for residents of my home region. It is from this positioning that I come to the discussion that follows in this thesis.

Chapter One:

Theory and Methodology

Defining Disaster

As anthropologists Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith comment, “the anthropological investigation of disaster has evolved to incorporate questions of the definition and ownership of disaster, or the ‘framing’ of calamity” (1999, 9). Who has the right to claim entitlement to a disaster and how are these rights intensified, nullified, or challenged by the claims of others? Whose disaster story has cultural weight, and whose does not? Anthropologist Howard Stein further speaks to these issues when he states that “certain categories of people are publicly recognized, acknowledged; certain other categories of people are publicly unacknowledged, overlooked, ignored...In disasters, who gets left out, and what becomes of them?” (2002, 157). An individual’s disaster narrative exists at the intersection of the individual’s construction of experience and the cultural expectations and social construction of disaster, and not all of these intersections occur in the public view. Combined with the variety of individuals who can qualify as disaster victims, such as the four categories proposed by anthropologist Stephen W. Dudasik (1980) that include people both at and away from the disaster scene, the complexity of these issues of the ownership of experience grows exponentially. This broad array of disaster experiences means that individuals can experience disaster

without undergoing a publicly seen disaster outcome, and, from a research standpoint, the number of people with insights into disaster can be seen as increased, as well.

In the social sciences, the interest in disasters is one that originated in the 1920s, although as anthropologist Anthony Oliver-Smith notes, there has been “little consensus” on how to define disaster throughout the history of the research (1999, 18). In part, this lack of consensus stems from the variety and complexity of the events that can fall under the umbrella of disaster. As sociologist G. A. Kreps comments, “Disaster is a vague term that has defied simple interpretation” (1984, 311). Kreps proposes the following definition:

Thus, disasters are: *events, observable in time and space, in which societies or their larger subunits (e.g. communities, regions) incur physical damages and losses and/or disruption of their routine functioning. Both the causes and consequences of these events are related to the social structures and processes of societies or their subunits.* (1984, 312, emphasis in original)

From this definition, we can take away that disasters (1) are bounded in a particular time and place, (2) have some form of physical or functional impact on people, and (3) are situated within the social structure of people, be it within a large group, such as a nation, or a smaller group, such as a family. In this way, disasters are both physical and cultural events, yet simply considering these characteristics allows a wide array of events to match the definition. Oliver-Smith proposes an anthropological definition that echoes many of the dimensions set forth by Kreps:

... disasters are best conceptualized in terms of the web of relations that link society (the organization and relations among individuals and groups), environment (the network of linkages with the physical world in which people and groups are both constituted and constituting), and culture (the values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge that pertain to that organization and those relations). (1999, 28)

In Oliver-Smith's definition, we see an interpretation of disasters that includes many of the same elements as Kreps's definition, but the emphasis on the relationships between the elements of the definition has shifted from disaster as more of a bounded event (Kreps's first element of "observable in time and space") to the interplay between the players involved (as Oliver-Smith's definition leaves out time and space altogether). Consistent in both of these definitions is the importance of cultural or societal impact and response to identifying something as a disaster, whether that disaster is a "natural"¹ one, a technological one, or something that blends the two. Also, if we consider these two definitions at once, we can think of disaster as both temporally and physically located and as occurring over time.

This concept becomes useful as we look at the subject matter of this project, hurricanes affecting the Gulf Coast region, because we can look at both the specific "event" of an individual hurricane and we can look at the interplay of multiple hurricanes over time, the way these bounded events blur over time within the perspectives of society, communities, and individuals. Oliver-Smith points toward this blurring when he

1. Oliver-Smith posits that there is no such thing as a natural disaster: "...disasters occur in societies. They do not occur in nature... Disasters can result from the interaction of social, material, and natural systems, producing a failure of human culture to protect" (1999, 28).

notes, “the life-history of a disaster begins prior to the appearance of a specific event-focused agent” (1999, 30). As I discuss in Chapter Two, an overview of some of the hurricanes in the recent past of the Gulf Coast, we can see how these events do not fully exist in isolation. Instead, they are frequent enough to remain in the minds of residents and impact decisions made beyond the “event” of the storm, creating overlapping experiences of hurricane response.

Chapter Outline

This thesis will follow the following structure in order to discuss issues of preparation in relation to hurricanes on the United States Gulf Coast.

Chapter One

Theory and Methodology

Chapter One provides an overview of scholarship in disaster folklore, with a focus on work on hurricanes, and in personal experience narrative. By discussing the work in both of these areas, I identify gaps in the literature that are addressed by this project, including the consideration of multiple storms and the focus on preparation.

Chapter Two

Hurricanes and the Texas-Louisiana Coast

Chapter Two provides a description of hurricanes as weather systems, defining terminology often used in both weather prediction and communication by officials and in the narratives of residents. This chapter also describes the geographic area of the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast with a focus on the greater Houston and New Orleans areas and the regions' histories of hurricanes during the twentieth century. This brief history provides support to the claim that hurricanes are a frequent threat to communities in this region in the United States.

Chapter Three

Media Narratives of Preparation

Analyzing news stories as a form of narrative, Chapter Three considers a selection of articles to examine how they construct concepts of preparation. This chapter includes a content and structural analysis of eighty-one articles to reveal patterns in the information shared in these texts. The discussion takes patterns uncovered in the analysis to look at how newspaper articles disseminate “official” information and recommendations about storm preparation—both by utilizing government officials’ and weather experts’ voices and by positioning themselves as an official source. Another significant part of this discussion is an examination of how these articles characterize residents in the preparation process, especially in contrast to official recommendations.

Chapter Four

Lay Discussions of Preparation

Chapter Four begins by recognizing preparation stories as a subtype of hurricane narrative, which creates space for considering these stories on their own. By examining interviews collected during independent fieldwork and archival research, this chapter explores ways that residents make preparation decisions from the perspective that the narrative of preparation is a subtype of hurricane narrative. Specifically, it describes various influences that inform these decisions and the ways that residents prepare resources. Concern over the protection of resources and the evaluation of one's own preparation approaches is also addressed. This chapter also discusses the tensions and agreements between the official and lay constructions of hurricane preparation using concepts of master narrative and entitlement. Using the concept of master narrative, the discussion puts forth the concept of the "narrative of pre-victimization" as a possible master narrative at play in some hurricane narrative in the media. In this sense, "victimization" is the idea of suffering significant damage from a hurricane, and this master narrative utilizes the idea that residents may already be doomed by the dangers of a hurricane unless they conform to official recommendations.

Chapter Five

Challenges to Public Safety and the Value of Narrative

Chapter Five extends the discussion to looking at using narrative as a tool for bridging lay and official perspectives of preparation. Also, it summarizes the research presented in the thesis as a whole and discusses the implications of the research findings on future studies of narrative and disaster preparation.

Disaster Folklore

The links between folklore research and disasters have existed throughout many decades in the discipline. The topic of “disaster folklore” is prevalent enough to warrant an entry in *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, with the definition “[Disaster lore is the] lore created in response to natural or human-made disaster. Events... [that] can permanently alter cultural landmarks and the natural landscape, rupturing the common body of knowledge crucial for everyday patterns of communication and living” (Matthews-DeNatale and DeNatale 1996, 202). This definition echoes the definitions of disaster put forth earlier (though it seems to privilege the temporally bounded event over the overlapping one), and it places the disciplinary focus on the cultural response to the event. In the sense of this definition, the lore is an adaptive response to the disaster. As such, the folklore that emerges from human experiences of disaster cuts across both

various folklore genres and the many varieties of disaster. What is interesting about Gail Matthews-DeNatale and Doug DeNatale's definition, though, is the key use of the word "can" in the discussion: Disaster lore stems from an event that *can* alter landmarks and landscape. The potential is key here, as it opens up the possibility of the creation of disaster folklore as a response to an event that threatens—that has the *potential* to cause harm—but does not ultimately alter the environment. In the discussion of hurricanes, this small detail has merit, as it allows us to acknowledge that the *threat* of storms can have folkloric weight.

Within the discipline, research in the last seventy-five years has examined disaster folklore across a variety of genres, including examples from ballads (Hudson 1947), folksong (Kononenko 1992), jokes and humor (Doyle 1976, Smyth 1986, Simons 1986, Oring 1987, Dundes 1987, Morrow 1987, Failkova 2001, Ellis 2001 and 2002, Kuipers 2005, Blank 2011), folk belief (Andersen 1974, Doyle 1976, Howell and Lott 1980, O'Leary 1997, Goldstein 2009), and material culture (Estes and Shaw 1985, Hagen et al. 1999, Edwards 2010). Narrative has also been a fruitful genre for disaster folklore research (Andersen 1974, Doyle 1976, Bendix 1990, Frank 2003 and 2011, Milspaw 2007, Sloan 2008, Goldstein 2009). As with much folklore research, however, discussions often cross generic lines and illustrate how experiences of disaster occasion various forms of expression, such as how Charles Clay Doyle's piece in *Western Folklore* about the Los Angeles earthquake in 1971 touches upon jokes and belief tales (legend)

and Diane Goldstein's (2009) article about the September 11 attacks in the United States discusses issues of belief and narrative.

As the above definition of disaster folklore and the previous discussion of definitions of disaster would lead us to expect, the types of events that can produce disaster folklore also vary widely. On one end of the spectrum, research can range from focusing on natural disaster—including earthquakes (Hudson 1947, Andersen 1974, Doyle 1976, Howell and Lott 1980, Bendix 1990, Gaudet 1993, O'Leary 1997, Frank 2003), volcanoes (Estes and Shaw 1985), and hurricanes (Matthews 1993, Frank 2011, and the examples in the next section)—to man-made disasters on the other end, with notable examples stemming from the Challenger explosion of 1986 (Smyth 1986, Simons 1986, Oring 1987) and the September 11 attacks (Ellis 2001 and 2002, Goldstein 2009, Frank 2011). The concept of a spectrum is important here because the categories of “natural” and “man-made” are not absolute, and there can be overlaps within individuals' experiences.

Disaster Folklore and Hurricanes

Most of the folklore-based research on hurricanes has focused on Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Granted, this focus on Hurricane Katrina is not just within folklore, but within other disciplines, as well. Considering the three hurricanes central to this thesis—

all along the Gulf Coast—Hurricane Katrina is, by far, the most discussed in publications.

A quick look at the websites Amazon and Google Scholar offer the following results:

Table 1. Number of results from website queries from June 12, 2012

| Hurricane Name Searched | Amazon (search limited to books) | Google Scholar |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------|
| “Hurricane Katrina” | 3133 | About 57600 |
| “Hurricane Rita” | 103 | About 4550 |
| “Hurricane Ike” | 76 | About 2360 |

Sources: Searches from Amazon (www.amazon.com) and Google Scholar (scholar.google.com) websites.

In noting these results, it is important to remember that these numbers do not represent absolute numbers of publications on each storm, but, rather, the number of items associated with keywords related to these storms. As such, there may be duplication within the results (for example, a book existing in multiple print formats), or items may make reference to more than one storm (for example, Hurricane Katrina may be discussed in a text on Hurricane Rita). What is very noticeable is the dramatic difference between the results from the Hurricane Katrina search and the searches for the other two storms. It is difficult to deny that Hurricane Katrina has had an impact in research and other publications.

Within folkloristics, Katrina has been the focus of several notable publications. Before 2005 and before Katrina, published work tended not to focus on hurricanes at all, with a few exceptions. For example, Gail Matthews (1993) contributed a chapter to the collection *Images of the South: Constructing a Regional Culture on Film and Video* that

describes the Our Stories of the Storm project focused on the effects of Hurricane Hugo on South Carolina residents. Generally, though, the bulk of hurricane research in folklore and related disciplines stems from Katrina-related topics. Hurricane Katrina garnered a great deal of research focus in large part due to the enormity of the storm's impact on a large number of people and the impact that Katrina had on the communities to which those people belonged. As thousands of people were evacuated from storm-affected regions—many of whom returned months or years later, if at all—their lives were vastly and often permanently altered. If we consider disaster folklore as emerging out of a disruption of the ways of everyday life, Hurricane Katrina acted as a prime instrument for the creation of disaster folklore.

This said, work dealing with folklore and popular culture-related material and hurricanes cuts across several genres. A large portion of these works focuses on narrative research, including personal experience narrative and oral history, legend, and humor. However, other scholars have written on topics relating to material culture, custom, and identity. Most of these scholars have focused on Katrina specifically, but some have addressed other storms as well. This discussion attempts to organize the literature by genre, but, as is often the challenge of discussing genre, the lines often blur and some of the works in this review could fit into multiple generic categories.

Personal Experience Narrative and Oral History

Folklorists have been interested in both raw and analyzed narratives of hurricanes. In other words, some publishing has focused on narratives standing on their own with little academic interpretation, while other literature has sought to use hurricane narratives as a basis for analytical discussion. Within the discipline, Carl Lindahl and Pat Jasper stand out as two primary figures in publishing about Hurricane Katrina. In the fall of 2005, Jasper and Lindahl co-founded and -directed Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston (SKRH). Through field schools, hurricane survivors were trained in how to document other survivors' narratives via recorded interviews. This project, the "first large-scale project, anywhere, in which the survivors of a major disaster have taken the lead in documenting it" (Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston 2006), has collected several hundred interviews since its inception. From this collection of survivor narratives, a series of works have been published, both by Lindahl and Jasper and by the survivors/fieldworkers themselves writing about their experiences as storm survivors and as interviewers for the project.

A prominent example of these publications is a series of articles from a 2006 special issue of the journal *Callaloo*. In this issue, Lindahl and Jasper contributed introductory and background pieces, including discussions of the SKRH project itself and its "across her own kitchen table" approach to fieldwork. Lindahl also contributed a book notes piece that provides a snapshot of a sample of books published in the ten months after Katrina. Also included in this special issue was work from survivors themselves.

For example, Nicole Eugene, who evacuated from New Orleans and participated in SKRH, writes of her own experiences and contributes an edited transcript of one of her fieldwork interviews.

In addition to this special issue, the hurricane and fieldwork experiences of Shari Smothers, Marie Barney, Glenda Harris, and Linda Jeffers were highlighted as part of a piece in *Houston History* (2010). The SKRH project was also the focus in articles in *The Dialogue*, a bulletin published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Lindahl and Nash 2008, Howard 2007).

The personal experience narrative focus on Hurricane Katrina by folklorists and others interested in expressive culture is not limited to work by Lindahl and Jasper and other SKRH-related individuals. For instance, in 2006, *Health Affairs* published a collection of narrative commentaries entitled “Witness to Disaster.” This collection included short written pieces from medical providers who assisted Katrina and Rita survivors in various locations, including Louisiana, Texas, and Mississippi. The selections were written in response to a call from the journal for medical responder stories, with the collection “represent[ing] the most compelling of these writings” (Witness to Disaster 2006, 478). Although this collection is not overtly folkloric in nature and does not provide an analytical discussion of the narratives presented, it does provide an example of interest in hurricane narrative itself.

Also, in 2008, several essays in the *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany* dealt with materials at the intersection of personal narrative and Hurricane Katrina. Two presented

personal experiences without analysis. In one, Adeem Nachabe, Jessica Cohn-Phillips, and Amelia Kish, three students from the Metairie Park County Day School, contributed their own narratives to the issue. Each of these narratives is short, about four to seven paragraphs long, and the collection is presented without the adornment of an introduction or conclusion. In the other, folklorist Chris Goertzen recounts his Katrina experiences, using the thread of vehicles used, bought, and sold during the time of Katrina to connect the parts of his story. Like the students' narratives, Goertzen's is presented on its own. These two pieces are interesting points of contrast to the more analytical and interpretive articles in the rest of the issue.

Also in the same issue, Donna Bonner examines how time is expressed in Hurricane Katrina narratives written by her University of New Orleans students. The narratives were collected during a class she led in the Fall 2005 semester, the semester immediately following Katrina's destruction. She discusses patterns that look at the passage of time in the students' narratives, and how these ways of considering time play into concerns of identity and rebuilding.

In another piece from the *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*, Alan H. Stein and Gene B. Preuss discuss the implications for the collection of oral history in the wake of Katrina². They discuss the concern of collection and temporal proximity to the disaster and professional distance. They also touch upon issues of funding and dissemination of data, highlighting several different collection projects that were working with Katrina

2. This work also appeared in the collection *There is no such thing as a natural disaster: Race, class, and Hurricane Katrina* (2006).

survivors at the time. Stein and Preuss close with a discussion of “the conflict between narrative and oral history” and the uses of oral history material post-Katrina. They comment that Katrina’s impact will be long-lasting and widespread, explaining that

How Americans weave this tragedy into their collective memory and the lessons we take from the disaster will preoccupy the minds of pundits, historians, and both political and community leaders for generations. However, the impact of Hurricane Katrina is not limited to Louisiana, Mississippi, and the Gulf Coast. “Katrinaland” has become a national and international phenomenon that has struck both the nation and the world. (Stein and Preuss 2008, 120)

Stein and Preuss’s piece underscores the great desire to collect stories of the storm and the idea that these stories can inform people well beyond those immediately impacted by Katrina.

Like Stein and Preuss, Stephen Sloan’s “Oral History and Hurricane Katrina: Reflections on Shouts and Silences” (2008) discusses issues surrounding the conducting of oral history interviews, though his work is specifically within the context of Katrina’s aftermath in Mississippi. Sloan writes on issues such as dealing with trauma and the need for reflection in disaster work. He also discusses the efforts made by the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage at the University of Southern Mississippi to collect Hurricane Katrina stories in the weeks after the storm, underscoring the need to collect these stories soon after the event (as well as later on). One of Sloan’s comments made while describing his experiences of interviewing Mississippians is also worth noting:

Whenever I would sit down to interview longtime residents they began telling me of their experience with Katrina by relating it to their prior experience of

Hurricane Camille.... Hurricane Camille was the benchmark and reference point that residents returned to as they began to understand this newer experience. Most often, it was how the previous storm, in all its ferocity, did not prepare them for Hurricane Katrina. Ironically, however, Hurricane Camille did prepare them in the sense that it gave them a familiar point from which to analogize Hurricane Katrina quickly and effectively. (Sloan 2008, 179)

This referencing of prior storm experiences is part of the aspects of hurricane narrative being explored in this thesis, in that how one draws from prior experience (and from other narrative sources) can have impact on hurricane preparation and resource acquisition.

The immediate groundswell of interest in documenting people's experiences post-Katrina is the focus of Susan Roach's (2008) piece, "In the Wake of the Hurricanes Research Coalition: A History." In this article, Roach discusses the efforts made in the months after Katrina to organize research and create materials and protocol to facilitate projects collecting survivor experiences. Both Lindahl and Jasper's and Sloan's projects are mentioned, among others, in Roach's discussion. These projects indicate the importance of Katrina as a cultural event and to the value of hurricane research.

Legend

Several scholars have focused on legendary material surfacing in hurricane narrative. In "Katrina: The Urban Legends Begin: A Memoir with Commentary," Frank de Caro (2008) blends his own personal narrative with urban legends he heard after returning to New Orleans. These included legends such as President George Bush

sending Secret Service into the Superdome to execute gang members and a looter drowning because he clutched onto a bag of silver and gems he refused to release. De Caro discusses why these legends not only address concerns about crime but also “emphasize hope and a kind of redemption” (2008, 51).

More recently, in 2012, Carl Lindahl’s “Legends of Hurricane Katrina: The Right to Be Wrong, Survivor-to-Survivor Storytelling, and Healing” appeared in the *Journal of American Folklore*³. In this article, he discusses “media-borne legends” disseminated through news reports and narratives communicated by survivors themselves. Media reports, such as the ones of residents shooting at helicopters, positioned New Orleanians as dangerous and criminal and created concern about assisting storm victims. In addition, narratives of survivors are often cast in doubt in favor of narratives of the media and government. In this way, we “dismiss those [narratives] shared by witnesses who were present at the site where the legends were born” (140). The discrediting of and suspicion cast upon residents disrupted disaster assistance and marred the lives of many survivors, in part, by discounting their own lived experiences. As Lindahl comments,

The levee legends [stories that the New Orleans levees were intentionally destroyed] accord far more closely with most survivors’ experiences of disaster than do the tales that depict storm victims raping and murdering fellow victims or shooting at would-be rescuers. Nevertheless, survivors gained nothing but further rebuke when they repeated the levee legends to the outside world. (2012, 171)

3. This article is an expansion of ideas presented in his essay, “Some Legendary Takes on Hurricane Katrina,” published in 2011 in the *AFS Review*.

Lindahl posits that efforts that tap into the survivor community to focus on survivors telling their own stories (such as the SKRH project) both help to combat the negative media-borne legends and provide an opportunity for survivors to use their voices and to heal. Lindahl's article is significant for several reasons. It underscores the social importance of hurricane narrative research. It delineates some of the tensions between narratives constructed by the media and government and the experiences of people dealing with the storm themselves. Also, it reminds folklorists of the need to think critically of our own presumptions when discussing disaster narrative, to be aware of our own biases and tendencies when working with narratives from both "official" and vernacular sources.

Like Lindahl, folklorist Kate Parker (2010) also uses interviews from the *Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston* project as a basis for discussing how urban legends surface in survivor interviews. She posits that survivors use legend to create a new sense of home, as people from New Orleans were relocated to the Houston area. As she comments, "...put simply, faced with a new home that is strange, perhaps they need to make their old home seem stranger" (Parker 2010, para. 3). She provides examples such as the mentions of sharks and alligators surfacing in the city and bodies emerging from graves and argues that these bizarre images create not only engaging stories but also serve to make strange their old, familiar city. The use of legends serves to assist the transition to new homes away from New Orleans, to help in coming to terms with a new living arrangement even when one longs for the familiarity of their home city.

Legends also surface in relation to Hurricane Ike. My own article, “I (Don’t) Like Ike: Post-Hurricane Legends and Anti-Legends in Electronic Discussion” (2011), explores different categories of rumor and legend that emerged in response to two Hurricane Ike media pieces on the website for the *Houston Chronicle*, Houston’s mainstream newspaper. I discuss how the transmitted rumors and legends addressed concerns of community members coming out of a major hurricane and how the online comments section of media webpages can become environments for the exchange of legendary material.

Material Culture

Given the amount of physical destruction that can be wrought by hurricanes, especially ones such as Katrina, it is not surprising that scholarship has emerged about material culture and hurricanes. Some research bridges material and narrative genres. For example, as part of his discussion of disaster humor after Hurricane Katrina, Jason Saul (2008) considered graffiti, including the graffiti left on refrigerators pulled out of flooded houses, signage, and Mardi Gras floats, as these items became vehicles for expression. Saul discusses how these examples of humor are a response to trauma, a sign of resilience and the reassertion of community post-disaster.

Keagan LeJune’s chapter, “Hurricane Rita and the New Normal: Modified Communication and New Traditions in Calcasieu and Cameron Parishes” in *Culture after the Hurricanes: Rhetoric and Reinvention on the Gulf Coast*, also deals with cultural

resilience and the use of traditional means of expression to cope with disaster. Specifically, he uses folk-created signage and modified holiday decorations displayed after Hurricane Rita in these two Louisiana parishes as the basis of discussion. Through these expressions of material culture, LeJune discusses how “...visual presentations of these modified traditions existed as powerful statements of community spirit aimed at both community members and visitors to the area” (2010, 167). These folk acts are part of the recovery process but also mark cultural memory.

In the same collection, vernacular housing was also linked to post-Katrina concerns. Jay D. Edwards’s chapter on the shotgun house, a common housing design in New Orleans, explores the history of this design, suggesting that the shotgun house may be a folk genre “developed as direct patterns of cultural resistance to political and economic hegemonies that African Americans experienced” (2010, 83). However, this history of vernacular architectural expression has not received significant attention by archival historians and other related researchers, favoring the contributions of other groups (such as Anglos and French Creoles), which in turn threatens survival of the shotgun house history in the post-Katrina environment. In order to address this, Edwards documented 146 “shotgun-like” structures; this revealed “a complex and robust history of early shotgun house development” (2010, 61). Editor M.B. Hackler comments, “Edwards’s cultural geography of the city’s ubiquitous shotgun houses poses a challenge to accepted histories and connects the city with its architectural heritage” (2010, 15).

An interest in more tourist-oriented material culture also surfaces in the literature. In “Katrina That Bitch! Hegemonic Representations of Women’s Sexuality on Hurricane Katrina Souvenir T-Shirts,” sociologists Kris Macomber, Christine Mallinson, and Elizabeth Seale (2011) survey novelty t-shirts from shops in New Orleans after Katrina. In doing so, they look at how the shirt slogans construct gender and sexuality and how they may play a role in disaster recovery. Although this research delves into popular culture creations, by speaking with people along Decatur Street in New Orleans, Macomber, Mallinson, and Seale also consider how the expressions on these shirts tap into vernacular humor, especially disaster humor. Also, as part of their discussion, they acknowledged the possibility of “an important connection between personal experience with the hurricane and taking offense to the t-shirts” with people more removed from the experience finding them funny or unoffensive (2011, 536).

Custom and Identity

In the collection, *Culture after the Hurricanes: Rhetoric and Reinvention on the Gulf Coast*, several essays address custom- and identity-related topics. Two essays by Benjamin Morris and Jeffery Schwartz, for instance, deal with foodways issues. Morris focuses on the impact of Hurricane Katrina on the culinary culture of New Orleans and how restaurants and recipes have been important to post-storm recovery. Schwartz focuses on food culture from the angle of neighborhood food markets that cropped up

after Katrina to help address the lack of food access. Both address food as a marker of cultural identity.

Also in *Culture after the Hurricanes*, W.D. Wilkerson's chapter on Plaquemines Parish examines the interplay between culture and environment. She specifically focuses on the effects of land loss from erosion, which is in part caused by hurricanes in the region. She discusses how erosion impacts the lives of parish residents: "Without people, there can be no culture, and without a healthy landscape, the people of Plaquemines cannot survive" (2010, 141). She argues that rebuilding and preservation efforts post-Katrina must include the cultural *and* environmental needs of Plaquemines Parish, which have been largely ignored by policy makers in the focus on rebuilding New Orleans more than surrounding parishes. As she notes, "The environmental restoration of Plaquemines Parish is necessary not only to the parish's way of life and cultural landscape but also those of New Orleans" (Wilkerson 2010, 161).

Other scholars have also written on custom- and identity-related issues. In "A Hurricane Is Nothing...", Kathleen Carlin uses interview excerpts from the Katrina Impacts on Vietnamese Americans Living in New Orleans (KATIVA-NOLA) Project to look at how certain cultural traits may lead to resilience after disaster. She discusses how stories from past generations of the Vietnamese community dealing with trauma and relocation helped to create a point of comparison for Vietnamese-Americans affected by Katrina in that crises were not unfamiliar territory. Instead, as Carlin posits, "the crisis that Katrina brought on caused these Vietnamese-Americans to reassess their identities,

especially in terms of their material life goals and their family relationships. This is in line with the principles of respect for family, for the elders, and for their Vietnamese heritage...” (2011, 18). In other words, individual and cultural identity can both come into play in how individuals relate to and recover from hurricane experiences.

Barry Jean Ancelet also examines community identity feeding into hurricane response in his essay, “Vernacular Power: The Social and Cultural Implications of Katrina and Rita.” Ancelet discusses the differences between the institutional and community responses to these storms, and how they differed across these two temporally close hurricanes. He connects the community response described in his essay, specifically the remarkable efforts of residents assisting and rescuing people with their own boats (often in the face of institutional hurdles), to their heritage. As Ancelet comments, “The vernacular response managed to do some good despite being frustrated by the breakdown in the institutional response. It surged instinctively from the Cajun community for reasons that come from deep in our history” (2008, 35). He points to the self-reliance of the French settlers who became the Acadians and how their history instilled in the Cajuns a strong sense of social cooperation and the ability to get around “the inertia of institutions and bureaucracies” (Ancelet 2008, 35). Like Carlin, Ancelet connects heritage to how one responds to hurricanes, although they do so through different cultural perspectives.

Also focusing on community and institutional response, Jocelyn H. Donlon and Jon G. Donlon took a different tack in their 2008 article. In “Government Gives Tradition

the Go-Ahead: The Atchafalaya Welcome Center's Role in Hurricane Katrina Recovery," the Donlons "...unabashedly celebrate a local example of cooperation between government and citizens which worked not just well, but exceptionally well..." (2008, 36). Using narratives from the people involved in the response at the welcome center, the essay discusses how this "home-grown community effort" grew out of the local knowledge of those involved in running it. As in Ancelet's piece, local culture fed into the response, with the Donlons asserting that collective understandings of play and foodways helped in its success.

Changing focus to Hurricane Rita, Corliss Badeaux, Keagan LeJeune, Stella Nesanovich, and Wendy Whelan-Stewart (2008) comment on intersections between individual and community identity in their collaborative essay. Each contributor, through individually written sections, attempts to "capture the wide-ranging experiences of Louisiana residents who faced Hurricane Rita" (Badeaux et al. 2008, 3). The sections relate to aspects of the Rita experience, written from a mixture of personal and resident-based perspectives, including preparation and evacuation, remaining for the storm, returning after the storm, and recovery from the storm. Nesanovich, in her discussion of her own preparation and evacuation, notes the idea of past storms affecting her response, which is a concept picked up in later parts of this thesis. Whelan-Stewart's and Badeaux's sections address community and individual identities and how they come into play in hurricane response and recovery, interweaving their own experiences and choices with stories from friends and neighbors. LeJeune's section, which likely was developed

and incorporated into his chapter in *Culture after the Hurricanes*, moves the essay's focus to the use of handmade signs and public displays created and used in the time surrounding Hurricane Rita as a way of communicating community perspectives.

More recently, Ancelet, Gaudet, and Lindahl (2013) edited *Second Line Rescue: Improvised Responses to Katrina and Rita*. This collection brings together a wide variety of materials, including first person narratives, essays, and field studies to address vernacular responses to these two storms. Not solely a personal narrative collection—though many of the chapters have rooting in personal narrative—this book taps into the cultural identity of the region. As Ancelet, Gaudet, and Lindahl note, “The vernacular responses and solutions recorded in this book are rooted in south Louisiana’s cultural historical background. It is no accident that those who improvise in jazz, blues, second lines, Cajun waltzes, and zydeco two-steps also improvise to get people off their roofs” (2013, xvi). The collection represents perspectives from both rescuers from outside the area who saved people in danger from the storms and displaced storm survivors. It includes reprinted and republished pieces (such as the articles from Donlon and Donlon, and Eugene referenced in this chapter) as well as interviews and essays new to the collection. Although more aimed at the response to hurricanes, the book serves to underscore the diversity of experience related to hurricanes, which is important to the discussion in this thesis.

Gaps in the Literature

Taking past literature into consideration, this project adds to the research in disaster folklore of hurricanes by looking at narratives of hurricanes in several key ways. Unlike most of the research (with some exceptions), this study looks at hurricane experiences from several storms instead of honing in on one particular storm. Although the impact of a single hurricane can be significant—Hurricane Katrina’s impact on both the communities directly affected by the storm and the United States was (and is still) undeniable—considering multiple-storm narratives allows us to venture into the realm of “hurricane culture,” the ways that people in areas repeatedly affected by hurricanes frame their experiences of them.

In addition, this project explores the intersections between the personal narratives of individual residents and the mainstream narratives promoted by the media and governmental entities, narratives that form kinds of master narratives that can be resisted or incorporated into stories of personal experience. Elaine Lawless explored similar concerns in her discussion of the personal experience narratives of domestic abuse (2001), but this project will take this concern and explore it within the context of hurricane culture. Examining media itself is not a new approach to take; however, the focus on pre-storm media aims to provide a different angle for consideration. This project focuses on the issues of *preparation and resource acquisition within the hurricane experience*—in other words, the way in which people prepare for, use, and procure resources needed to deal with hurricanes. This focus allows us to tackle a specific aspect

of these narratives but also allows us to hone in on a part of the hurricane experience not thoroughly represented in the literature of disaster folklore.

Personal Experience Narrative Studies

Before delving into the particular discussion of hurricane narrative in subsequent chapters, it helps to contextualize the personal narrative within the larger discipline of folklore, and from this contextualization, to touch upon some of the narrative issues that will impact this project's discussion. Within the discipline, the personal experience narrative has only been widely recognized as a viable stand-alone genre for the past four or five decades, even though its narrative cousins, such as folktale, legend, and myth, have enjoyed genre status for much longer. In part, the reticence toward recognizing personal experience narrative stemmed from the unique content of the narratives. Each narrator's life is unique, and, by extension, the content of narratives about his/her life would also be unique. In this way, personal experience narratives lacked the traditionality of content seen in other narrative genres whose stories consisted of content passed down through people over time.

However, with the work of folklorists, including Sandra K. D. Stahl (sometimes also cited as Dolby-Stahl), the discipline's perspective on the status of personal

experience narratives began to shift. In her essay, “The Personal Narrative as Folklore,” Stahl examines the notion of tradition in order to justify the genre. She writes,

If, as in the past, tradition were arbitrarily defined as recurrent items of content passed on orally from one person to another, then personal narratives along with any number of other less content-specific genres could not be considered traditional, nor by extension folkloric. However...there is much about any one personal narrative that is traditional; there is much more that is traditional than innovative. (1977b, 10)

Although the content of the narrative is non-traditional, elements of the personal experience narrative that Stahl argues are traditional include “structure, use, attitudes, or idioms” (1977b, 14). She also argues that personal experience narratives are “traditional” in that they are part of the storytelling tradition and reflect traditional attitudes. She writes that “...the personal narrative...is the primary traditional genre for expressing traditional attitude just as memorate and legend are the primary genres for expressing supernatural beliefs” (1977b, 22). In “The Oral Personal Narrative in Its Generic Context,” Stahl further explores personal experience narrative as its own genre. In this essay, Stahl posits the following definition of the genre: “The personal narrative is a prose narrative relating a personal experience; it is usually told in the first person and its content is nontraditional” (1977a, 20)⁴. Again, there is this sense that the content may be unique to the teller (“nontraditional”), but as seen above, these narratives are traditional in other

4. Linda Dégh dissects this definition in her essay, “‘When I Was Six We Moved West...’: The Theory of Personal Experience Narrative.” She is most troubled by the use of “nontraditional” in the definition, as she argues that “...nontraditional things could not have happened to anyone” (Dégh 1985, 103). She also mentions that the “textual, situational, and social context [of personal stories] ...cannot” avoid being traditional (104).

ways. Stahl relates the personal experience narrative genre to other widely recognized genres, including the memorate, the legend, the hero tale, the tall tale, the joke, rumor, and gossip. In her conclusion, she summarizes several of these relationships:

As we can see, the personal narrative has many close relatives among the genres of folklore. Some, like the reminiscence, memorate, and true story are distinguishable only through the arbitrary emphasis on certain features—narrative form, secular content, the “personal aspect.” Others, like the legend, the anecdote, rumor and gossip, have the quality of relatively wide distribution to distinguish them from the personal narrative. And yet others, like the tall tale, the joke, or the family story, may be distinguishable on paper but may be represented in reality by stories that seem to be personal narratives (1977a, 39).

By defining the genre’s relationship to other genres, Stahl seeks to establish a generic space for personal experience narrative. In her later 1988 work, “Contributions of Personal Narrative Research to North American Folkloristics,” Stahl continues to promote the genre by discussing three issues that have been addressed mainly through personal experience narrative research: the relationship between narrative and experience, the “interplay between tradition and creativity,” and how much narrative reveals about the storyteller (390-391). Through her discussion, she illustrates personal experience narrative’s contributions to such research areas as structuralism and contextualism, which highlights the ways in which this previously unacknowledged genre benefits the discipline as a whole.

Narrative Analysis

Although Stahl is noted as a major force in defining the personal experience narrative as a folkloric genre, linguists William Labov and Joshua Waletzky's work in the analysis of structure in personal experience narrative is frequently referenced as a helpful tool in analyzing narrative. Labov's essay, "The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax" (which is based on an earlier work by Labov and Waletzky), offers a structural approach to the narratives⁵, using narratives about the danger of death as the texts for analysis. Labov identifies six major structural elements that may appear in a narrative:

- Abstract: summary of the story
- Orientation: time, place, persons, situation
- Complicating Action: what happened in the story
- Evaluation: "indicate the point of the narrative" (366) and include various types (external, embedded, evaluative action)
- Result or Resolution: what finally happened
- Coda: signal that the narrative has ended

5. In this essay, narrative is defined as "...one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred" (Labov 1972, 359-360). He does not specify "personal experience narrative" or "personal narrative" in this definition, although the narratives used are personal experiences of the tellers.

To Labov (and Waletzky), a complete narrative includes all of these elements, (although all elements may not be in all narratives). In addition to presenting the larger structural elements of these narratives, Labov also discusses more minute syntactical structures within the narrative. Labov's structure provides us a tool and a vocabulary to use when discussing the way a narrative is told.

Although Labov's work is a frequent touchstone for structural analysis, other academics prefer a more context-centered approach to analysis of personal experience narrative. John A. Robinson, in his essay "Personal Narratives Reconsidered," uses Labov and Waletzky's work as a jumping off point for his own discussion of personal narrative. Specifically, Robinson argues that

(1) personal narratives are not limited to remarkable or unusual experiences; (2) the point of a story can be implied or even unknown; and (3) the formal organization of personal narrative is jointly determined by norms of conversational etiquette, the discourse structures of narrative, and the pragmatic functions that prompt narration. (Robinson 1981, 85)

Robinson acknowledges the value of the structural approach, but emphasizes that the content and meaning can vary from Labov's notions and the need to consider the situated element of personal narratives. Both of these approaches (structural and contextual) tie back into Stahl's discussion of the ways that personal experience narratives are traditional. The narratives have structural elements and respond to contextual influences that are not unique to the individual teller or his/her storytelling situation. Both structure and context will play into the discussion in this thesis.

Tellability

An interesting difference in Labov's and Robinson's conceptualizations of personal narrative is on the issue of tellability. Tellability refers to the determination as to whether a narrative is worth telling. In his classic work, Labov asserts that, to be tellable, a story has to be remarkable (reportable) in some way. This is an evaluative aspect of the storytelling situation, as the teller must deem the story to be reportable. As Labov comments, "Evaluative devices say this to us: this was terrifying, dangerous, weird, wild, crazy; or amusing, hilarious, wonderful; more generally, that it was strange, uncommon, or unusual—that is, worth reporting. It was not ordinary, plain, humdrum, everyday, or run of the mill" (1972, 371). In other words, there has to be something extraordinary about the experience to bother talking about it. Discourse scholar Teun A. van Dijk's concept of "remarkableness" is similar to Labov's reportability. He comments that "a remarkable event is an exception to usual states or events" (van Dijk 1975, 287) and is more likely to be interesting within the conversational context.

The guideline set forth by Labov and van Dijk, however, is not universally accepted as the only way to consider tellability. Returning to Robinson, he does not argue that Labov's and van Dijk's concepts of tellability make for a "good" story; instead, he notes that "telling stories about remarkable experiences is one of the ways in which people make the unexpected expectable, hence manageable" (1981, 60). (This comment echoes the idea, such as that set forth in Regina Bendix's article about earthquake narratives (1990), in which disaster narratives create order out of chaos.) This said,

Robinson argues that this idea of limiting the tellable to the remarkable inaccurately represents how we tell stories. Turning to stories of “commonplace activities,” Robinson notes that the experiences that are unremarkable to the teller may be very interesting to the listener, and the story may, in turn, be told. Also, Robinson mentions that seemingly mundane narratives (such as recounting one’s day) may be told as “a linguistic resource for making life interesting” (1981, 63). Lastly, he comments that stories of victimization may be “regarded as secrets rather than stories to tell” (1981, 63) and resist the remarkable-commonplace dichotomy.

Further, linguist Neal R. Norrick adds to the discussion of tellability by proposing a modified perspective. Norrick’s discussion shifts the focus on tellability from content-centered to contextually influenced. Pulling from linguistic anthropologist Elinor Ochs and psychologist Lisa Capps (2001), he notes how tellability is negotiated, determined by how the story is relevant to the teller and the audience, giving the listeners an active role in the process: “All sorts of participation by listeners can render a familiar story tellable in a given context” (Norrick 2005, 326). In this way, Norrick begins to portray tellability as a range with the lower end being “sufficient to warrant listener interest” (323) and a variety of contextually dependent senses following. However, Norrick proposes an upper boundary to tellability, which he terms “the dark side.” This boundary is determined by when the narrative becomes untellable in a certain context by becoming too intimate, too frightening, or too incoherent. Therefore, the teller must narrate between the two boundaries and does so with the following actions. As Norrick writes:

- [A] teller decides which personal experiences to relate...;
- [T]he teller decides how to relate the experience, with regard to key (serious vs. humorous), perspective, details etc.;
- [T]he teller decides whether or not to press on with additional details, with related episodes and/or related stories, depending on the reaction of the listeners... (2005, 323).

Through these actions, the teller crafts a story that is “in bounds” for the audience at hand, contextually interesting enough, but not transgressing audience norms too much. To fail to meet the lower boundary or to cross the upper one risks rejection of the story and its teller.

In this way, tellability encompasses a variety of senses. The concept of tellability is relevant to the discussion of hurricane narratives because these narratives span a range of experiences. On one hand, some seem obviously tellable in a classic Labovian sense. Often, when people think of Hurricane Katrina, they can instantly envision stories of rooftop rescues and massive shelters, and Hurricane Rita can conjure up stories of huge highway gridlock. However, not all hurricane experiences are so overtly exceptional. In a region where hurricane season looms for six months every year, the experience of watching hurricanes can seem almost routine. Coupled with this, hurricanes, even large ones, can end up leaving a community relatively unscathed, resulting in what seems a

“non-event.” Widening the idea of what makes a story tellable, though, opens up the ability to put these stories—ones that might fade from attention after the storm passes—on the table for consideration. The issue of tellability and hurricane narrative resurfaces in Chapter Four in looking at different ways we can approach what stories can fall into someone’s hurricane narrative repertoire.

Patterns in Narrative

Analytical work on personal experience narrative is also often focused on discovering patterns within the narratives themselves, focusing on small details within the narrative (also called microanalysis). For example, three scholars who have performed work in this vein of analysis are Diane Goldstein (2009), Gillian Bennett (1989 and 1990), and Nessa Wolfson (1978). Goldstein’s work with narrative often focuses on patterns within the text, including the uses of metaphor, analogy, modifiers, evidence, and silence. Seeking pattern within the texts can provide insight as to how these narratives are constructed and how they communicate meaning within their context. Like Goldstein, Bennett’s work also seeks pattern within narrative texts. Her work focuses on the use of “super-sentences,” extremely long sentences constructed of many clauses; use of dialogue; and tense shifts. Bennett argues that these super-sentences are tools used to structure and create coherence within a narrative, even though some people misinterpret them as poor storytelling or rambling (1990, 214). Taking another approach, Wolfson’s piece, “A Feature of Performed Narrative: The Conversational Historical Present,”

discusses the use of verb tense in order to shift focus in a narrative, to separate events of a story from one another. What is most significant here, however, is that Wolfson does not only find meaning in the shift from past tense (“I entered the house.”) to conversational historical present (“Then, my mother calls me on the phone.”), but in the switching back and forth between the two tenses within a narrative. She describes the switching back and forth as having “the effect of a change of lighting or scenery upon a stage” (Wolfson 1978, 220). Using different approaches, Goldstein, Bennett, and Wolfson provide several ways of thinking of pattern within narrative by looking at the small details within them.

Thematic Pattern: Narrative Order in Chaos

Theme is another way of considering narrative pattern. One of the themes in literature about disaster narratives is the idea that, through disaster narratives, individuals make sense of the events that happened to them through the organizing and retelling of their experiences. For example, Regina Bendix (1990) points out that narratives “illustrate with astounding clarity the interplay between the event, the personal experience thereof, and the structuring of this experience in a meaningful fashion” (333). Within the narrative, these three elements come together to make meaning. In her 2006 work on Chernobyl narratives, Ann Enander comments that reflecting upon experience “[forms] an important filter between the experiences of an event and anticipations about the future... [and can be] interpreted as part of the process of sense-making, which forms an important part of recovery from natural disaster” (265). Through narrative, the

individual gives structure and sense to experiences that may seem chaotic or traumatic. John H. Harvey (1996) further echoes this idea and emphasizes the positive impact that narratives of disaster can have. He highlights the “coping value of private reflection and confiding and sharing of stories with close others in times of major loss and adversity” (162). In these ways, narrative becomes a tool to control one’s experiences by using them to make sense of events and to assist in coping. This kind of thematic organizing is not universal to all narratives, however. Revisiting the concept of tellability, not all narratives create this cohesive representation of experience and some narratives are within contexts in which they cannot be expressed. Diane Goldstein and Amy Shuman argue “Stories become untellable because the content defies articulation, the rules of appropriateness outweigh the import of content, the narrator is constrained by issues of entitlement and storytelling rights, or the space the narratives would normally inhabit is understood by the narrator to be unsafe” (2012, 120). These untellable narratives can be stigmatized, placed in contrast to other narratives that might be deemed more expected or “normal.”

Entitlement

Narrative entitlement, mentioned in the prior section, is another concept that relevant to the discussion of disaster narrative in this thesis, drawing from work by scholars such as Shuman. Her use of the term entitlement follows the work of Courtney Cazden and Dell Hymes on storytelling rights (1978) and the work of William Labov on tellability (1972). Narrative entitlement concerns who gets to say what, to whom, in

which contexts, and, perhaps most importantly, who does not. Amy Shuman and Carol Bohmer's (2004) work on narrative claims in the context of refugee asylum appeals illustrates that these concerns are particularly significant in high-stake social situations. Their work has shown that personal narrative has become increasingly important in legal and governmental settings, having implications for crucial legal decision-making. Entitlement—the right to one's story—becomes important as one seeks authority as an informed voice of experience, especially in light of potentially contradictory narratives from the media and governmental sources (seemingly “official” stories). In this way, entitlement will play into the discussion of lay and official narratives later in this thesis.

Master Narrative

Personal narratives exist in a world also populated with master narratives often espoused in the official stories mentioned above. The concept of master narrative has its roots in the work of Francois Lyotard and refers to narratives created and propagated by collectives (such as “the people” and “the state”) that carry cultural weight within society, such as the “narrative of progress” that seems to drive decisions made within western societies by making these decisions seem legitimate. These are narratives that “give coherence and meaning to smaller or ‘local’ stories and practices” (Seidman 1998, 226). In other words, the “big” story may shape/control/change the “small” story. Master narratives can become a kind of defining and legitimizing force as they affect how situations are perceived and can become schemata that map expectations of how life is

lived, or *should* be lived. In this way, they can have a kind of hegemonic power in which the “authority” in play holds cultural sway over other individuals and groups, and, in doing so, further legitimizes its own power. However, this power is not stable, and master narratives can be contested by more localized narratives, which may contradict all or part of the master narrative. These competing narratives can lead to a variety of outcomes, including, on one end of the spectrum, the master narrative losing its power, and, on the other, the localized narrative being dismissed or not believed.

Elaine Lawless’s work on the cycle of violence stands as an example of master narrative research in folklore. In *Women Escaping Violence*, Lawless discusses the theory of the cycle of violence (also termed the cycle of abuse), which is a concept used by social workers, academics, and abuse victims. The concept serves as a type of master narrative: “suggesting a narrative that everyone has come to know well and one that is referenced perhaps too freely as the ‘typical’ narrative for domestic violence” (2001, 12). By doing so, the master narrative may serve to drive our expectations of abuse experiences and may not match the actual lived experience. Those experiences that differ may be narratively altered to meet the master narrative or may be silenced or ignored as they do not meet the expectations set forth by the master narrative. Shuman and Bohmer also encountered this dynamic in their work with asylum-seeking refugees, mentioned earlier. Refugee narratives that do not meet the expectations of the institution may have difficulty gaining the teller political asylum. In this way, refugees may be compelled to

change their story and/or how they present it for the purposes of securing governmental assistance.

In “Ethnography as Narrative,” anthropologist Edward Bruner comments that, “Narrative structures organize and give meaning to experience, but there are always feelings and lived experiences not fully encompassed by the dominant story” (1997, 268). The act of telling experience stories creates narratives that may or may not conform to mainstream ones, creating alternative interpretations of the “reality” of a situation. This process illustrates the dynamic ways that individuals co-construct the meaning(s) of the past, present, and future. Anthropologist Cheryl Mattingly, occupational therapist Mary Lawlor, and anthropologist Lanita Jacobs-Huey echo this concept when they explain that “stories are highly agentic speech acts that occur in specific contexts and are co-constructed by speakers and their audiences...stories may seem to be ‘about’ the past, but they have implications for how one should act on or interpret immediate and future events” (2002, 745). Narratives, then, are valuable in how they embody a plurality of realities, shaped by the culture in which they are told: “...they come in certain, culturally available types, genres that provide a repertoire of possible, tellable tales” (Mattingly, Lutkehaus, and Throop 2008, 15). Further, anthropologist Bradd Shore comments that, in Bruner’s vision, storytelling is “the very workshop of meaning making” (2008, 98). In disaster, this sense-making aspect of narrative is crucial: “While disaster ultimately implies death of at least a few...those who remain thrust themselves into vigorous affirmation of life, and words strung together, eventually finding narrative cohesion, are

the first symbolic evidence of our escape from death” (Bendix 1990, 336). In this way, examining personal narratives and how they influence and are influenced by more “dominant” narratives is important in exploring issues of narrative entitlement.

The concept of master narrative can also come into play when considering hurricane narratives. In a media-saturated environment that reports on hurricanes through meteorological information, storm coverage, and news stories of response and recovery, the messages conveyed through “official” channels can become their own kind of master narrative as well, creating expectations about matters such as proper preparation and response to storm threats.

By using the concepts of master narrative and narrative entitlement, this thesis explores the interactions between media and residential perspectives of preparation. For the purposes of this discussion, narratives of those who hold positions of authority as “official” narratives (which would include individuals such as governmental officials and meteorologists), in contrast to the lay narratives from “ordinary” people⁶. Patterns of narratives, both in media narratives and residential narratives are highlighted to discuss how each perspective constructs concepts of “appropriate” preparation and authority. From this, I discuss how these narrative interactions can bridge lay and official perspectives and how this understanding can have implications for future hurricane preparation communication.

6. More discussion of official and lay definitions is in Chapter Three.

Considering Preparation

Preparation, in a simple sense, is often construed as being merely action taken in response to information. In other words, threat and preparation information is transmitted by agencies and other entities “in the know,” and individuals are meant to receive the information and act accordingly. This concept could be visualized as:

$$I \implies A$$

(where I is information and A is action by recipients)

Douglas Paton and David Johnston comment, however, that “...care must be taken with regard to assuming that the provision of information on hazards or risk will facilitate the adoption of preventative measures. The information-action link assumes that recipients automatically assimilate, comprehend and utilise information in forming and following action plans. This assumption is often unjustified” (2001, 270). The link, therefore, does not always play out in reality. Both sides of this link are more complex than they may seem on the surface.

Michael D. Barnes, Carl L. Hanson, Len M.B. Novilla, Aaron T. Meacham, Emily McIntyre, and Brittany C. Erickson point to two issues that complicate the matter from the information side of the process. In their discussion of media and Hurricane

Katrina, they note that “the media engenders public awareness and concern on the basis of assumptions that (1) the press and the media do not reflect reality but, rather, filter and shape it, and (2) media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues and subjects as more important than others” (Barnes et al. 2008, 605). In this way, the information communicated to audiences cannot be conceived simply as factual information. Instead, it reflects a constructed view of that information.

In addition, the action aspect of this process is not straightforward. Gerry Larsson and Ann Enander point out several issues that are cited as reasons individuals do not participate in disaster preparation and express a lack of willingness or interest to act. These reasons include belief that one is less vulnerable than others, an uncertainty about that to do, and belief that action is useless if the disaster does not occur (Larsson and Enander 1997, 11). Out of these reasons, Larsson and Enander found uncertainty to be the strongest justification for not preparing. Paton and Johnston also note that individuals can assume that the officials providing information are responsible for preparation actions. Moreover, individuals often overestimate their own knowledge (2001, 271). Richard Zoraster adds other possible variables that can influence “understanding and believing” public warnings, such as socioeconomic level, literacy, and lack of trust in authority (2010, 75). Many of the variables mentioned here focus on the thinking and characteristics of the individuals receiving preparation messages.

However, other variables point towards interactions between individuals and official messages. Kathleen Tierney, Christine Bevc, and Erica Kuligowski mention that

individuals can interpret disaster messages in unintended ways. To illustrate, they use a Red Cross campaign with the theme “I can’t stop a [tornado, flood, fire, hurricane, terrorist attack, etc.] but I can stop panic.” They note that this messaging did not work as intended because it actually sent the message that individuals were powerless in the face of disaster and that panic was inevitable (Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski 2006, 60). The preparation information attempting to be communicated can instead demotivate those it is supposed to move to action. Further complicating matters, the individuals receiving disaster information may disregard it by deeming it common knowledge. As part of her work on media and Hurricane Georges in Puerto Rico, Maria Perez-Lugo looked at the media-audience relationship during different phases of the storm (preparedness, impact, recovery). One of the issues she noted was that media safety recommendations often fell into what her interviewees considered “common sense knowledge, based on previous personal and collective experiences with hurricanes” (Perez-Lugo 2004, 218). Due to it being deemed common knowledge, many individuals disregarded the information.

What is interesting in looking at many of these complicating reasons are how social they are—they often involve interactions among the individuals, those around them, and their environment. Preparation, then, becomes an emergent act⁷, coming out of the interactions of a variety of factors, not simply the cause and effect relationship

7. This idea of preparation as emergent is influenced by Richard Bauman’s discussion of emergence and performance: “The emergent quality of performance resides in the interplay between communicative resources, individual competence, and the goals of the participants, within the context of particular situations” (1977, 38). Although the factors may be a bit different in this discussion, the idea of interplay is still relevant.

implied by the information-action link. If we think about preparation as emergent action, it becomes a much more complex process instead of a linear one. As such, preparation messaging produced by official outlets is received in varying ways by diverse audiences of residents. Those residents take that discussion and weigh it among other considerations relevant to their experiences, beliefs, and interests. The ways that residents prepare (or do not prepare) then emerges from these variables.

Also relevant to this discussion is the concept of risk perception, which has come into play within folklore studies in the context of health and belief. In *Once upon a Virus*, Diane Goldstein notes that many expert models of risk-related health behaviours tend to assume “that knowledge of risk factors will relate directly to the informed estimation of one’s own risk” but that these approaches are not successful due to “their lack of allowance for the cultural associations and meaning that feed individuals’ abilities to internalize and apply notions of risk to themselves” (2004, 163). A similar concept is at play with preparation in that the information-action link here is also not as straightforward and that preparation activities can also be rooted in the cultural contexts in which individuals live.

Though not often the explicit focus in disaster folklore research, the above discussion illustrates how the issue of preparation has a place in other fields, such as public health and psychology. Bringing folklore into the conversation helps to broaden the interdisciplinary perspectives on this topic. With interests in narrative—the construction of preparation by both the media and by residents—and emergence—how

actions emerge out of considerations of those taking action—a folkloristic approach can add to the discussion of this recurring public safety concern.

From a folklorist's perspective, preparation is interesting both because preparation itself and preparation narrative can be considered traditional. Preparation choices can be steeped in familial and community experience. For example, Stacy C. commented on her experiences from Metairie, Louisiana: “Usually everybody gets together so just in case somebody has a generator...They call them hurricane parties, so I mean typically everybody got together, whoever had the biggest house, we all got together and we hung out and made the best of it...get together, listen to the radio, have our candles and our batteries and all the flashlights and just...played games and did the best we could...” Preparation narratives, in turn, can also be passed among people. From my own experiences, stories about the days before storms have been shared among my own family members. The story of the days leading up to Hurricane Alicia in 1983, which is shared in Chapter Four by my mother, is a familiar one in my own family. The ways that preparation in action and in narrative can be transmitted and shared over time make it a topic that folklorists can and should consider. Also, ultimately, these traditional experiences have importance and value. As Diane Goldstein notes, “The power of the personal and the power of the local make them valuable tools for our cultural institutions” (2015, 137). Not only does looking at preparation as traditional resonate with the folklorist within our discipline, but it also has merit in its potential to inform and shift the

status quo by recognizing different ways of understanding and doing in the context of recurring environmental threat.

Methodology

This project employed a number of methods to explore how concerns surrounding hurricane preparation are discussed within the affected Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast community:

1. Independent fieldwork: Using the snowball technique, I conducted interviews with twenty-two informants focusing on the experiences of residents affected by the three hurricanes central to this study. The snowball technique involves finding eligible participants and, through the recommendation of those individuals, locating more participants (Morgan 2008, 816).

In my fieldwork, my informants ranged from being personally close to me, such as my parents, to being individuals whom I had never met. About two-thirds of my informants were female, one-third male. Most of my informants resided in urban or suburban areas. They tended to be Caucasian and generally came from middle-class backgrounds. There were, however, exceptions to these descriptions, but it is necessary to point out that the stories of my informants do not include

representative samples from all demographic groups in the region. A wider sample of socioeconomic and racial backgrounds, however, was represented in the materials collected by the archives and used to augment my own interviews.

This distinction is important because race and socioeconomic status have historically had impact on preparation in the Gulf coast region. For example, Susan L. Cutter and Mark M. Smith point out ways in which race had played into preparedness for Hurricane Camille in Mississippi, noting how segregation played into who was placed on particular evacuation buses and to which shelters they were taken. They write, "...the very process of evacuation functioned as a microcosm of the long battle between white segregationists and African Americans who pressed hard to enforce their civil rights" (Cutter and Smith 2009, para. 11). Issues of race continue to play a role in the region. Jeffrey A. Groen and Anne E. Polivka note that "Although the demographic composition of evacuees reflects the composition of prestorm residents of the Katrina affected region, the probability of returning varies considerably by demographic group" (2008, 41). Drawing from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey from October 2005 to October 2006, they noted that black residents were comparatively less likely to return than their white counterparts (54 percent and 82 percent respectively) (41). This is worth noting, in part, due to that returning or not

returning can shift the make up of communities in a region, and can impact certain racial or ethnic groups disproportionately.

Socioeconomic class can also be a factor that affects how preparation is enacted by residents. For instance, taking into account that, according to Cutter and Smith (2009), 27 percent of New Orleans Parish was below the poverty line and 21.8 percent of households were without a car, the decisions made by some residents can be impacted by access to finances and mobility. Further, as Elizabeth Fussell comments, “Low-income residents had fewer choices with respect to how to prepare for the imminent arrival of Katrina. Since the storm was at the end of the month and many low-income residents of New Orleans live from paycheck to paycheck, economic resources for evacuating were particularly scarce” (2006, para. 4). In this way, we can expect that preparation decisions can vary widely across segments of the population in these regions, given historical issues of race and class. The informants who participated in my research represent their experiences of preparation, but they do not necessarily represent all possible experiences.

2. Archival collection: I accessed several archival collections to locate a variety of interviews with residents. Three collections were used: the “Writing Katrina” Collection at the Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans; the Surviving

Katrina and Rita in Houston (SKRH) Collection; and the Through Hell and High Water: Katrina's First Responders Oral History Project at the Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection. Including archived interviews allowed me to broaden my collection of narratives with people outside of my own fieldwork.

3. Narrative analysis: Interviews provided the basis for examination of patterns of both overt methods of preparation, including information gathering, decision-making (to evacuate or not), and resource acquisition as well as underlying concerns about these activities. This work follows the textual and discourse analysis strategies of other narrative scholars, including Bennett (1989 and 1990), Goldstein (2009), Labov (1972), Wolfson (1978), and Shuman (2005 and 2006).
4. Newspaper analysis: Using a blend of content and structural analysis approaches, influenced by Ernest Zhang and Kenneth Fleming (2005) and Yoonhyeung Choi and Ying-Hsuan Lin (2008), I analyzed eighty-one newspaper articles from the *Times-Picayune* and the *Houston Chronicle* published in the days before Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Ike. From this analysis, I looked at how newspapers, which both assert an official stance and present official information from members of the government and meteorologists, construct not only a sense of what preparation is, but also a portrayal of residents in the preparation process.

These two newspapers were selected because they represent the largest mainstream papers for these cities. Although readership numbers do not guarantee exact numbers of individuals reading complete editions of newspapers, they do represent large potential audiences for these articles, both in physical newsprint and online.

Conclusion

At its core, this project explores how individual narratives of hurricane experience challenge, incorporate, and/or ignore more mainstream master narratives constructed by official sources. In order to hone the discussion, the area of focus within this thesis is the way in which issues of resource acquisition and preparation are constructed in these narratives. To do so, the discussion must consider how individuals, the media, and governmental entities address these issues. Also of interest to this thesis is how the history of storms and repeated threat of hurricanes molds both individual and institutional narrative. Third, this project considers how institutional narratives leverage personal narratives in their own construction, which may serve to use personal authority to bolster institutional authority or to undercut individual experience.

As seen in this section, natural disasters are not unfamiliar territory to scholars. While scholars have recognized the significance of narrative, and while numerous

researchers have written about natural disasters, few have looked at the intersection between preparation and resource acquisition and narrative entitlement, especially in an environment of competing and repeated environmental disaster. Often past research has focused on individual disasters, but, in doing so, the effects of long-term and repeated exposure to disaster situations have not been fully explored. In *Everything in Its Path*, Kai Erikson argues that we must “note that we are edging toward the notion that chronic conditions as well as acute events can induce trauma, and this, too, belongs in our calculations” (1976, 255). The Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast is a region that exists in both these situations, and exploring the intersection of narrative entitlement and resource accessibility here will broaden scholarly understandings of disaster behavior and response.

Chapter Two:

Hurricanes and the Texas-Louisiana Coast

The Gulf Coast of the United States is no stranger to hurricanes. As Barry D. Keim and Robert A. Muller point out in their climatological history, *Hurricanes of the Gulf of Mexico*, “Of the 63 major hurricane strikes around the shores of the Gulf from 1851 to 2007, 36—more than half of all the strikes—have assaulted the coastline from East Texas to the Florida Panhandle,” with the most frequent strikes from Morgan City, Louisiana to Gulfport, Mississippi (2009, 75). Also, the Gulf Coast region has experienced significant population growth in recent history. From 1960 to 2008, coastline counties bordering the Gulf of Mexico have grown in population by 8.4 million people (Wilson and Fischetti 2010, 4). Couple the frequency of hurricanes on the Gulf Coast with the population growth in this region of the United States, and the number of Gulf Coast residents with hurricane stories to tell is considerable.

Houston, Texas and New Orleans, Louisiana represent two of the largest population areas in the region. The Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown Metropolitan Statistical Area (The Greater Houston Area) is defined by the United States Census Bureau as including ten counties encompassing and surrounding the City of Houston (Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Montgomery, San Jacinto, and Waller Counties).



Figure 2. Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown Metropolitan Statistical Area. Map created using the United States Census Bureau TIGERweb Application (http://tigerweb.geo.census.gov/tigerwebmain/TIGERweb_main.html)

The Greater Houston Area is home to approximately 5,946,800 residents (Greater Houston Partnership 2009). This number takes into account Galveston, Texas, a barrier island roughly 35 miles (56.3 kilometers) away from Houston. The New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner Metropolitan Statistical area, which includes seven parishes (Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, and St. Tammany Parishes), has approximately 1,165,440 residents, based upon 2008 data from the Greater New Orleans website (Greater New Orleans, Inc. 2011).



Figure 3. New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner Metropolitan Statistical Area. Map created using the United States Census Bureau TIGERweb Application (http://tigerweb.geo.census.gov/tigerwebmain/TIGERweb_main.html)

As these cities are only about 350 miles (563 kilometers) apart, they share a history of hurricane and tropical storm vulnerability. Between the years 1960 and 2010, these neighboring metropolitan areas have each experienced threats from eighteen storms (tropical storms and hurricanes combined)⁸. New Orleans is particularly vulnerable, as Keim and Muller comment that the city's geographical placement makes it "...more storm

8. These numbers were calculated using the Historical Hurricane Tracks tool on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) (<http://csc.noaa.gov/hurricanes/>). It reflects storm tracks that crossed over an area encompassing a 65-nautical mile radius from each city. As such, it does not reflect storms outside of this area, such as storms that may have approached the region but changed course before crossing into the 65-nautical mile boundary.

prone for hurricane disasters than any other major American city” (2009, 131). These cities are connected by Interstate 10 (I-10), a major thoroughfare used in both regular commerce as well as travel and evacuation. Both cities are also connected to several other major roadways, including Interstate 45, U.S. Highway 59, and U.S. Highway 290 for Houston and Interstates 55 and 59 for New Orleans. The maps below illustrate the placement of highways in these regions, as well as the location of some of the communities included in the greater city areas.

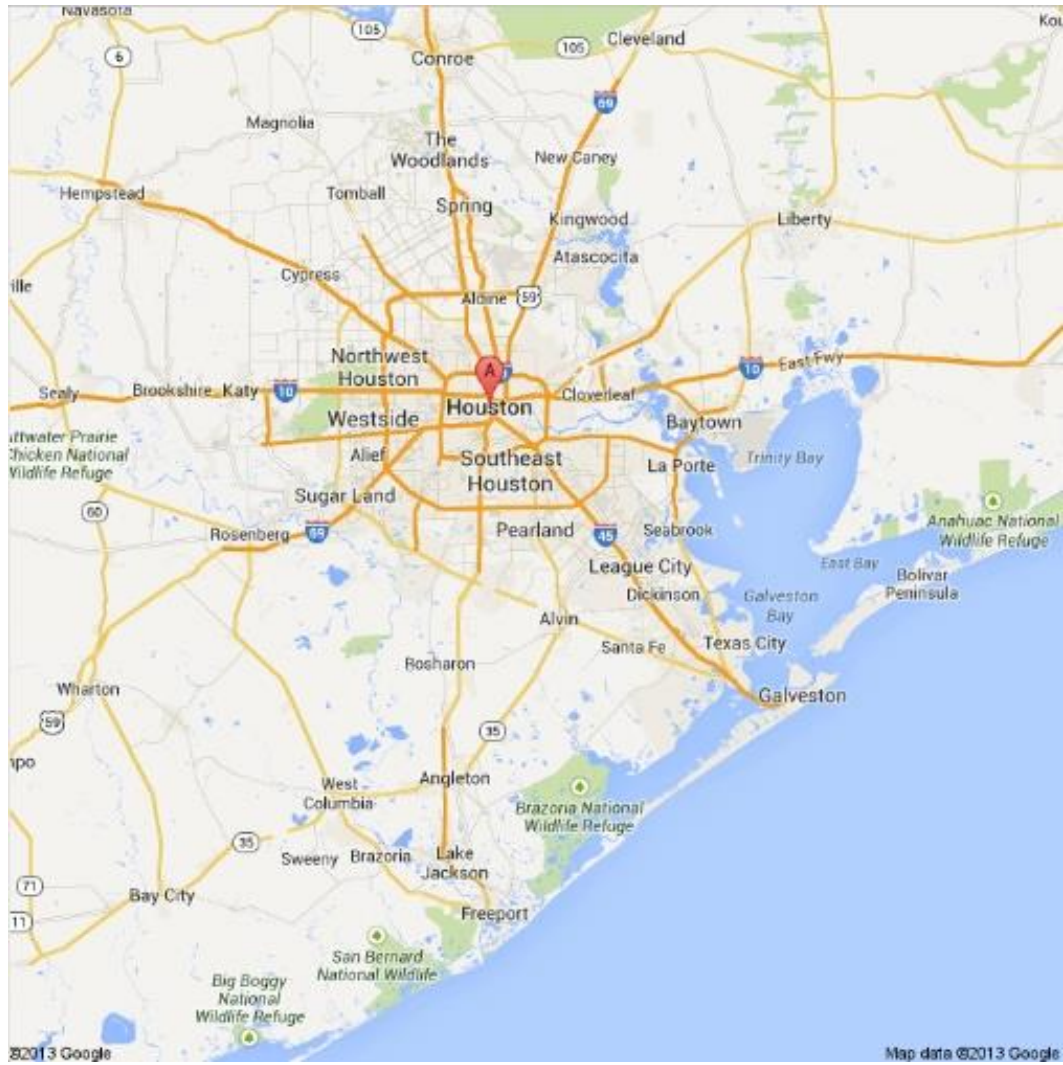


Figure 4. Map showing the roadways in the Houston area. Map data ©2013 Google.

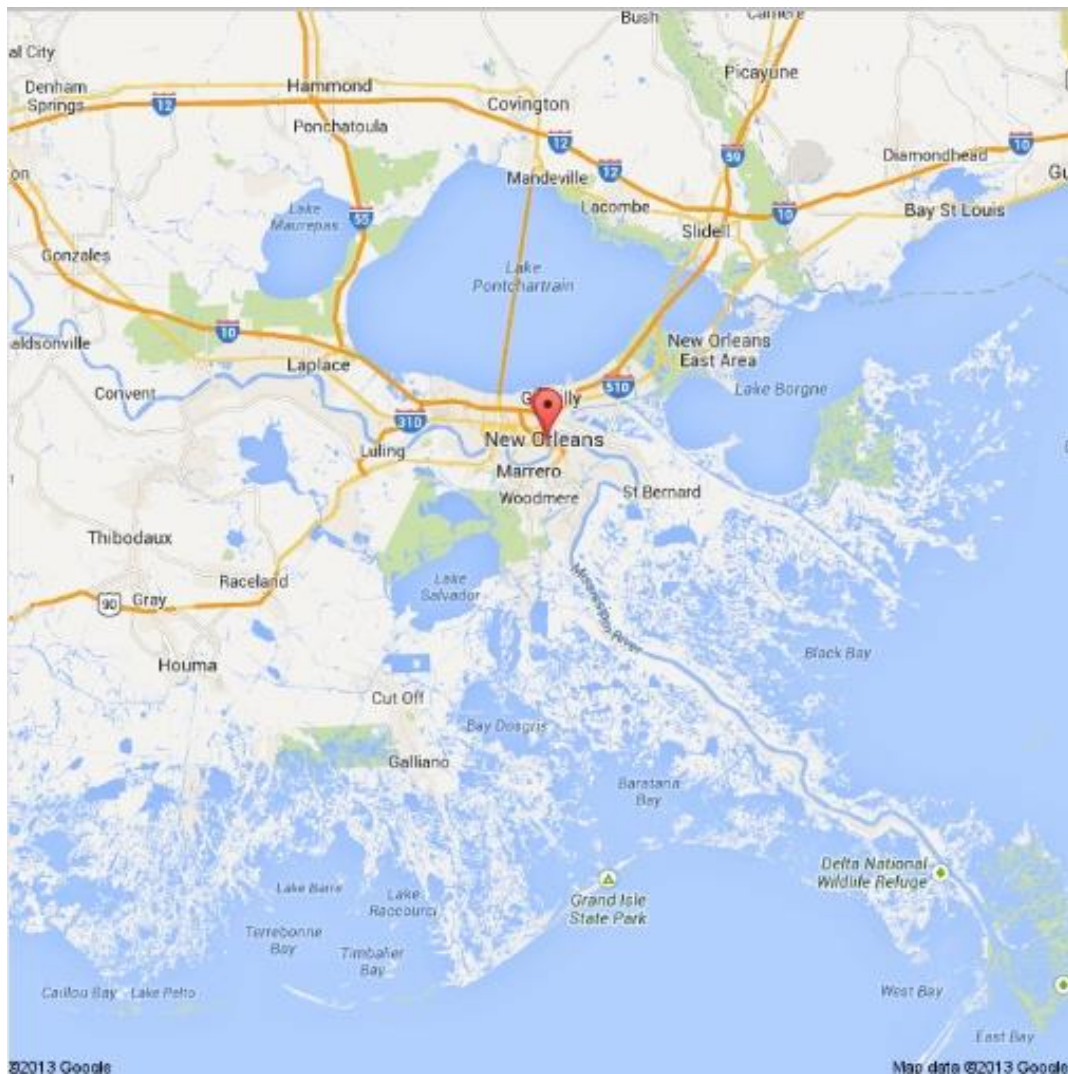


Figure 5. Map showing the roadways in the New Orleans area. Map data ©2013 Google.

In order to frame the discussion of hurricane experiences in the following chapters, this chapter defines tropical storms and hurricanes and provides a brief history of notable storms in these two areas. Even though the focus of most of the narratives in this thesis is on experiences of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Ike, the contextualization of these storms within the larger scope of storms in the eastern Texas/western Louisiana

coast offers a picture of how these specific events can feed into the broader cultural experiences of residents of the greater Houston and New Orleans areas. While this chapter does not address every storm in this region, it highlights many of the historically “major” storms that affected the region. This distinction is important because, for the individual resident, a storm not deemed major from a historical perspective may still be personally significant in its effect(s) on an individual and his/her family and friends.

Defining Storms

Tropical storms and hurricanes are both physical and social events. The storm is both a meteorological entity and an event that becomes woven into the experiences of individuals and communities (in both a small and large sense of community).

Tropical storms and hurricanes that come into the Gulf of Mexico are related events that fall under the overall category of tropical cyclones, which are storm systems (often just referred to as storms) that consist of an organized system of thunderstorms that form over the warm ocean water of the Atlantic Ocean. More technically speaking, the National Weather Service National Hurricane Center defines a tropical cyclone as

A warm-core non-frontal synoptic-scale cyclone, originating over tropical or subtropical waters, with organized deep convection and a closed surface wind circulation about a well-defined center. Once formed, a tropical cyclone is maintained by the extraction of heat energy from the ocean at high temperature

and heat export at the low temperatures of the upper troposphere. (National Hurricane Center 2011a)

The term tropical cyclone describes a spectrum of systems ranging from tropical depressions to tropical storms to hurricanes. These systems are generally differentiated by wind speed, thunderstorm intensity, and the level of organization in the storm circulation. Tropical depressions are the weakest of the three systems, having the least defined circulation and wind speeds of 38 miles per hour (62 kilometers per hour) or less. Tropical storms have more definition and maximum sustained wind speeds between 39 miles per hour (63 kilometers per hour) and 73 miles per hour (118 kilometers per hour). Hurricanes are the strongest of the three systems, with the most well defined circulations and sustained wind speeds of 74 miles per hour (119 kilometers per hour) or greater. As tropical cyclones become more organized and stronger, the center of the system will form the distinctive eye often pictured in hurricane images. The eye, though an area of relatively calm light winds at the axis of rotation for the cyclone, is surrounded by the eyewall that can have some of the highest winds of the system (Landsea 2011).

As tropical cyclones represent a spectrum of systems, storms that begin as tropical depressions may develop into tropical storms and, later, hurricanes if the ocean environment in which they develop is conducive to gaining strength and organization. Stronger systems also degrade, and hurricanes weaken to tropical storms and depressions and eventually lose their status as organized systems altogether. Storms tend to degrade

quickly after making landfall and moving over land⁹. Tropical cyclones are most likely to threaten the Gulf of Mexico during the Atlantic “hurricane season,” a period that runs from June 1 to November 30 (other regions of the world have differing “seasons” for tropical cyclones and related weather events). Although tropical storms and hurricanes can threaten southeast Texas and southwest Louisiana throughout hurricane season, the peak threat to the Texas coast is from August to September and the Louisiana coast from August to mid-October (National Weather Service, Southern Region Headquarters 2010 and 2010-2011; Blake, Landsea, and Gibney 2011, 22). Many of the memorable storms in this region occur during these periods. Hurricane season is common knowledge to area residents. As K.C. G. told me, “Every hurricane season, I think, everyone in Houston goes, ‘OK, it’s June 1st, it’s time to start thinking about this.’ And every season I go, ‘What am I going to do if a hurricane comes?’” In this way, the potential threat of hurricanes plays an annual role in residents’ lives, even as there is a chance that no major storm will threaten their area. Granted, not everyone shares the same seriousness to hurricane season. As New Orleans resident Ali J. noted in discussing why she never evacuated before Katrina,

I never do because it’s—the people—it’s funny. They all know that I say this about them. As you’ve been through hurricane season, people just “Oh, it’s horrible!” I mean, there can be, like, a storm off the coast of Africa and people here are buying water, Sterno, they’re freaking out, making hotel reservations, and

9. A hurricane or tropical storm officially makes landfall when the center of the system intersects with land (National Hurricane Center 2011a).

then they sit in traffic for a million hours to get to Baton Rouge. I'm like, no. It's always just this total bullshit thing¹⁰.

Even though residents take varying levels of response to hurricane season period, the time frame is one marked in residents' minds.

Once a storm system becomes categorized as a tropical storm in the Atlantic Ocean, it is provided a name by the National Hurricane Center from a list of names maintained by the World Meteorological Organization, which maintains lists of storm names for a six-year cycle (National Hurricane Center 2011b). The official naming of Atlantic storms started in 1953. Before that, storms were identified by the phonetic alphabet (from 1950-52) or not officially named at all (Landsea 2010). If a tropical storm progresses to hurricane status, the name given to that system remains the same.

After running out of phonetic alphabet names, the National Weather Bureau transitioned to using women's names. The names for hurricanes from 1954 until 1978 were solely female names. Liz Skilton¹¹ (2011) notes that the reason for using women's names is unclear, though it quickly caught on in the media as a way to talk about hurricanes. Skilton mentions one legend about the origin of the gender choice: "The most popular version [of this story] is that of a Key West weatherman named 'McAlphin' who

10. "Through Hell and High Water: Katrina's First Responders Oral History Project" Collection, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

11. Liz Skilton's presentation, "Talking about The Tempest: Constructing a Gendered Hurricane," provides an informative overview of ways people have described hurricanes historically, focusing largely on the naming conventions in the last one hundred years and the gendered-related issues associated with these conventions.

described a particular hurricane headed towards Florida as looking ‘just like my wife Gretchen.’ The joke about a terrorizing ‘Gretchen’ was quickly passed on and eventually inspired the female-only naming system” (Skilton 2011, 10). The use of women female-only names changed in 1978 for storms off the Pacific Coast, with worldwide transition occurring a year later (Skilton 2011, 14). After this, storm name lists have included both masculine and feminine names, though gender issues still surface in some descriptions of hurricanes. This tension is discussed in Macomber, Mallinson, and Seale’s (2011) work about sexuality and Hurricane Katrina novelty t-shirts, mentioned in the previous chapter.

The naming of these storms is interesting because, as Skilton comments, “Nothing about a *cyclonic natural force* is physically gendered or contains a specific sex” (2011, 1, emphasis in original). However, these storms are given names that both identify them and gender them. Anthropomorphizing these systems by using human names gives further dimension to them as being significant. Skilton notes that, well before the naming conventions of the 1950s, hurricanes were attributed with human qualities, that “...humanistic descriptions of hurricanes increased as direct impact of hurricanes on humans was noted” (2011, 7). Considering the increased impact on people as population size in hurricane-prone areas grew and exposure to media increased, the use of human names to label and discuss these storms grew in popularity appears quite sensible. A hurricane is not simply a weather system, it is an entity that can enter a life and alter it immensely. Calling it by a human name seems to recognize its identity, making it a character in a person’s life story. It is worth noting that names of particularly damaging

storms are retired by the World Meteorological Organization and never used again, so as to respect the damage, both in life and property, wrought by a storm.

The issue of potential gender bias and hurricane naming was the subject of a recent study by Kiju Jung, Sharon Shavitt, Madhu Viswanathan, and Joseph M. Hilbe. The authors posit that male-named hurricanes are considered riskier than female-named hurricanes due to ingrained cultural sexism, resulting in less preparation for “female” hurricanes. As they comment,

Feminine-named hurricanes (vs. masculine-named hurricanes) cause significantly more deaths, apparently because they lead to lower perceived risk and consequently less preparedness. Using names such as Eloise or Charlie for referencing hurricanes has been thought by meteorologists to enhance the clarity and recall of storm information. We show that this practice also taps into well-developed and widely held gender stereotypes, with potentially deadly consequences. (Jung et. al 2014, 8782)

To this thinking, people tend to downplay the danger of female-named hurricanes, which can result in those storms causing more damage and death. This research was picked up by media outlets, such as the *Washington Post* via a blog post on June 2, 2014. The post discussed the research findings and the reaction of several weather experts, who, though interested in having the findings explored further, felt that the effects of the name alone needed more support before being considered a significant factor. The reader comments to this article were more strongly sceptical, with comments ranging from criticisms of statistics and methodology to general lampooning about either the article (such as “I can’t believe I wasted my time reading this...so I’ll waste a little more by commenting. Like

someone commented, let's name them all with male names from now on, but then we would need to call them "himmacanes"!") or gender issues in general (such as "The real problem here is the female-named storms are only paid 77 cents on the dollar compared to male-named storms. Just kidding."). In this way, although the statistical analyses in the article may point towards the potential dangers from the gendered naming of hurricanes, the findings may not resonate with the audience whom the research is ultimately aiming to protect.

In the context of the research for this thesis, the issue of the implications of male-versus female-named hurricanes did not come up frequently. Most of the time, the referencing of gender came up in media coverage of storms, such as when a Houston public official noted "I don't think history will remember Rita as a lady" (Cappiello et al. 2005, para. 30). In the fieldwork interviews conducted for this thesis, the gendering of storms (beyond simply using the storm's name) did not surface much at all. One example was when Stacy C. described her refusal to evacuate for Hurricane Rita after her experiences with Hurricane Katrina¹²: "Over my dead body. I will not get in that car again... If Rita wants to take me, *she* can take me. I'm done. I am done" (emphasis mine). Here, the hurricane is a "she," but her femininity is not what influenced the response, her past experiences were¹³.

12. Stacy C.'s experiences are discussed more in Chapter Four.

13. This is not to say that naming conventions cannot influence decisions in hurricane preparation. Instead, I am pointing out that this did not seem to overtly surface much in my own fieldwork.

When a tropical cyclone reaches hurricane status, one of the most common descriptors of the system's intensity is its wind speed, as indicated as its scale number on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale¹⁴. The wind speed measurement considered for the scale is the maximum 1-minute surface wind speed (Blake, Landsea, and Gibney 2011, 3). With that in mind, the Saffir-Simpson scale includes five categories of hurricane intensity:

- Category 1: 74-95 miles per hour (119-153 kilometers per hour)
- Category 2: 96-110 miles per hour (154-177 kilometers per hour)
- Category 3: 111-130 miles per hour (178-209 kilometers per hour)
- Category 4: 131-155 miles per hour (210-249 kilometers per hour)
- Category 5: Greater than 155 miles per hour (Greater than 249 kilometers per hour)

It is worth noting, though, that the Saffir-Simpson scale does not take heavy rainfall into account in its categories of intensity (Blake, Landsea, and Gibney 2011, 3). In this way, although a Category 3 hurricane and above is considered “major” by the National Hurricane Center (National Hurricane Center 2011a), a “weaker” hurricane (and even a tropical storm) can produce heavy and destructive rainfalls. In other words, a hurricane's

14. Blake, Landsea, and Gibney (2011) note that the original Saffir-Simpson scale was based on wind, central pressure, and storm surge values and that it has only been since 1990 that the scale has come to categorize them only by maximum 1-minute sustained wind speed.

intensity on the Saffir-Simpson scale does not necessarily serve as a complete indicator of the threat a storm can pose to residents in its path. However, residents may play down the threat posed by a tropical cyclone at tropical storm or Category 1 level. Tropical Storm Allison, discussed later, serves as an excellent example of how a weaker system can still have significant impacts on people and communities. This sometimes also surfaces in offhand comments by residents. Vicki B. noted regarding early information about Hurricane Ike that, “As Ike was coming in as a Cat 1, Cat 2 hurricane, it was like, ‘Pfffbtt [a derisive sound]!’” Even though lower category storms can cause serious damage, their category label can reduce residents’ concern.

With this in mind, the task of describing storms as “major” or “memorable” becomes more than a simple task of knowing a storm’s category on the Saffir-Simpson scale. Keim and Muller point this out succinctly:

Potential factors [for choosing memorable Gulf Coast hurricanes to discuss in their book] include storm intensities in terms of the Saffir-Simpson scale...; maximum heights of storm surges; loss of life; monetary estimates of property, business, and infrastructure losses; the collective impacts on the socioeconomic functions of communities and cities; and, of course, the personal narratives of the survivors. (2009, 68)¹⁵

In their 2011 National Hurricane Center report, “The Deadliest, Costliest, and Most Intense United States Tropical Cyclones from 1851 to 2010 (and Other Frequently Requested Hurricane Facts),” Eric S. Blake, Christopher W. Landsea, and Ethan S.

15. The National Hurricane Center (2011a) defines a storm surge as an “An abnormal rise in sea level accompanying a hurricane or other intense storm, and whose height is the difference between the observed level of the sea surface and the level that would have occurred in the absence of the cyclone.”

Gibney present rankings of storm systems based on these factors of impact. Table 2 synthesizes the top ten storm systems in each category. Of these storms, ones that threatened the Greater Houston and Greater New Orleans areas are highlighted.

Table 2. Summary of top-ten hurricanes across several variables

| Deadliest Storms | Costliest Storms (values not adjusted for inflation) | Costliest Storms (values adjusted to 2010 U.S. dollars) | Most Intense Storms (defined as central pressure at landfall) |
|------------------------|--|---|---|
| 1. TX (1900) | 1. Katrina (2005) | 1. Katrina (2005) | 1. FL (1935) |
| 2. FL (1928) | 2. Ike (2008) | 2. Andrew (1992) | 2. Camille (1969) |
| 3. Katrina (2005) | 3. Andrew (1992) | 3. Ike (2008) | 3. Katrina (2005) |
| 4. LA (1893) | 4. Wilma (2005) | 4. Wilma (2005) | 4. Andrew (1992) |
| 5. SC/GA (1893) | 5. Ivan (2004) | 5. Ivan (2004) | 5. TX (1886) |
| 6. GA/SC (1881) | 6. Charley (2004) | 6. Charley (2004) | 6. FL/TX (1919) |
| 7. Audrey (1957) | 7. Rita (2005) | 7. Hugo(1989) | 7. FL (1928) |
| 8. FL (1935) | 8. Frances (2004) | 8. Rita (2005) | 8. Donna (1960) |
| 9. LA (1856) | 9. Allison (2001, tropical storm) | 9. Agnes (1972) | 8. FL/MS/AL (1926) [tie] |
| 10. FL/MS/AL (1926) | 10. Jeanne (2004) | 10. Betsy (1965) | 10. Carla (1961) |

Source: Data adapted from Blake, Landsea, and Gibney 2011, 7-13.

This table illustrates two points. One, these two cities have a history of being threatened by significant storms as defined in a variety of ways. Two, storms that can be defined as significant by one measurement may not be considered as significant by another measurement. Granted, in the case of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, a storm can have significance across multiple measurements. However, the perspective taken when looking at tropical storms and hurricanes does contribute to how we conceptualize the magnitude of the storm. This process of conceptualization comes into play in the discussion here

because both lay and official sources often refer to storms in the past when discussing storms in the present. By doing so, they can evoke different images of danger, from death to destruction. References of past storms, therefore, are part of the discussion of media narrative (Chapter Three) and lay narrative (Chapter Four).

A Selection of Past Storms

For the purposes of framing the research in the coming chapters, the next section of this chapter highlights some of the notable storms over the last fifty years (with an exception being made for the 1900 Galveston Hurricane). As has been discussed previously, the labeling of a storm as major or important is a relative process, and this section only seeks to provide thumbnail sketches of some of the storms in the region. For the most part, these sketches report the basic physical elements of the storm, such as intensity and costliness. As most of the storms here occurred within the last fifty years, they are weather events that can still live on in the recent memory of area residents within the last few generations—and, indeed, mentions of some of these storms did surface in the interviews collected in the course of this research process—and they form some of the basis of hurricane culture in the region. The storms are addressed in chronological order. For the sake of covering basic details of storms across several decades, each storm is

touched upon briefly. Later chapters will delve more deeply into three specific storms, weaving in details that go beyond basic physical dimensions.

The 1900 Galveston Hurricane

On September 8, 1900, Galveston Island was struck by a hurricane that would become colloquially known as “The Great Storm.” At the turn of the twentieth century, Galveston was a prominent city, described as the “third richest city in the United States in proportion to population” (Scharnweher, ed. quoted in Greene and Kelly 2000, 3). As David G. McComb writes of Galveston at the end of the nineteenth century: “Galveston still was the most important port [of Texas], it was the first to have telephones and electricity, it had the best newspapers and theater, it had the greatest variety of sports, it had the most individual wealth and the most advanced architecture, and it was a place of unique, sensual beauty which every visitor could feel” (1986, 118). However, as the city stood directly on the Gulf Coast and only at a maximum elevation of 8.7 feet (2.65 meters) above sea level (Greene and Kelly 2000, 5), the city was extremely vulnerable to hurricane threats. The city’s status of prominence, therefore, took a significant hit when the storm ravaged the city, and the hurricane became the deadliest storm to strike the mainland United States to date. Current reports place the deaths caused by the 1900 storm to be approximately 8,000, with the possibility of being up to 12,000 (Blake, Landsea, and Gibney 2011, 7). The cost of life from this storm is significant, and the hurricane is a notable part of Galveston history.



Figure 6. The 1900 Storm Memorial by David W. Moore, located on the Galveston Seawall.

Unfortunately, the residents of Galveston were provided little warning of the storm threat posed by the hurricane. No hurricane warning was ever issued by the

Weather Bureau in Washington, and Isaac Cline, chief of the Galveston Weather Bureau office, only issued a storm warning. As Keim and Muller note, “...most city officials and the public, including Cline and the other Weather Bureau personnel, anticipated a day of stormy weather but nothing that had not been experienced before” (2009, 7). Hence, little preparation or evacuation occurred, and residents went about their business, some even taking time to enjoy the pleasant weather that preceded the landing of the hurricane.

The Category 4 hurricane devastated the city. Hundreds of acres of shoreline were cleared by the storm, and “[thousands] of houses, the wharves, railroad bridges, and telegraph connections to the outside world were lost” (Greene and Kelly 2009, 4). The city faced huge struggles to recover, which included the challenges of disposing of large numbers of dead bodies, a task that was first attempted by burial at sea. When that failed, disposal was accomplished through the use of funeral pyres. Despite the setbacks and tragedies experienced by Galveston and its residents in the 1900 Hurricane, the city was rebuilt. Part of the rebuilding of the city included the creation of a seawall and the raising and grading of the entire city. The seawall, initially completed in 1904, initially stood 17 feet high and stretched for 3.3 miles (Galveston and Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library 2004). Over the following decades, the seawall has been developed and extended to protect a larger portion of the island. However, although the city was revived, Galveston never regained its prominence as a major city in Texas, and Houston became the major port city of the area with the opening of its Ship Channel in 1914. The 1900

Galveston Hurricane stands out as a significant storm not only due to its large death toll but also its impact in the historical development of cities in the region.

Hurricane Carla

Hurricane Carla struck the Texas Gulf Coast on September 11, 1961. Although it struck as an intense Category 4 storm near Port O'Connor (well over 100 miles [160 kilometers] southwest of Galveston), it still struck Galveston with tropical storm-force winds (Keim and Muller 2009, 147). Carla created a maximum storm surge of 22 feet, with flooding at some parts of the Texas coast that went ten miles inland, and a nine foot tide at Galveston (McComb 1986, 26; Keim and Muller 2009, 151). In addition, Carla spawned 26 tornadoes during its strike on Texas. One tornado, out of the four that hit the area, caused notable damage in Galveston. Tornado activity in Galveston cost the city 120 buildings and the lives of six people (McComb 1986, 149).

What is particularly important to note, though, is the damage avoided with Hurricane Carla. Due to early warnings, there was an evacuation of about a quarter of a million people from Galveston and the surrounding areas (Larson 1999, 272). In addition, the Galveston seawall held up to Carla's force, which is why most of the damage wrought by the storm resulted from the tornadoes that the hurricane caused, not the storm surge and flooding. In addition, the news coverage surrounding Carla marked the beginning of the national career of long-time news anchor Dan Rather and the first time that televised

news showed a live radar image of a hurricane on air (Keim and Muller 2009, 147; Holguin 2009).

Hurricane Betsy

Hurricane Betsy threatened the Gulf Coast in September 1965. After initially making landfall near the southern tip of Florida as a Category 3 storm, Betsy moved into the Gulf of Mexico and ballooned into a Category 5 hurricane. The hurricane landed again on September 10 as a Category 3 storm at Grand Isle, Louisiana, just 50 miles (80.5 kilometers) south of New Orleans. The winds at New Orleans were significantly weaker, measured at speeds near Category 1 strength (Keim and Muller 2009, 84).

Although the winds from Betsy seem less significant in relative terms, the ten-foot storm surge breached the levees protecting New Orleans, causing “massive breaks” in the levee system (Keim and Muller 2009, 86; Lewis 2003, 82). About 250,000 people evacuated the area, and about 150,000 homes were flooded (Keim and Muller 2009, 85). The aftermath from Betsy marked the first time in the United States that a hurricane exceeded \$1 billion in damages, earning the nickname “Billion Dollar Betsy” (Keim and Muller 2009, 84). Needless to say, Betsy was nowhere near the last hurricane to cause this amount of damage or more. By the time that Blake, Landsea, and Gibney compiled their list of the top 30 costliest mainland United States tropical cyclones from 1900-2010, Betsy only ranked 25th place.

Hurricane Camille

Hurricane Camille made landfall on August 17, 1969 at Venice, Louisiana, southeast of New Orleans. The center of the storm missed New Orleans by only about 50 miles (80.5 kilometers). As a Category 5 storm, Camille had maximum sustained winds between 190 and 205 miles per hour (305 to 330 kilometers per hour), making it the strongest landfall in United States history (Keim and Muller 2009, 87). As metropolitan New Orleans was on the weaker side of the storm circulation (colloquially called the “clean” side of the storm¹⁶), it did not sustain as much damage as might be expected given the strength of the storm. Also, advance warnings and the implementation of mandatory evacuation minimized the loss of life. On the eastern side of the landfall, however, residents were faced with more destruction. As Keim and Muller write: “Along the Mississippi Coast, almost all buildings from the Louisiana border to Biloxi and up to three miles inland were destroyed, much of it by the high-record storm surge of 22.6 feet at Bay St. Louis” (2009, 87-88). The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also noted “less reliable [high-water] marks” at Pass Christian of 24.2 and 24.6 feet (qtd. in Lewis 2003, 82).

Approximately 140 people drowned due to Hurricane Camille, most in Mississippi. In addition, the storm was so strong that more deaths occurred in West

16. Storms in the northern hemisphere rotate counter-clockwise, which means that the easterly side of the storm is “the most powerful part...with the strongest winds, heaviest rains and most energy that can lead to a high storm surge” (Myrie 2011). This side is often referred to as the “dirty” side of the storm. The westerly, “clean” side of the storm, in contrast, has less energy and moisture.

Virginia and Virginia due to people being taken off-guard by floods and mudflows caused by Camille's inland rains (Keim and Muller 2009, 88). Camille caused \$1.42 billion in damages (in 1969 currency, \$9.282 billion by 2010 standards) (Blake, Landsea, and Gibney 2011, 9-11).

Both Camille and Betsy caused strong impressions on residents who experienced them and who have heard stories about them. While talking about the time period before Hurricane Katrina, Ali J. noted the moment she decided to evacuate:

I went and helped her [a friend] pack up animals at her animal shelter, and then, you know, was still, like, just totally undecided [about evacuating]. Then the weather lady came on. The point of my story is the weather lady came on TV that night and said, "If you stay, you need to get an ax and have it in your attic," because during Hurricane Betsy that's where so many people drowned and died, in their attics. When I heard that, I said, I probably should leave town, so we did the next day¹⁷.

The memory of death by waiting out flood waters in an attic resonated enough with Ali J. to push her into evacuating for the first time. Area resident Glen K. had first-hand memories of staying in his attic during these storms. He noted,

I remember being in our attic on Magazine Street as the water was coming up. It didn't get really high there. My dad was in the National Guard and they actually had to go to Chalmette [Louisiana] to go...And they had to leave us during the storm, and told us to get in our attic. Because they were hearing all they water levels down in St. Bernard and all and they were getting scared because the water was coming up in New Orleans, but it never did get really bad. But I remember my dad and the news reports. Same thing with them getting people off of the

17. "Through Hell and High Water: Katrina's First Responders Oral History Project" Collection, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

rooftops. People having to bust holes through their attics to get out and get on the roof¹⁸.

Even though Glen K.'s experience is not of direct experience with storm waters, his memories from his father's experience have remained strong to him. Also worth noting here is the parallel made in the last two sentences between memories of these older storms and the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina, decades later. These connections with previous storm experiences are discussed further in Chapters Three and Four.

Hurricane Alicia

Unlike the other storms mentioned thus far, Hurricane Alicia was not identified as a tropical storm until it was close to shore, on August 15, 1983, when it was only 300 miles (483 kilometers) southeast of Galveston. By the time it landed on August 18, Alicia was a Category 3 storm (Keim and Muller 2009, 147). As the eye passed over the far west end of Galveston Island (McComb 1986, 26), Galveston found itself on the dirty side of the storm, which placed the city in a vulnerable position. Minimal evacuations occurred before the storm. Keim and Muller note that only ten percent of Galveston area residents evacuated, and due to the suddenness of the storm, by the time the storm had become a major concern, evacuation off the island was impossible (2009, 147). Alicia had the potential to be extremely dangerous for the area.

18. "Writing Katrina" Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

The Galveston seawall again held up under the threat of the hurricane, and the city behind the seawall had minimal damage, most of which was due to winds. The area not protected by seawall, however, did not fare as well. Alicia washed away between 50 to 200 feet of beach (McComb 1986, 149). The erosion caused some private property to end up on public land, which, due to the Texas Open Beaches Act, caused legal issues as to whether property owners could rebuild on their land or repair their buildings (National Weather Service, Houston/Galveston 2010). Total damages caused by Alicia are estimated at around \$4.6 billion (2010 values) (Blake, Landsea, and Gibney 2011, 11). Alicia also claimed 21 lives, although no deaths were on Galveston Island (Keim and Muller 2009, 147; McComb 1986, 149). Some damage was noted in Houston, as well, when winds blew gravel off of downtown skyscrapers, which broke windows on several buildings and led to changes in building codes (Keim and Muller 2009, 147-148).

Tropical Storm Allison

Tropical Storm Allison is the only tropical storm addressed in this section, but it stands out due to the impact it had on the Greater Houston area. Interestingly, there were two Tropical Storm Allisons of note, one in 1989 and the other in 2001, the latter being more the focus of this discussion. Both storms landed near Freeport, Texas, south of Houston, and both storms looped around southeast Texas. The 2001 storm, however, has the distinction of being the only tropical storm-level cyclone deemed destructive enough to have its name retired.

On June 5, 2001, Tropical Storm Allison made landfall around Freeport with sustained winds around 50 miles per hour (80.5 kilometers per hour). The storm moved slowly across eastern Texas as a tropical depression, as far north as around Lufkin, before turning and drifting back to the Gulf of Mexico, where Allison regained strength. Later, Allison landed again near Morgan City, Louisiana and moved across the southeast United States as a depression, before becoming a tropical storm again over Atlantic waters near Atlantic City, New Jersey (Keim and Muller 2009, 96). In total, Allison caused 41 deaths (23 in Texas) and almost \$11 billion (2010 values) in damages (Stewart 2002; Blake, Landsea, and Gibney 2011, 11).

Allison is most noted for the damages it brought upon Houston during three rounds of extremely heavy rain. The multiple rainfalls occurred due to the slow movement of the system and the looping path it took across southeast Texas. According to Keim and Muller these three rainfall periods drenched the area (2009, 96):

1. June 5, 2001: up to 8-12 inches (203-305 mm) of rain in Houston and parts of Harris County
2. June 7, 2001: 5-12 inches (127-305 mm) in the area
3. June 8-9, 2001: 4 inches (102 mm) of rain an hour (26 inches [660 mm] measured by one particular gauge)

The heavy rain caused a standstill in the Houston area, with considerable flooding that made many major roadways impassible. Thousands of homes and vehicles were flooded. Also, among the flooding losses was approximately \$2 billion (2007 values) of damage to the Texas Medical Center in Houston, the largest medical center in the world (Keim and Muller 2009, 97). Damages were incurred as bottom levels of hospitals and other medical facilities were flooded and thousands of patients had to be moved to other locations. Overall, Allison is notable because of the surprising amount of impact it had for its seemingly weak intensity. As Keim and Muller note, “These [the amount of Allison’s damage] are amazing losses for such a weak tropical meteorological system—hardly identifiable on the daily weather maps for North America” (2009, 97).

Hurricane Gustav

Hurricane Gustav entered the Gulf of Mexico at the end of August 2008. While in the Gulf, the storm grew in size, though wind shear and dry air seem to have presented the storm from significantly strengthening (Beven II and Kimberlain 2009, 2). On September 1, 2008, the storm made landfall near Cocodrie, Louisiana, approximately 60 miles (96.6 kilometers) southeast of New Orleans as a Category 2 storm (Keim and Muller 2009, 190).

Two days before Gustav’s landfall, Ray Nagin, Mayor of New Orleans, called for an evacuation of the city. Due to Nagin’s comments about Gustav being “the mother of

all storms¹⁹” and the “storm of the century” (Nossiter and Dewan 2008) and that Gustav was the first hurricane to seriously threaten New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (see next section), large numbers of New Orleans residents left the area. Approximately 1.9 million people were evacuated, making the evacuation for Gustav the “largest and most orderly evacuation in Louisiana history” (Keim and Muller 2009, 190).

Due to Gustav having weakened to tropical storm strength by the time it was over New Orleans, damages to the city were less than expected, and storm waters did not breach the levees. Damages to other parishes around New Orleans, however, were greater. Louisiana cities, such as Houma and Baton Rouge, were much more affected. For example, Baton Rouge sustained more property loss from Gustav than from Hurricane Betsy in 1965 and Hurricane Andrew in 1992, two significantly destructive storms to that area (Keim and Muller 2009, 192). Overall, even though Gustav did not do much damage to New Orleans, it took 43 lives in the United States and cost between \$4.8 and \$8.3 billion in damages (Keim and Muller 2009, 192; Blake, Landsea, and Gibney 2011, 11).

19. Given that the storm had a masculine name, it is interesting to see Mayor Nagin call it a “mother.” Granted, it could be argued that the essence of the use of “mother” in this manner could also be invoking the idea of “mother***er,” a term that would not be appropriate for a public official to exclaim.

Three Particular Storms

This section provides basic information about the three particular hurricanes discussed throughout the rest of this project: Hurricane Katrina (2005), Hurricane Rita (2005), and Hurricane Ike (2008). Each of these hurricanes has had notable effects on the recent history of the Greater Houston area and Greater New Orleans area, and they were the primary foci of the interviews conducted in the research process. As media, government, and personal narratives about these storms will be the subjects of deeper discussion in the following chapters, the descriptions in this section serve to provide preliminary information to place these particular storms alongside the other systems previously discussed.

Hurricane Katrina

According to the information presented in Table 2, Hurricane Katrina is the only storm to be in the top 10 for each of the dimensions addressed by Blake, Landsea, and Gibney's report. The myriad of impacts that Katrina had on the country, especially in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, combined to make Katrina one of the most devastating natural disasters in United States history.

Hurricane Katrina occurred during the record-making 2005 hurricane season, during which 27 named storms were identified²⁰, including several threats specifically to

20. After the list of official hurricane names is exhausted, the National Hurricane Center names hurricanes after letters in the Greek alphabet (Alpha, Beta, and so on).

the Gulf Coast region. Hurricane Cindy, although at the time at tropical storm strength, had already visited the New Orleans area, only causing minimal damage (Keim and Muller 2009, 19). When Hurricane Katrina entered into the Gulf around August 26 (three days before making landfall near New Orleans), the storm was a minimal Category 1. Predictive models initially had the risk of a landfall near New Orleans as very low (Keim and Muller 2009, 25). However, the storm quickly intensified, and the predictive models changed tracks for the storm. By the end of August 26, the winds were up to 105 miles per hour (169 kilometers per hour), and “the official consensus prediction [of weather models was that the threat was focused on]...Plaquemines Parish and New Orleans” (Keim and Muller 2009, 26), marking a dramatic change in strength and threat to the New Orleans area. Over the course of the next day, the predicted landfall of the storm jogged a bit to the east, to southeast Louisiana/south Mississippi, and Katrina continued to grow from a Category 3 to a Category 4 storm. By nine o’clock in the morning on August 27, two Louisiana parishes called for mandatory evacuations because of the storm, and at five o’clock that evening, New Orleans mayor, Ray Nagin, declared a state of emergency for the city and called for a voluntary evacuation (although many residents chose not to heed the voluntary evacuation order).

On August 28, the day before landfall, Katrina grew to a Category 5 storm over Gulf waters, and the threat for landfall had refocused again near New Orleans. That morning, at 9:30, Mayor Nagin issued a mandatory evacuation (less than 24 hours before landfall) and designated the Superdome, the major sports arena, as a shelter of last resort.

It is estimated that 100,000 people remained in the New Orleans area even after the mandatory evacuation order (Keim and Muller 2009, 29).

Katrina ended up taking a path similar to that of Hurricane Camille, about 36 years earlier. The storm made landfall as a Category 3 storm at Plaquemines Parish in the early morning of August 29. The storm brought with it a strong storm surge, flooding waters, strong winds, and tornadoes that wreaked havoc in the area. (In total, Katrina caused 43 tornadoes, though most of them touched down in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi and none were reported in Louisiana [Knabb, Rhome, and Brown 2011, 10].) The New Orleans levees crumbled, causing widespread flooding to the area²¹. The flooding was worsened by the levees on the Lake Pontchartrain side of the city being breached by the storm surge of lake waters caused by shifting winds as the hurricane moved inland. There was extensive damage to roadways and buildings in the Greater New Orleans area, and to many areas on the Gulf Coast in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. As Keim and Muller note: “The three nineteenth-century beach towns just east of New Orleans—Waveland, Bay St. Louis, and Pass Christian—all heavily damaged by Hurricane Camille in 1969—were virtually swept off the map by the storm surge” (2009, 31-32).

21. There is also the belief that the levees were intentionally blown up.

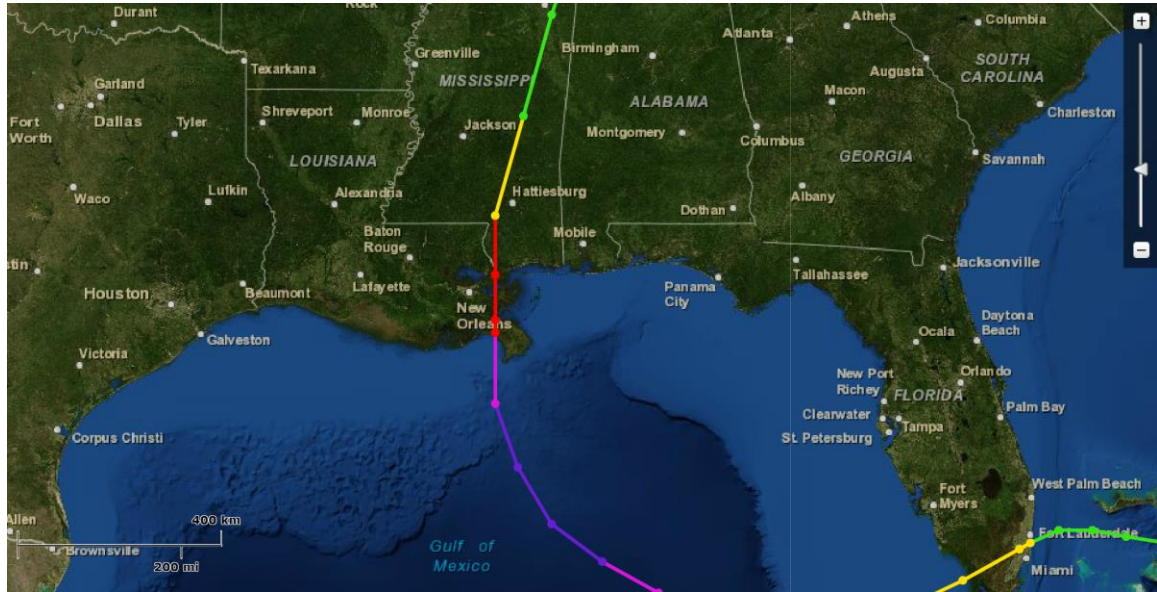


Figure 7. Map showing the track of Hurricane Katrina. Map created using the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Historical Hurricane Tracks database (<http://csc.noaa.gov/hurricanes/>)

After the storm, thousands were rescued from New Orleans in large-scale rescue attempts, although, during the days of evacuations huge numbers of people were stranded on tops of buildings and on roadways. Other areas were served by rescue attempts, although many of these were delayed due to lack of resources or accessibility to the area. For example, federal disaster responders did not reach Bay St. Louis until more than three days after Katrina made landfall (Keim and Muller 2009, 35). Large numbers of Katrina-affected people were displaced, with nearly a quarter of a million people in “officially designated shelters and hotels in Texas” (Keim and Muller 2009, 39). According to the *Houston Chronicle*, about 150,000 of those individuals came to Houston itself (2006, para. 1). From the tri-state area of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, more than 1.7 million people were displaced and ended up in almost all of the 50 states (Keim and

Muller 2009, 39). The death toll from Hurricane Katrina varies from about 1,200 (Blake, Landsea, and Gibney 2011, 7) to 1,350 (Keim and Muller 2009, 43). The mass movement of people and widespread damage made accurate death toll counts difficult.

In New Orleans, the levee breaches were not closed off until September 5, 2005, and, by that time, eighty percent of the city was flooded (Keim and Muller 2009, 39). The Army Corps of Engineers did not deem the city dry until October 11. The damages from Katrina made it the costliest storm in United States history with \$106 billion in damages (2010 values) (Blake, Landsea, and Gibney 2011, 11). The hurricane caused population loss as well, with the U.S. Census estimating that coastline counties affected by Hurricane Katrina had an overall two percent decrease in population²² (Wilson and Fischetti 2010, 20).

Hurricane Rita

Less than a month after Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Rita threatened the Texas-Louisiana coast. After entering the Gulf on September 20, Rita grew to a Category 5 storm. While in the Gulf, the landfall projections targeted New Orleans, still reeling from Katrina, and later Houston and Galveston, where thousands of Katrina survivors were trying to recover (Keim and Muller 2009, 104). Fortunately for both cities, Rita weakened while still over the Gulf. Hurricane Rita finally made landfall on September 24 as a Category 3 storm near the Texas-Louisiana border.

22. Wilson and Fischetti's report does not specify the types of decrease included in this figure (relocation, death, etc.).

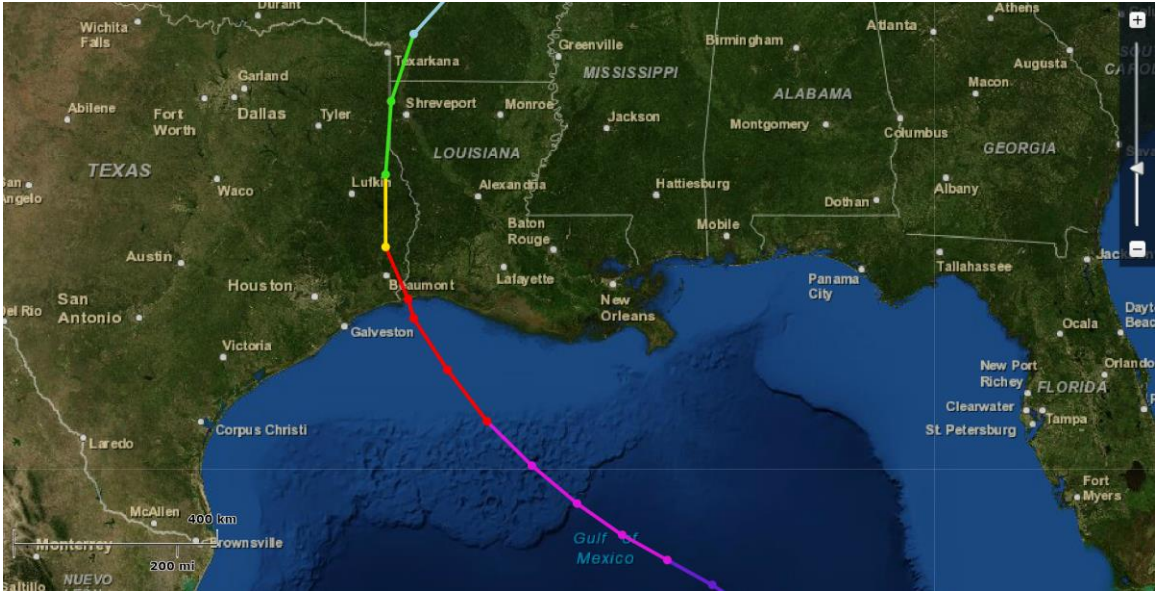


Figure 8. Map showing the track of Hurricane Rita. Map created using the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Historical Hurricane Tracks database (<http://csc.noaa.gov/hurricanes/>)

In the days leading up to landfall, when both New Orleans and Houston-Galveston were in the direct projected path of the storm—and memories of Katrina were still fresh in the memories of residents—mass evacuations were ordered in several locations on the Gulf Coast. The evacuations for Rita were the largest in United States history at that time, with an estimated three million people evacuating across all the states threatened by Rita (Keim and Muller 2009, 104). In Texas alone, the evacuation may have been larger than two million people (Knabb, Brown, and Rhome 2011, 8). The evacuation of Houston-Galveston received a great deal of media attention, due to the extensive gridlock on the highways leaving the region to the north and the west. Residents from the area who evacuated often found themselves on the highways between

twelve to thirty-six hours, depending upon their planned destination (frequently Austin or Dallas, cities usually three to five hours away from the area).

The direct death toll of Rita was low in large-scale terms, with only seven deaths resulting from the storm itself (Knabb, Brown, and Rhome 2011, 8). Most of Rita's toll on life was from the mass evacuations in Texas. This toll is reported as including at least 55 lives. Twenty-four of these deaths were from a bus accident on the way to Dallas, a majority of passengers being elderly nursing home residents from Bellaire, a neighborhood within the Houston area (Belli and Falkenberg 2005). Other deaths occurred due to carbon monoxide poisoning and heat exhaustion during the evacuation effort.

Hurricane Rita caused damages estimated at between \$11.8 billion (2010 values) and \$12.037 billion (Blake, Landsea, and Gibney 2011, 11; Knabb, Brown, and Rhome 2011, 8). Even though New Orleans missed much direct damage from Rita, the storm still caused some levee breaching and flooding, causing setbacks to the Katrina repairs (Keim and Muller 2009, 142). Considerable damage occurred in the area near the Texas-Louisiana border. As Knabb, Brown, and Rhome note, "The storm surge of Rita devastated entire communities in coastal areas of southwestern Louisiana... Almost every structure in these areas was destroyed, and some were completely swept away" (2011, 8). However, media attention tended to focus on the evacuation problems surrounding Rita, rather than on the damages done to these smaller towns near the border.

Hurricane Ike

Less than three years after Hurricane Rita, and less than two weeks after Hurricane Gustav, Hurricane Ike threatened the Houston-Galveston area. While in the Gulf of Mexico in mid-September 2008, Ike became a Category 3 storm, though it initially had the potential to grow to Category 4 intensity (Keim and Muller 2009, 194). However, the storm still was predicted to create large storm surges to Galveston Island and the nearby Bolivar Peninsula, to the east of the island. On September 13, Ike landed on Galveston Island as a Category 2 storm. Keim and Muller point out that the storm track ended up crossing on the eastern side of the island, which helped to protect the west end of the island (where the seawall does not extend) and the petrochemical companies farther west on the coast. They continue to note, though, that “the jog [in storm track] intensified the potential for disaster along the Houston Ship Channel, the greatest concentration of petrochemical complexes along the Gulf Coast” (Keim and Muller 2009, 194).

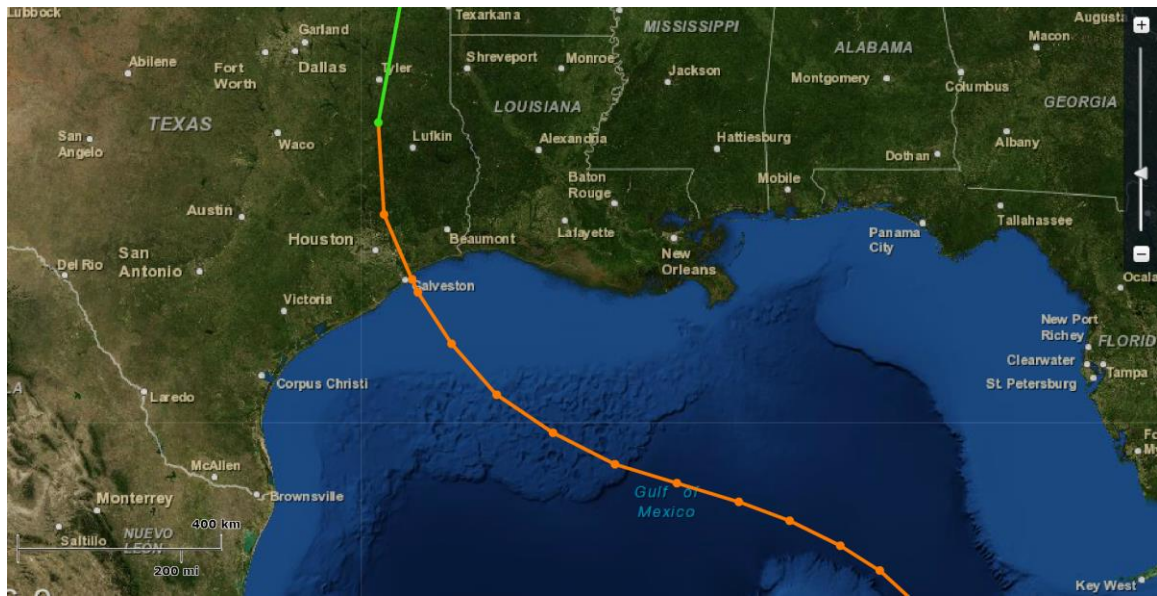


Figure 9. Map showing the track of Hurricane Ike. Map created using the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Historical Hurricane Tracks database (<http://csc.noaa.gov/hurricanes/>)

Before the storm made landfall, a large number of residents evacuated the threatened areas. Another large-scale evacuation included about 2.2 million people from Texas, with about 130,000 evacuating in Louisiana (Keim and Muller 2009, 194). Compared to the evacuation for Hurricane Rita, however, this evacuation included noticeably fewer residents. Indeed, many residents chose to remain in areas under mandatory evacuation order, a number estimated at about 140,000 people (Keim and Muller 2009, 194). In this way, although many residents chose to leave, a considerable amount of people remained in threatened areas.

The storm surge on Bolivar Peninsula was between 15 and 20 feet (approximately 4.5 to 6.1 meters), with an average of 4 feet (1.2 meters) of water covering the peninsula (Berg 2010, 6). The storm surge on Galveston Island was less strong, but still between 10

to 15 feet (approximately 3 to 4.5 meters). Ike is credited as creating the largest storm surge since Hurricane Carla (National Weather Service, Southern Region Headquarters. 2010-2011). The rainfall from Ike reached a maximum measurement of 18.90 inches (480 millimeters) just north of Houston (Berg 2010, 7).

The effects of Ike were felt over a large area. In Texas and Louisiana, about 2.6 million people were without power (Keim and Muller 2009, 195), and many people were without power for weeks after the storm. According to Berg (2010), there were 20 direct deaths in Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas, with 12 from Galveston and the surrounding areas. In addition, there were 64 indirect deaths in Texas because of Ike (Berg 2010, 9). The damages incurred by Ike are estimated to be about \$27.8 billion (2010 values) (Blake, Landsea, and Gibney 2011, 11). In Houston, many downtown buildings were damaged, including skyscrapers and Reliant Stadium. More striking, though, was the extensive damage to Galveston and the Bolivar Peninsula. Many buildings in downtown Galveston were flooded with about 6 feet (1.83 meters) of water, which coated the inside of buildings with debris, and seven buildings near the seawall were destroyed (Keim and Muller 2009, 195). Figure 10 illustrates the damage that occurred in informant Sharan Z.'s bookstore in Galveston.



Figure 10. Sign in Sharan Z's bookstore in Galveston. The sign notes both the depth of the floodwaters in her store and the damage caused by the flooding.

In contrast to the buildings flooded but still standing in Galveston, many buildings on the Bolivar Peninsula were washed away by Ike, “...much like the Mississippi Gulf Coast during Katrina in 2005” (Keim and Muller 2009, 195). Residents were not allowed back into the Galveston/Bolivar area until September 24, and it took even longer than that to restore basic services to the area.

These storms and others help to illustrate the long history of hurricanes that residents have experienced in this part of the Gulf Coast. This history provides the context to discuss narratives that have emerged from the three storms described in this final section. Chapters Three and Four will explore narratives from the official perspective through newspaper media and lay narratives from area residents. Behind the narratives from both perspectives, though, there is the constant backdrop of regional hurricane history.

Chapter Three:

Media Narratives of Preparation

“And perhaps most importantly, we know that few people in the modern world live in a vacuum of ignorance when it comes to hurricanes. The clarion warnings from hurricane forecasters have blared from television, the radio, the Internet and, yes, newspapers.”

—Eric Berger, “The Sciguy” from the *Houston Chronicle* (2008, para. 10)

In order to see the ways in which official and lay narratives interact regarding issues of hurricane preparation, we need to describe patterns within those narratives. For this discussion, the news media is being used as the voice of the “official” narrative. This choice reflects the tendencies of the news media to reach widely and to incorporate messages from other sources that may be thought of as official, such as government figures and “expert” groups (e.g., meteorologists). These concepts of official and lay in the following chapters parallel the concepts of expert and lay in other folklore research, particularly that dealing with health and belief. In his article, “Folklore Studies Applied to Health,” David Hufford makes this delineation between the two:

It is no accident, of course, that medical and scholarly views converge in a tendency to dismiss the knowledge claims of ordinary people. Both professional communities are faced with similar situations: each makes a claim to expert knowledge about the world, and alternative claims from non-experts—whether informants or patients—are a potential threat to professional authority. However, this is not only a problem in studying the relationships of doctors and patients, it is also a highly suggestive and fruitful place to begin to understand the interaction of official and folk traditions. We have here a process of intense social negotiation among competing constructions of reality, official realities versus the

realities of ordinary people—the starting point of folklore research, both historically and conceptually (DeVinne 1991 [citation in original]). It is in this competition that I locate my working definition of folklore—unofficial culture contrasted to official narrowly defined: “1. Of or pertaining to an office or post of authority” (DeVinne 1991 [citation in original]). (Hufford 1998, 301)

In this sense, the “official” stance I explore in this discussion relates to the narratives espoused by those who hold “an office or post of authority” in contrast to the “lay” stance that relates to the narratives shared by “ordinary” people. I chose to use “official” instead of “expert” in this project because the authority of the narrative does not seem to come explicitly from professional credentials (such as the medical and advanced degrees that a doctor or a scholar would hold, to use the two categories of experts noted in Hufford’s quote), but from their position in relation to the lay person, either in the sense of being an elected official (such as a mayor or governor) or in the sense of communicative power (being a writer for the most widely circulated newspaper in a city). This is not to say that all people that fall into the category of official here would not also have “expert” credentials, as meteorologists, for example, have backgrounds that would make them expert in this sense. For that reason, the constructed narratives in newspapers can be thought of as having multiple claims to being representative of the official reality—through their communicative power and through their representation of other kinds of officials. In this chapter, therefore, the focus will be on examining how official media expresses concepts of preparation. What do people need to do or need to have to be officially prepared? When should people stay and when should people go? What does a prepared person look like?

To explore these questions, this chapter will analyze newspaper articles to look for trends within their stories, focusing on newspaper stories in the days leading up to each storm. A three-to-four-day window leading up to each storm was chosen because official sources (emergency management, meteorologists, governmental officials) will usually begin to make concrete recommendations to residents within the 72 hours before a storm makes landfall. Due to hurricanes' ability to shift course at periods of time beyond three days out, the storm track is often too uncertain for recommendations to start before this period. Also, the three-to-four-day window reflects that landfall can take place any time during a day and is not based on publication schedules.

The newspapers chosen for analysis are the largest newspapers in each affected area. Therefore, articles from the *Times-Picayune* (weekday circulation: 252,799) were examined for Hurricane Katrina and articles from the *Houston Chronicle* (weekday circulation: 554,783) were chosen for Hurricanes Rita and Ike (circulation numbers from Choi and Lin 2008, 295). These newspapers represent the widest circulations for their respective areas. Newspaper articles were chosen as the media of choice as they are widely accessible when published (being both a print medium and an Internet medium in the current age) and in archival form. Honing the scope to this time frame and these papers allowed for an examination of pre-storm messages communicated specifically to these areas through the newspaper outlets with the greatest exposure to the local public.

Newspaper Analysis

Newspapers serve as a window to the official stance on hurricane preparation and how it is presented to the general public. By creating narratives, news media tell the audience what the people “in charge” are thinking and what audience members should be doing. Building upon the introduction of lay verses official, crafting these narratives is a powerful thing in that it allows news media to portray officials and their instructions through the media’s own lens. These messages are then spread widely across the readership (in the case of newspapers). In this way, not only does the newspaper outlet communicate “official” messages, they wield an official power of their own in their relationship to the public at large. In other words, residents might not hear what was said through a press conference, but they might read or hear about it later on through the news.

My analysis blends both a content (what was discussed in the article) and structural (how the article was put together as a unit and as part of a larger newspaper) approach to looking at these texts, influenced by Ernest Zhang and Kenneth Fleming’s analysis of SARS coverage in Chinese newspapers and Yoonhyeung Choi and Ying-Hsuan Lin’s analysis of newspaper coverage of three 2005 hurricanes. Each of these articles analyzed coverage from different points of emphasis. Zhang and Fleming focused on front-page news coverage of a major newspaper (and all pages of a weekly newspaper) to identify categories of information, placing any given story into one category. Choi and Lin focused on news stories relating to Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and

Wilma printed one week before the storms' "occurrences" (not defined in the text). Their analysis included two newspapers each in Louisiana, Texas, and Florida. They coded content based on categories (e.g., outcomes of damages, severity of the hurricanes) and emotional versus logical framing patterns. These frames were "defined based on dimensions such as image evoking (vs. non-image evoking) and specific (vs. general, e.g., data, statistics)" (Choi and Lin 2008, 295).

In the present analysis, for content, I focused on pre-storm and preparation messages put forth to the readers: what kinds of actions should they take, what supplies are needed, etc. Also, I considered the sources referenced for this information, how different "voices" are used to convey information about what to do (or what is not being done). From a more structural perspective, I considered where within the paper as a whole articles were published, when available, as the front page and, by extension, the front section tend to cover the "most important news and breaking news" (Zhang and Fleming 2005, 326). This would be in comparison to pieces in other sections, such as the Entertainment section of the newspaper that is embedded further into the newspaper (in the *Houston Chronicle*, this section is the "Star" section).

Also, I looked at how each article sets the stage for what it presented (in other words, how the article frames the information). Framing information helps to influence how the information is interpreted. As Goffman notes, "the type of framework we employ provides a way of describing the event to which it is applied" (1974, 24).

Newspaper texts are constructed in ways to affect the interpretation and understanding of

events and information. Choi and Lin used the emotional versus logical framing in their analysis. In my own, however, I considered what I term “official” versus “lay” framing. In this frame, I looked at whether the article itself opens from a lay perspective (a resident, a business owner, a general image of everyday life) or an official perspective (government official, the National Weather Service, etc.). The idea behind this framing approach is to see how the article is grounded—which kind of perspective it invokes from the beginning. When looking at official versus lay framing, I looked at the voices and images invoked in the first three or so sentences in each article. Most of the time, the official/lay stance was clear. When the stance was unclear, either due to both being represented in close proximity or the stance seeming neutral, this was noted (as blended or neutral, respectively). This approach to framing is influenced by the concept of the formulaic frame in folktales, in which the opening of the narrative shapes the audience expectations of what is to follow. In this sense, a media narrative opening with a public official discussing information about a storm cues a different expectation than one opening with a young woman planning for her wedding.

An important distinction to make between my analysis and both Zhang and Fleming’s and Choi and Lin’s is that my own analysis is not statistical in nature. Instead of looking for statistical relationships amongst the articles, I looked at how breaking down these articles helps to uncover patterns in the narratives they tell. As Elliott Oring notes in “Legend, Truth, and News,” although the press may try to present themselves as factual and objective, these concepts are actually illusory as the press controls the

selection and organization of its stories (1996, 329). In this way, the consideration of news stories is not too far afield from considering personal experience narratives, and, as I will later look at how residents construct preparedness from their perspective, an analysis of newspaper articles sheds light on how the press constructs preparedness from their perspective, which then allows for consideration of how these narratives can overlap and disagree.

The Article Collection and Method

To locate newspaper articles for each storm, I performed archival searches via library databases. Searches were limited to the days leading up to the hurricane and by mentioning the name of the hurricane anywhere in the title or text of the article. Further, only articles before the hurricane in question were used; ones focusing on hurricane aftermath were not included because the focus of this analysis is on pre-storm preparation information and recommendations.

The total number of newspaper articles I examined was eighty-one. Eleven were pre-Katrina, forty-eight pre-Rita, and twenty-two pre-Ike. Table 3 below illustrates the spread of the articles analyzed by date.

Table 3. Articles analyzed by date

| | | | |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Hurricane Katrina (Landfall: August 29, 2005) Total Articles Examined: 11 | | | |
| | August 27 2 | August 28 5 | August 29 4 |
| Hurricane Rita (Landfall: September 24, 2005) Total Articles Examined: 48 | | | |
| September 20 6 | September 21 18 | September 22 14 | September 23 10 |
| Hurricane Ike (Landfall: September 13, 2008) Total Articles Examined: 22 | | | |
| September 10 1 | September 11 4 | September 12 11 | September 13 6 |

It is worth noting that Hurricane Rita—the hurricane often considered a “non-event” by Houston residents (though it did cause significant damage in East Texas)—garnered the most articles published that surfaced in my archive searches. This number likely indicates a spike in interest due to its closeness to Hurricane Katrina. The drop in number of articles for Hurricane Ike may also indicate a reduction in concern given the three years after Rita.

After determining the article collection, I created a chart to analyze the articles based on several dimensions: location in newspaper, opening frame used, preparation instructions provided, and whether lay voice was used (with examples when used). This approach was taken so that I could more clearly see patterns across articles that might provide insights into the narratives constructed.

When looking at the lay versus official framing, and how official and lay voices are used within the article, issues of authority come into play. The press itself holds a

certain authority. As Sue Robinson writes, “Journalists perform as storytellers and watchdogs, guidance counselors and history writers from within the established American institution of the press” (2009, 796), even though this position is not monolithic, given the rise of other forms of information dissemination (such as online). The voices within news stories, official and lay, “tend to be symbols of the institutional power elite...or archetypal characters who relay social ideologies and values” (Robinson 2009, 797), with citizens generally portrayed as “passive, disengaged and two-dimensional, with little agency or even a desire for agency” (Robinson 2009, 797). However, Robinson notes that these roles are shifting as more participation outside mainstream journalism occurs. In her analysis of mainstream and citizen-based journalism post-Katrina, Robinson notes how mainstream media portrayed citizens as larger symbols of morality than as regular people, a narrative device to construct the moral of the journalist’s narrative. As she states, “it is not so much citizens who show up in this narrative [of rebuilding] as the concept of citizenship” (Robinson 2009, 805).

My analysis here differs from Robinson’s in that I look at the narratives before the storms, articles dealing not with rebuilding but with preparation. In this sense, my analysis seeks to test this idea of lay person as symbol—are residents used as larger archetypal characters and, if so, what kinds? In addition, by considering official framing, I look at how newspaper media bolsters its authority through the use of official voices to open its narratives.

For the purposes of this discussion, I begin by looking at some of the trends I noticed in the analysis. Since media narrative does not necessarily contain some of the vernacular patterns we might expect in a personal narrative discussed in Chapter One, such as false starts or shifts in verb tense which would be revised away through the editing process, I looked for other patterns that might hint at meaning. Then I discuss how some of these trends feed into the construction of the official narrative that seems to be created through these articles. Specifically, I want to consider messages communicated about preparation, how residents are portrayed by officials and how officials are portrayed by residents, and how preparedness themes seem to emerge through these messages.

Some Trends from the Article Analysis

Article Positioning in the Newspapers

First, I looked at where articles were located within the newspaper as a whole. Pre-Katrina articles were excluded from this part of the analysis because they all were in the National Section or were archived from the Web Edition (nine articles, one and two articles, respectively). Due to the small number of Hurricane Katrina articles, I opted to focus on the *Houston Chronicle* articles. The *Houston Chronicle* is divided into several main sections:

1. A-Front Page
2. B-City and State
3. C-Sports
4. D-Business
5. Star/E-Lifestyle and Entertainment

A difference did emerge between the placement of coverage between Rita articles and Ike articles. Twenty-six (54%) of the Rita articles were Front Page material, compared with seven (32%) of Ike articles. Conversely, thirteen (27%) of Rita articles were in the City and State section compared with fourteen (64%) of the Ike articles. It is also interesting to note that nine (19%) of Rita articles surfaced in other sections of the newspaper, namely the Business and Star sections, whereas only one (5%) of the Ike articles showed up outside of the two front sections of the paper. These differences in placement may hint at different perspectives taken in relation to these storms, with Rita coverage being more “in the reader’s face” and spread across the paper as a whole and Ike coverage more locally focused. This more local focus also may make sense in light of the financial market failures around mid-September 2008, which competed for news story space with Ike’s approach.

Storms Referenced in Articles

While reading through the articles, I also noted the past hurricanes and tropical storms referenced in each article. I defined reference as a mention of the storm in the title or text of an article, as the mention of an event invokes memories or images of that event as a whole. Table 4 below shows the top storms by number of articles mentioning them:

Table 4. Top storms referenced by articles²³

| Top Storms Referenced in Articles (By number of articles in which the storm is mentioned) | | |
|--|---|--|
| First Set: Pre-Katrina (11 articles) | Second Set: Pre-Rita (48 articles) | Third Set: Pre-Ike (22 articles) |
| Ivan (2004): 3 (27%) Betsy (1965): 3 (27%) Dennis (2005): 2 (18%) Camille (1969): 2 (18%) | Katrina (2005): 28 (58%) Allison (2001): 9 (19%) Alicia (1983): 7 (15%) | Rita (2005): 14 (64%) Katrina (2005): 6 (27%) Gustav (2008): 5 (23%) |

Other storms were mentioned in the collected articles, but I focused on the ones garnering the bulk of references. Looking at the top storms mentioned across articles, the storms that are mentioned most seem to be either (1) close in proximity (space or time) or (2) the storms having the most “impact.” Looking at the Katrina set, Ivan was a recent storm to have landed near Louisiana and Texas, and Dennis was a 2005 season storm that landed on the Gulf Coast near Florida. The storms between Dennis and Katrina did not threaten the United States. Betsy and Camille, as noted in Chapter Two, were both major storms

23. The percentages are not intended to add up to 100%. Multiple storms may be referenced in a single article. Also, not all articles reference past storms.

affecting the greater New Orleans area, even though they were decades earlier than Katrina.

In terms of Rita, Katrina had just occurred the month before, and brought with it historic damage and population movement. Allison and Alicia, on the other hand, were the last two major storms to damage the greater Houston area, with Alicia being the last notably destructive hurricane to visit the city (as mentioned in the previous chapter, Allison was a tropical storm). Finally, for Ike, the memories of Katrina and Rita were still fairly vivid in media (and cultural) memory, while Gustav was the most recent storm to threaten the Gulf Coast in the 2008 season before Ike, and caused a massive evacuation in Louisiana. In comparison to the Rita articles, Alicia and Allison are still mentioned, but their prominence relative to other storms slipped down a few places. These patterns seem to indicate two different kinds of storm memory are at play in the media narrative. One points toward more of a short-term memory of what hurricane events are most recent in both media and readership memory. The other pulls from a longer-term, more image-based memory of impactful storms in area history. Invoking the memory of storms such as Betsy, Carla, Alicia, and Allison acts as a shorthand to the destruction those storms wrought, often through media outlets as well as first hand (or passed down through family and friends) experience. Katrina and Rita, in the case of Ike, seem to play a similar role, even though the time lapse between these storms and Ike is relatively short. These storms take the place of Allison and Alicia in this case, seeming to indicate a possible

lessening of those storms' visceral effectiveness, at least from the angle of the news narrative.

Official versus Lay Frame

Looking at each set of articles, the opening frame of articles tended to lean towards the official. The breakdown was as follows:

- Katrina set: 6 official, 3 lay (66.7%, 33.3%)
- Rita set: 22 official, 17 lay (56.4%, 43.6%)
- Ike set: 10 official, 8 lay (55.6%, 44.4%)

The numbers did not add up to the total of each set due to some articles having a more neutral or blended opening frame.

Whereas a newspaper acts as an official source in an attempt to communicate what people “ought” to know or do, the slight lean towards the official frame makes sense. That said, what is interesting is how closely split the articles tended to be overall. This trend points toward different narrative hooks being used across the collection. An official frame included mayors making statements, press conferences, or meteorologists positing forecasts about the storm. A lay frame opens the news narrative in the life of “ordinary people” doing things, either in preparation or otherwise. Official frames set the stage for actions, information, and authority, whereas lay frames set the stage for lives

disrupted or under stress. Examples of this lay frame included looks into the lives of a variety of residents. The residents depicted in these openings included:

- A bride in New Orleans going forward with her wedding before Katrina. She refused to let the storm stop her wedding. (“It was enough to make any bride break down in tears. But first, Katrina Christoval had to laugh. She and the hurricane that kept more than half her guests from attending her nuptials Saturday have the same name” [Thevenot 2005, para. 1].)
- People at the Superdome “without enough money or luck to leave town...” (For example: “A 2-year-old girl, clutching a bottle and ignoring her knock-off Barbie doll, running in circles around her mother. Homeless men trying to doze on the sidewalk, using backpacks as pillows. People without cars. People with cars but nowhere to go” [Filosa 2005, para. 1].)
- Residents praying and preparing for the storm coming.
- Shoppers scrambling for supplies at stores.
- Evacuees from Katrina having to evacuate again for Rita. (“This was not the move that LeEsther Scott wanted. Scott, 37, waited outside Reliant Arena about 5 p.m. Tuesday for a bus to take her and 12 family members to Fort Chaffee, Ark. But what she really wanted was to go home” [Bowman 2005, paras. 1-2].)

- A mother preparing for a hurricane after having to cancel a child's birthday party.
- Members of a retirement community who did not evacuate Galveston even in light of warnings. ("At a retirement community in the 2800 block of 61st Street, 66-year-old Ed Raymond patrolled the courtyards on a red motorized scooter Friday morning. He carried a handwritten list of his neighbors who hadn't yet evacuated. An American flag fluttered on the back of the scooter as he maneuvered the cracked sidewalks to check on them, one by one" [Wise 2008, para. 1].)

These images of ordinary people's lives, in contrast to the more official frames of weather information and official action, will contribute to the construction of "residents" discussion later in this chapter.

Lay Voice in Articles

Along with considering the opening frame of the articles, I also looked at how the voice of residents (lay speech) was used in newspaper narratives. In the use of lay speech, quotes from residents are woven into the media narrative. Examples of lay speech are when Katrina Christoval is quoted in the article about her wedding or when quotes from residents interviewed at the Superdome are worked into the article on stranded residents, to use two articles cited above. Lay speech was used in many articles in this collection:

- Katrina set: 8 (73%)
- Rita set: 17 (35%)
- Ike set: 8 (41%)

Some of the differences in lay speech used across sets could result from differences in writing style and newspaper preference, but what is worth noting is that a sizable number of articles incorporate the speech of lay people along with other information. Borrowing from Nessa Wolfson's idea that incorporating reported speech in personal narrative makes it "seem more authentic by invoking the words of others" (1978, 220), it is not much of a leap to see the lay voice in the news narratives as grounding them in the experience of "real" people. For instance, in the Filosa Superdome article, we are given a glimpse into the experience of an unnamed woman:

No funds, a 41-year-old woman surrounded by four children, ages 2 to 14, said when asked what brought her to the shelter..."I can't have them in all this water," the mother said of her children, explaining why she didn't choose to evacuate from the coming hurricane. If only things were different, she said, she would have reserved seats on a Trailways bus or perhaps bought plane tickets. But she wasn't placing her children in a car for hours on end, she said. (Filosa 2005, paras. 7 and 9)

Alternating between the mother's own words and Filosa's paraphrase attempts to give life and authenticity to the article's depiction of the situation. This practice is not uncommon in news media.

However, thinking of these news stories as constructed narratives, it is worth exploring how these bits of reported speech are selected and presented in the articles. What do these printed “sound bites” say about residents? Relatedly, when official voices are quoted talking about residents, what is being said there? These concepts also feed into the construction of official and lay in these narratives discussed later.

What Do Newspaper Articles Say about Preparation?

In Choi and Lin’s work on risk-related messages in newspapers, they mention that “actions to take to prevent the risk,” which included evacuation and preparation, was the most frequent type of message. This echoed a similar finding in research for a thesis by Laura B. Cowan. In her analysis of thirteen newspapers dealing with Category 3 storms or higher, she noted, “Preparation content is by far the most common hurricane content” (2006, 41). She found that 36.5% of the articles she examined dealt with preparation and 15% dealt with evacuation, the most emphasized content areas in her study (Cowan 2006, 22). In the articles I analyzed, a wide variety of preparation advice was given to readers, ranging from specific orders from officials to checklists of items to gather. When I considered preparation advice, I included both explicit recommendations, such as the aforementioned direct orders and checklists, to more implicit recommendations, such as descriptions of people buying food, water, and batteries at a store, as images such as these

serve as potential models of what people preparing for a hurricane might look like. Examples of these implicit recommendations include descriptions such as “Batteries, bottled water, canned food—shoppers wanted it all on Tuesday” (Garza et al. 2005, para. 1) and “Across the Houston region, residents busied themselves Thursday morning preparing for Ike’s onslaught. Some bought plywood and duct tape; others ice and generators” (Casimir et al. 2008, para. 1). Casting this wide net for preparation information, I found that a majority conveyed clearly identifiable explicit or implicit preparation information. Examples of other types of articles included ones focused on storm information only, on hospital preparation, and the like. This said, the kinds of preparation information conveyed varied widely.

General preparation warnings were common. These included officials using the term “preparation” without specificity. For instance, in the days before Katrina, Mayor Ray Nagin was quoted as saying “This storm really scares me... That’s why I am trying to stress to everyone now to get prepared” (Schleifstein 2005, para. 22). Similarly, The St. Tammany Parish President stated, “I urge citizens to make storm preparations today” (Breaking News Weblog Day 1 2005, para. 17), and the Jefferson Parish Emergency Management Director warned, “Everybody needs to get their plan and be prepared” (Schleifstein 2005, para. 26). This vague order to prepare was also seen in the general order to use “common sense.” Both Houston Mayor Bill White and Harris County Judge Robert Eckels were cited using this advice before Rita, with White and Harris County Judge Ed Emmett invoking similar advice before Ike.

Residents were also told to follow official instructions—or to face the consequences of not doing so—and to stay up-to-date about official storm information. Before Rita, the Galveston City Manager warned that people should heed evacuation recommendations, although official entities would not compel them with force: “If there are people who are unwilling to leave, we’re not going to pry them out of their households” (Moran et al. 2005, para. 20). While this comment allows for choice regarding evacuation, not surprisingly, it does not cast non-compliance in a positive light. Other “officials” remarked that by ignoring evacuation orders, residents should not expect emergency services.

Before Ike, the Brazoria County Assistant Emergency Management Coordinator was reported as saying that no one would be fined or arrested if they did not leave (which was ordered), but “they will be on their own” (Stewart 2008, para. 21). Residents were advised to follow the lead of local officials or face the consequences of going their own way. Coupled with this was the general advice to follow official information regarding storms, to “stay alert” (Schleifstein 2005, para. 27), and, as senior federal officials were reported as advising before Ike, “to listen to what their local officials tell them to do. And if they are told to evacuate, evacuate” (“Hurricane Watch; Ike in Brief” 2008, para. 11). Overall, the official message underscores that residents should be strongly guided by official recommendations and information. At the same time, officials recommended uniting as a community. For instance, before Katrina, the St. Tammany Parish President advised, “I also ask that you check with your neighbors... This is a time to pull together

as a community (Breaking News Weblog Day 1 2005, para. 17). Similarly, Mayor Nagin urged, “This [Katrina] is an opportunity for us to come together in a way that we’ve never done before” (Breaking News Weblog Day 2 2005, para. 137). Coming together as a community was also advised by Houston’s Mayor White before Rita, as he stressed the need for “‘neighbors helping neighbors,’ noting that the government will not have sufficient vehicles to carry out all needed evacuations” (Markley et al. 2005, para. 8). In this way, a clear stance that residents must follow what they are told by officials, yet must also fend for themselves (either by not following orders or because the officials actually do not have the resources to help you) seems to emerge; this stance also seems echoed in the advice to follow local officials’ lead, yet to use common sense (which lies within the residents themselves).

More Specific Recommendations

Amidst the vague instructions presented in these articles were also more concrete pieces of advice about residential storm preparation. Several articles presented various lists of actions to take or supplies to gather. Out of the three storm article collections, the Katrina articles had the least information of this kind, while the Rita articles had the most. Some of these lists were fairly short, comprised of only three to five actions or items. One example is when the St. Tammany Parish President advised that “Residents should refrain from putting out garbage for pick up during the storm. Lids from garbage cans can quickly clog storm-water drains. I am also asking residents fuel cars and to help

neighbors who may be unable to secure items in their yards” (Breaking News weblog Day 1 2005, para. 35). Another example is a list from a pre-Ike article that outlines five pre-storm tips regarding insurance information (Patel 2008).

However, most lists were more complex. These lists included one article that outlined several actions to take to protect personal data and documents along with a 25-item list of documents and information that should be protected (Patel 2005). Another included a lengthy set of actions followed by a 31-item checklist of things to gather, divided into “Tools and Supplies,” “For Sanitation, Safety,” and “Documents” (“Food for thought; Stock up for the Storm; Check This List for The Essentials” 2005). This same section of the *Houston Chronicle* also presented an article on the “‘do’s and dont’s’ of emergency eating” (Vuong 2005). These lists seem to offer residents more actionable guidance than the more vague instructions already discussed.

From the sense of narrative, though, it is worth noting another way that these articles discuss preparation, which is through the description of residents preparing. In these descriptions, readers “see” preparation and what people are gathering (or should be gathering) before storms hit. A few articles describe residents boarding up windows with plywood, advice echoed in several articles’ lists. By far, though, the most common preparation image invoked in these articles is the image of people buying supplies at stores. Several examples of these descriptions include:

- “All day Saturday people pumped gas into their cars, scooped up last minute supplies from groceries and visited ATMs” (Nolan 2005, para. 24)
- “Customer after customer walked through the store with carts filled with bottled water and canned goods, scanning shelves for items that may be useful, such as can openers” (Bowman, Stiles, and Garza 2005, para. 5).
- “Batteries, bottled water, canned food—shoppers wanted it all on Tuesday... Mark Anton hit the grocery store to stock up on water Tuesday afternoon, while his wife foraged for baby food. ‘Everybody is kind of freaking out a little bit,’ he said, turning onto the aisle of a southeast Houston H-E-B [grocery store] where rows of water bottles normally sit in stock. It was empty. Outside, lines of cars snaked across the parking lot as people waited to top off their gas tanks.” (Garza et al. 2005, paras. 5-8).
- “So people lined up for plywood and water, canned tuna and duct tape, preparing to safeguard their homes and stock up on the essentials” (Garza et al. 2005, para. 11).
- “As authorities prepared themselves for the second major hurricane to strike the Gulf Coast in less than a month, Houston-area residents stripped stores of food, bottled water, batteries, toilet paper and other necessities. The cheapest grade of gasoline was in high demand” (Markley et al 2005, para. 18).

- “A rush on hurricane supplies was reported at several coastal-area stores, as shoppers stocked up on batteries, bottled water and plywood to cover windows” (Rice et al. 2008, para. 32).
- “Residents across the Houston region scurried and scrounged Thursday stocking up on essentials from gasoline and batteries to water and peanut butter, everything needed to endure Hurricane Ike’s arrival—or flee its path. Streets throughout town were unusually busy. People emerged from home improvement and grocery stores laden with supplies. Gas lines snaked around the pumps and spilled into the streets. Some stations ran out of fuel” (Khanna et al. 2008, para. 1-2).
- “Across the Houston region, residents busied themselves Thursday preparing for Ike’s onslaught. Some bought plywood and duct tape; others bought ice and generators. Some packed their belongings to flee; others secured supplies to fortify” (Casimir et. al 2008, para. 1).

Several items seem to be commonly noted in preparation advice. Certain of these items tend to emerge as basic essentials: canned food, bottled water, gasoline, and plywood. Other items—such as, in the examples above, can openers, toilet paper, ice, and generators—can get added in, but the core items seem fairly consistent. The images of

shoppers exemplify a narrow type of preparation through a commonplace description, in contrast to some of the lengthier checklists.

Also notable are the many images that highlight scarcity and the inability to get supplies. Looking at the aforementioned examples, shoppers “scan” the shelves, “forage” for baby food, “stripped” stores of supplies, and “scurried and scrounged” around their areas. Store shelves are emptied, and lines of cars snaked around gasoline pumps. Residents preparing, as they are told to do, are portrayed amid scenes with few or any resources available. These scenes are occurring at the same time as officials are telling residents to gather the things they need to prepare, and lengthy checklists of supplies for emergency kits are being disseminated by the media. For illustration, the 31-item list mentioned earlier was published on September 22, 2005, about two days before Rita’s landfall. In this way, issues of time and preparation emerge. If residents are trying to follow official calls for preparation, these calls may be counteracted by occurring at a time when acting upon them is extremely difficult.

Construction of the “Resident”

Also worth considering, along with the concept of what constitutes preparation, is how residents are portrayed in this time period. The descriptions discussed in the last section already point to a sense of how residents seem to be rushing out last-minute to get

their storm supplies. With this, looking at how official voices (governmental officials, etc.) and lay voices (residents) are used to create this portrayal points toward how these articles construct an understanding of what residents do and do not do to prepare for hurricanes.

Official Voices about Residents

Amidst communicating about the need to prepare ahead of storms, officials also make comments that, when presented via news media, create a sense of how to perceive residents and their preparedness. These constructions are often juxtaposed with officials' statements about their own plans and preparation activities.

While analyzing the articles in this collection, one thread that emerged was that of officials casting residents in a negative light, as not listening to advice or as stubbornly taking other courses of action. In the days before Katrina, Mayor Nagin commented, "We want you to take this a little more seriously and start moving—right now, as a matter of fact" (Breaking News Weblog Day 1 2005, para. 41). A day later, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco and a state police spokesperson also commented about residents. Blanco noted that "It appears that no one has heard the message to evacuate," while the spokesperson commented that "Part of the problem of people evacuating (is that) there's a large amount of people that won't do any pre-planning" (Moller 2005, paras. 8 and 13). Official perception of residents was additionally illustrated in the same article by presenting reports given to Blanco about residents not heeding warnings. The example

provided was from a Representative telling her that “at 7 p.m. he saw about 700 people attending a Little League baseball game—and that few people in attendance appeared to know or care that a storm was approaching” (para. 26). Taken together, these comments form an image of a passive, heedless populace, contrasted to officials urging action and vigilance. They seem much like what Robinson described as “passive, disengaged, and two-dimensional” (2008, 797), noted previously, in that they simply do not seem to be paying attention.

The articles from days before Katrina were not the only ones with these types of comments. Before Rita, Texas Governor Rick Perry was reported as saying that Texans had “adopted ‘a somewhat blasé altitude’” because of the length of time that had passed since Texas had a major hurricane, though he also noted “I think Katrina got everybody’s attention... It’s no longer the boy calling wolf” (Hughes et al. 2005, paras. 14 and 15). Two days later, Perry commented on the evacuation: “If you’re in the storm’s path, you need to git [sic] gone. You need to be on the road, moving out of the storm’s path. There are a few hardheaded ones out there who are going to ride this thing out, don’t expect there to be a lot of support in those areas” (Stiles and Ratcliffe 2005, para. 6). While both of these comments paint a less than supportive image of residents, the second one seems particularly worth noting. Invoking the very informal “git gone” advice to residents, Perry almost seems to be shooing people away as one might a stray dog on the front lawn. Also, people who do not evacuate are “hardheaded,” taking away any other

explanation for ignoring orders. Lastly, his comment echoes the “or else” advice discussed earlier.

Articles before Ike were not without a similar kind of characterization of residents. In contrast to the other two storms, though, the comments about residents seem a little less harsh. United States Senator John Cornyn commented that he was concerned that “...because Ray Nagin said that Hurricane Gustav was the ‘storm of the century’ and then it sort of petered out, that people may sort of get the sense that... maybe we don’t need to leave this time” (Rice et al. 2008, para. 12). In a similar vein, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff was reported to warn residents “... not to take Ike lightly. He said Ike is not a storm to gamble on” (“Hurricane Brief; Ike in Brief” 2005, para. 11). Both of these comments hinge upon an assumption that residents will likely default to thinking that the storm is not a threat and will take more of a passive role. Stubbornness is also addressed in comments such as the one from the Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management regarding evacuation routes. While describing the improvements that had been made in evacuation routes since Rita, the spokesperson also commented, “People don’t like to be told what the best route for them is” (Christian 2008, para. 9). Admittedly, this comment is much kinder than calling some residents “hardheaded,” but it still speaks to an assumed stubbornness on the part of the population, especially coming after a description of all the accommodating improvements that had been made to the roadways.

This said, not all descriptions of residents by officials were critically tinged. School officials noted how local parents had been calling in the days before Rita for an early decision regarding school closures (Radcliffe et al. 2005, para. 21). Also prior to Rita, the Chief of Police in the small city of Palacios noted that “Most [people] are well aware of this storm and are not going to take any chances...People know what type of damage this type of storm can do, because they’ve rebuilt (after other storms), and they’re just going to get out with their family to be safe” (Hughes, Gonzalez, and Pinkerton 2005, para. 26). These comments show a more active and prepared residential response; however, examples along these lines are more infrequent than the passively oriented ones.

Lay Voices about Residents

Although officials are often reported commenting on residential response and preparation, residents themselves (the lay voice) are also included to construct the media portrayal of residents. Like official voices, residents are often reported discussing reduced concern or not following the orders of authority. In the Katrina articles, for example, one resident was “headed unconcerned to a funeral Saturday morning,” not aware of the threat of the storm. In this resident’s case, though, his wife called him on the cell phone and updated him, changing his course of action, even though bringing his 92-year-old mother was going to complicate evacuation plans (Nolan 2005, paras. 29-31). As noted above, another Katrina article related the story of a bride, also named Katrina,

who went ahead with her wedding in the face of the hurricane threat. Before Rita, a shop owner described his storm plan: “I’m going to roll the dice and say I’ll survive if it hits...” (Lezon 2005, para. 5). Another resident, pre-Rita, commented that “If I lose [my home], I’ve lost everything I’ve got. I may as well go with it” (Markley et al. 2005, para. 44). Before Ike, comments included a resident explaining his rationale for feeling no sympathy for residents refusing to evacuate: “If people don’t have an eye on the weather, they have no business on this Island [Galveston]” (Rice et al. 2008, para. 19). Two paragraphs later in the same article, however, a ship owner in Surfside Beach, just west of Galveston Island, describes staying put, explaining “I’m going to go upstairs above my shop with my two guns and protect my property... Besides, the storm isn’t coming here... I went out on the jetty last night and prayed that it would just turn around” (Rice et al. 2008, paras. 22-23).

On one hand, these uses of residential voice point towards a disjunction between residential action and official advice. However, they also present a more complex image of the resident. Some residents are portrayed as weighing the responsibilities of everyday life over storm information, such as the resident attending a funeral (although he was ultimately convinced to change his mind) and the determined bride. This sense comes through in the two other residents’ descriptions of staying on their own property. The Surfside Beach shop owner’s comment also hints toward a competing source of storm information on which to base his decision-making: his own experience and prayer on the jetty. These comments describe situations that may not be as simple as staying or going,

and even when they communicate the choice to stay against orders, they do not seem necessarily “hardheaded.”

The complexity of residential perspectives also surfaces in the varying ways residents discuss how prior storm experience informs their actions. These experiences sometimes influenced residents to follow official advice while others led them to diverge. Several residents commented on how Rita preparation was influenced by Katrina. One noted that “People understand it now, and I think that they are going to prepare fully” (Bowman, Stiles, and Garza 2005, para. 6). Another stated “I think it’s just increased awareness of the power of the storms, the realization that earlier preparation is necessary” (Garza et al. 2005, para. 21). Contrasting with these ideas of preparation are residents commenting on the panicky way others seemed to prepare. The same resident remarking on residents preparing fully also described the scene at the store as, “It seems a lot of people have pressed the panic button” (para. 4). Another resident shopping before Rita noted, “Everybody is kind of freaking out a little bit” (Garza et al. 2005, para. 6). Later, before Ike, residents still commented on a sense of preparation panic at home improvement stores. For example, one said, “I don’t dare to go to Lowe’s or the Home Depot... It’s got to be a madhouse” (Khanna et al. 2008, para. 18). This resident instead got supplies at a dollar store, tailoring supply gathering to perceived chaos. In this way, there is a fine line between being motivated to prepare (advised action) and being panicky (not advised). Other storms could also motivate residents to prepare as advised. Before Ike, a resident identified experiences from Tropical Storm Allison as motivation to prepare and

evacuate: “This home flooded during Allison... This one next door is still vacant. We are just not going to chance it” (Khanna et al. 2008, para. 10). Past experience, in these examples, motivates residents to behave in ways aligned with official orders. In these cases, the use of the residential voice serves to emphasize the official recommendations.

In other instances, past experience does not work in this way. Most notably, experiences trying to evacuate before Rita informed subsequent choices not to leave. One resident in a neighborhood near a Houston bayou known for flooding commented that “I evacuated three years ago, and I will never do that again” (Khanna et al. 2008, para. 13). A resident of the city of Webster, about midway between downtown Houston and Galveston, explained her rationale for staying by stating “Because we did leave for Rita, and I wasn’t going to sit in some 20 hours of traffic again,” even though the area was under evacuation orders (Casimir et al. 2008, para. 15). In cases such as these, residents may hear the official orders, but they are more strongly informed by their past experience. And this kind of counter-informing was not limited to Rita. One resident explicitly noted other storms as his reason for not fearing Ike: “I’m not afraid. We had Carla, we had Alicia, and we had Katrina...We survived those” (Carroll et al. 2008, para. 30). This resident uses this experience to resist his son’s urging to evacuate from his home, as it is next to a bayou in a flood-prone area. Also, quite evocatively, a different article quoted an elderly man in a Galveston retirement home who had chosen to stay for Ike. He explained to the reporter:

“I’m a stubborn old man... I’ve lived here [in Galveston] 22 years and never left, so I feel safer here than in my tin-can car on I-45... So I have gone through this many a time. I ain’t going to evacuate again for anybody... J C. [Jesus Christ], I’ll listen to him. If he tells me to go, I’ll go. But if my numbers [sic] up and J. C. calls me, he’s gonna call me in my own bed, not some strange place.” (Wise 2008, paras. 30-32)

His explanation for staying comes amidst other residents discussing staying for Ike, many of whom had attempted and endured lengthy Rita evacuations. His comments point towards both a choice based upon past experience and a differing sense of official authority, as Jesus is the only “official” who could change his mind.

In the midst of residents being cited as following or resisting official advice because of their experiences, another segment of quoted residents are shown to be undecided, even in the few days leading up to storm landfall. Instead of knowing whether to stay or go, these residents are still portrayed in a wait-and-see mode or as awaiting more guidance. For example, prior to Rita, another elderly Galveston man commented on his preparations: “I was going to try to make some kind of arrangements to get out [of Galveston], but nobody’s said I needed to get out yet” (Moran et al. 2005, para. 34). In another pre-Rita article, a woman asked an elderly resident about her plans. In response, the resident “laughed and said, ‘I don’t know.’ But she said she wouldn’t leave without her new scooter” (Garza 2005, para. 12). This undecided response did not get presented as often as the other two stances, but it did crop up occasionally.

All three of these stances serve to create a complex portrayal of the general public in relation to their preparation. Some prepare, sometimes to the point of panic; others

ignore orders due to past experience even in the face of identifiable danger; and yet others delay decisions in the dwindling time before the storm. What seems absent or downplayed amidst this construction of the residential population is the idea of residents as being calm and rational decision-makers. When shown to be preparing or evacuating, these actions often take place in chaotic stores or in massive gridlock (with other people doing the same thing). When going against official advice, they are often individuals living in notably vulnerable areas, as this detail is added in the article by naming neighborhoods or locations that would be familiar to the readership. Also, by showcasing particularly vulnerable resident examples, such as the elderly or infirm, a heightened sense of the need for residents to be protected and told what to do emerges. In this way, by infusing the articles with these particular characterizations of residents, the media narrative seems to set up a sense that the “better” decision-makers tend to be official sources or people who align with those sources.

Uncertainty Pre-Landfall

Further, these scenes take place in front of a backdrop of information uncertainty. Even as officials instruct residents as to what to do, the days before a hurricane are also laced with a sense of uncertainty about the storm in these articles. Before Katrina, the St. Tammany Parish President stated, “Because the path of Hurricane Katrina is unclear, we are making storm preparations” (Breaking News Weblog Day 1 2005, para. 34). The models of hurricanes that provide predicted paths for the storms were frequently cited as

uncertain. One staff writer for an article published before Rita commented that “Five day forecasts for hurricanes are unreliable,” later adding the words from the Houston-Galveston National Weather Service Office: “The models have been a bit squirrely” (Berger 2005, paras. 5 and 9). Even closer to landfall, Rita’s track was shrouded in uncertainty. The day before landfall, the Harris County Office of Emergency Management Administrative Coordinator noted that “This storm [Rita] is being a little unpredictable” before adding “I don’t think history will remember Rita as a lady” (Cappiello et al. 2005, para. 30). This comment is particularly interesting due to its focus on uncertainty but also its gender commentary in Rita not being ladylike. For storms, then, to be ladylike is to be either predictable (as it is placed in the comment) or weak (as it seems more likely to mean in contrast to causing damage). In either case, the implications for feminine portrayal are worth considering, though they lie outside of the scope of the current discussion.

Ike, as well, was not without uncertainty. A few days before landfall, one article described Ike’s path as “tricky” and later noted that “Despite being in a region already fatigued by the number of storm alerts and near misses, Ike’s uncertainty is grabbing people’s attention” (Rice et al 2008, paras. 1 and 7)²⁴. In this way, the official information that residents are advised to rely on is always shifting, changing the danger of the storm’s landfall and damage potential with each shift.

24. This idea of storm fatigue cropped up in many articles either directly, such as in the words of Mayor White, or through the comments of people residents tired of evacuating or of hearing about storms and their threats.

The uncertainty also spilled over into the preparation discussion. A day or two before Ike, Mayor White and Harris County Judge Emmett urged residents to follow directions from local officials, with White adding “Nature doesn’t always comply with the best laid plans” (Tolson et al. 2008, para. 41). Whether intentional or not, resident plans seem portrayed as more fallible, in contrast to that the “local officials are prepared to deal with the storm and the aftermath” (Tolson et al. 2008, para 40). Again, official preparation seems more solid, less vulnerable, than residential preparation. However, uncertainty about the storms did not only plague residents. In another article, National Hurricane Center Director Bill Read—who the writer noted does not advise local officials on evacuation—commented on the issue of uncertainty and planning: “Every storm is different... My take is that 72 hours in advance is too far out to have enough certainty to a) always make the right decision and b) convince people they need to go” (Falkenberg 2008, para. 16). Director Read’s comment points toward a further layer of complexity. Not only is hurricane behavior difficult to predict, leaving residential plans at the mercy of the forces of nature, but, in a short window before a storm makes landfall, officials may lack the certainty to construct a solid, actionable plan, especially one to evacuate.

Conclusion: Complex Construction of Preparation

All of these factors, taken together, create a complex narrative of preparation shared through these articles. Returning to the work of Choi and Lin, my analysis also found that print and online journalism does communicate risk information to the public, often through what they term “actions to take to prevent the risk” (2008, 295). In both vague and specific ways, these articles disseminate recommended actions to residents. Choi and Lin argue that media also need to mention the expected outcomes in order to “...reduce uncertainty among the general public in the event of a natural disaster” (2008, 296). Although this is potentially true, my analysis points to other aspects of newspaper narrative that contribute to uncertainty, including the range of potential actions residents can/should take and the limits of certainty in the forecasting technology that reduce the ability of officials to make suggestions and of residents to decide what to do.

The larger narrative that seems to emerge about hurricane preparation in these articles is that the official side of the equation—though culpable when major errors occur (or seem to occur), such as Nagin’s misjudgment of Gustav’s risk in 2008—is still portrayed as the authoritative source of information and action. In contrast, the general public—though frequently shown as preparing for the storm—is often portrayed as a more panic-prone, scattered mass of characters. Neither side is perfect, but if one were to bet on which side is making more rational, thought-out decisions based upon the newspaper narrative, the safer bet is on the officials and their understanding of the

situation. The public is urged to put their faith in official orders, even when that faith is challenged by skepticism.

Granted, it is important at this stage in the discussion to emphasize that public safety plans are important in saving lives and reducing property damage, but it is also worthwhile to consider how newspaper media communicate these messages and plans to their readership. Essential information is almost never plainly put forth in newspapers; it is enclosed in narrative, packaged not only to tell the story, but also to *sell* it. In doing so, this narrative packaging lays out people's places in preparation by characterizing official and lay sources. By portraying residents in the variety of ways described earlier in this chapter, it is harder to imagine what exactly a well-prepared person looks like, as so many counter-images and sound bites are woven into the media narrative. Instead, these newspaper articles offer a variety of models of how to seem less-than-competently prepared.

Given the uncertainty inherent in these storms, a trait expressed in the general narrative of storm preparation, it would seem to make sense that there is an inexactness of residential response. This uncertainty, coupled with the invocation of memories of past storms (both damaging ones and false alarms), creates an environment where it may be prudent to use sources besides the official messages to make personal preparations. However, given the previous examples, this uncertainty seems to be utilized more often in forgiving official decision-making. All the while, these same decision-makers are the

ones to be followed, lest residents find themselves “on their own.” In general, though, residents seem to be on their own, regardless of whether they comply or not.

Using an analysis approach inspired by Zhang and Fleming and Choi and Lin, this chapter examined patterns within the news stories in the days leading up to the three hurricanes pertinent to this discussion. This kind of analytical approach allowed for a wide range of newspaper articles to be considered together to form a collection of preparation narrative from the official perspective. The following chapter expands the discussion to look at a selection of residential perspectives on hurricane preparation. In doing so, we can consider how the elements of the official narratives, discussed here, are integrated into or resisted by lay discussions of the issue.

Chapter Four:

Lay Discussions of Preparation

As in the media discussion of Chapter Three, preparation plays into the stories told by lay people about hurricanes. This chapter explores how the concept of preparation is constructed within lay experience. The interviews used for examples in this chapter are a mix of my own fieldwork interviews and archived interviews. It is important to note that the ideas discussed in this chapter are not the experiences of *every* resident; they are intended to point out impressions that surfaced in some of the residential narratives I considered. Also worth noting is that these interviews are reflections of hurricane experience. Unlike archived newspapers that capture what media communicated in the days before the storms in question, the interviews capture the post-storm perspectives of residents. In large part, this issue is one of accessibility. The likelihood of interviewing someone before a storm while they are preparing, in a comprehensive manner for research, is slim, never mind amassing a collection of interviews to discuss. This project seeks to mitigate that issue by considering multiple storms as this allows for a consideration of how people prepare over time, just as the media narrative analysis allowed for a discussion of trends in articles across hurricanes.

Making Decisions in Lay Narratives

Often when people tell their “hurricane stories,” the stories tend to focus on the experiences during and after the storm. Preparation itself tends to only be a part—and sometimes a minor part—of their stories. As a result, we might visualize a hurricane narrative in this way:

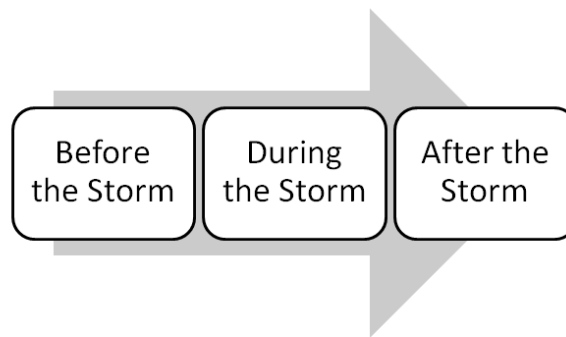


Figure 11. A linear representation of a hurricane narrative.

Using the Labovian (1972) framework for personal narrative, one could say that preparation is more of a complicating action in the narrative, decisions that are leading up to the much more “interesting” or “important” parts of the story. No one tells a story in which the preparation stage is the resolution of the actions, and the storm itself and days after are simply information leading to the coda. Although, at first, this placement in the narrative structure may seem to indicate that preparation is not a significant consideration

from a narrative standpoint, looking at this aspect can inform the discussion of how people make decisions, prepare on the basis of these decisions, and perceive of the threat imposed by hurricanes. Also, some constructions of preparation in these narratives incorporate commentary on how useful or non-useful preparation activities were. These evaluations provide insight as to how actions taken before a storm are judged by the person in hindsight.

However, we do not have to think about hurricane narratives only in this way. Stories of preparation, whether they are full-blown narratives or narrative fragments, can be thought of as their own subgenre of storm stories. This approach makes sense particularly because a hurricane threat does not necessitate a hurricane actually landing and causing damage. For example, for many Houston-area residents, Hurricane Rita was a storm in which there was little “during” and “after” to discuss because the track of the storm shifted. With this in mind, we can think of hurricane narrative using a different visualization:



Figure 12. An overlapping-narrative approach to hurricane narrative.

Using this approach allows us to focus on the importance of hurricane narratives regardless of the outcome of the storm. Depending upon the individual's experience, he or she may have a preparation story and/or a recovery story (though, admittedly, a standalone recovery story is more difficult to conceive). The storm itself rests in the center, allowing for overlap between the two stories.

With this in mind, it is important to note that preparation narrative is not always in a teller's immediate, active repertoire. Depending upon whether a storm is large or small, the storm itself and its aftermath may seem like the "bigger" stories to tell. This ties back to the earlier discussions of tellability discussed in Chapter One. Given the potential of appearing more mundane than other hurricane stories, preparation stories may be judged less tellable to certain audiences. For this reason, sometimes discussions of preparation need to be prompted more in the collection process, though issues of preparation often surface simply by asking about what was going on in the days leading up to a storm.

Therefore, the “naturalness” of sharing preparation stories, in my own collection and in the archival material, varied. Some preparation narratives emerged in response to questions about a particular hurricane, while at times interviewees needed to be explicitly asked about getting ready for a storm²⁵.

There was a mix of decisions made by my informants. Some described how they evacuated; others discussed how they gathered supplies and prepared to ride out the storm. Still others described leaving—or attempting to leave—for one storm and staying for another. This range of decisions was similar to those discussed in Chapter Three. This chapter will explore the influences on these decisions and the ways residents talk about preparing. Also, later sections in this chapter look at how residents talk about their past preparation, including what I call “preparer’s remorse.”

Influences on Decisions

The Influence of Media/Official Messages

As indicated in the media narrative chapter, residents seem to have multiple ways of making decisions about what to do in the days before a hurricane. The decision is often not one calculated simply by data for the storm at hand. This is not to say that the “data” composed of information about the storm filtered through media channels does not play a

25. This variation across narrators can occur in other types of folklore collection, as well, when trying to collect material about a topic.

role in the decision-making process of many residents. In the narratives I looked at, many people were exposed to information from the media, but the extent to which it impacted their decisions varied. For example, New Orleans resident Glen K. remarked about gathering information: "...I mostly checked out the internet. The weather, uh, stuff off the internet. Because when I get home from work the news is over, so I really didn't have that opportunity. But it was mostly the Internet and...I started watching it like I said about a week before"²⁶. Here, a resident uses the media information to gather storm data, just as residents are often told to do. Several media outlets are available, and, in this case, Glen K. chose the media outlet that fit into his normal lifestyle, which required him to go to the internet instead of watching the news on television.

Other residents tended to look towards television as the news outlet of choice. For another New Orleans resident, Glen A., the official warning through the media had a significant impact on him, albeit at the last moment. He recalled:

I have weathered quite a number of storms in New Orleans and I am very familiar with them. When we first got the notice of Katrina coming, I wasn't concerned because I know that these storms come and go in the Gulf Coast and they can turn a different direction. I waited until almost the very last hour to get out of New Orleans. We watched—I was at the apartment in New Orleans and watched television and saw Mayor Nagin come on and he [Nagin] said "If I could order you out of the City of New Orleans, I would order you out. But I can't, but I'm telling you: Get out of New Orleans. This storm is dangerous. If it comes up the Mississippi River, it's going to flood the entire city of New Orleans, and you really do need to get out." And I said to Michael, who was living with me in the little apartment in New Orleans, "We need to get out of here. Let's go to Houston." So we packed up Michael's two cats, my dog, got into the truck and

26. "Writing Katrina" Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

took off. But it was the last moment. It was ten o'clock at night on the Saturday night²⁷.

Mayor Nagin's warnings prompted a last-minute change in plans for Glen A. His initial lack of concern was displaced by the mayor's plea.

However, staying alert to media information does not always facilitate certainty in response. Louisianian Adam F. explained that he was aware of Katrina about a week before it hit, but "Just like everyone else we saw the initial reports and it said it wasn't gone [sic] to hit this area. It was gone [sic] to turn or it was gone [sic] to move or something. I knew people that started evacuating on Friday evening and Saturday and [at] that point we still weren't sure it was gone [sic] to hit and then by Sunday morning we knew that it was coming here"²⁸. Uncertainty is central to Adam F.'s description, as the storm seemed like it could have turned away or turned elsewhere, but then it became evident that it was going to hit the New Orleans area.

Not only are people sometimes unsure how to act, some are simply not paying much attention to the information disseminated by media outlets. Returning to Glen K., who followed information online, he commented: "And as it progressed I didn't, still didn't really take it too seriously because it was still way away and it was projected for Florida and this and that. And I didn't pay a whole lot of attention to it"²⁹. Similarly,

27. Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston, University of Houston.

28. "Writing Katrina" Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

29. "Writing Katrina" Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

Michael P. from New Orleans commented that “I watched channels 4, 6 and 8 that is CBS, NBC and FOX news locally. [And I thought] Holy Crap that is a big storm. That was probably the first thing that I thought of. After that, you just really kind of ignore it...I just kind of kept a second hand glance towards it every so often”³⁰. In these examples, residents stayed informed, but the information they gathered did not necessarily call them to jump into preparation activities. Instead, a “wait-and-see” approach seemed to kick in.

The media played a part in Ronald F.’s description of the days before Hurricane Rita threatened to make landfall in the Houston area³¹. Recalling the damage they had seen done to New Orleans, he worried about Spring, Texas, which is about thirty miles northwest of Houston. He described the threat that Rita seemed to pose:

And as we got closer to it, it seemed as if the storm, at least the local weather people were saying that it was basically going to come from the Gulf of Mexico and travel up basically the Ship Channel to Houston. The Ship Channel is an interior waterway that makes Houston a little bit different than a lot of other inland cities in that it is a port. As a water source, the media people felt that the hurricane would draw water support and basically follow the path of the Ship Channel all the way to Houston and logically lambaste Houston the way New Orleans had been lambasted.

30. “Writing Katrina” Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

31. For full disclosure, Ronald F. is my father. He and my mother moved from the northeastern United States to Spring in the early 1970s, and they have lived in the area since that time.

Even though he was not terrified, he was concerned. To him, the media seemed to be setting up the expectation that Rita could do the same damage as Katrina. He kept watching and listening to the information as it progressed.

Regarding Ike, Houston resident and Galveston business owner Sharan Z. recounted keeping track of media messages in the summer of 2008. She noted:

So that summer, we had had two evacuation scares already. And I think with Hurricane Gustav, which ended up going to Baton Rouge, we evacuated for two days. Took the cats to Houston. My employee was in the guest room. And nothing happened. It went the other way. So it had been a very busy season with hurricanes like this one where you're constantly on watching TV and by September 13th I was tired of it. Yeah, I was just tired of watching TV and tired of being worried about it. And when this one started to come up, I started to come up, I have to admit to you, I didn't want to acknowledge it. And I was like, "OK, so it's a Category 2, it'll hit—they say it's going to hit Galveston. It'll hit someplace else because it always happens at the last minute that it goes someplace else other than where it's supposed to go."

Sharan's comments underscore the relationship between media exposure and the resident. She kept connected to media messages enough to have heeded past evacuation recommendations. Also, she was informed about the details of the hurricane and language associated with hurricanes, noting that the storm was a Category 2 and what its track was. However, this relationship is a bit unstable. As much as she was connected to the information, she also grew tired of it, not wanting to acknowledge the possibility of another storm threat. In addition, there is a mistrust of the official messages themselves expressed here, as Sharan notes that the track may indicate one thing, but the actual path may be very different. Both wariness and weariness can be issues in the choices made

regarding hurricane preparation. Ideas of trust and mistrust are explored further in the next section.

Suspicion of the Media and Official Messages

Although media may play a role in how residents gather information about an oncoming storm, the extent to which that information is trusted varies. For instance, when asked about his preparation process, Houston area resident, Brett C., talked about watching the news:

My opinion is probably a bit jaded. Usually, you know, the news is, in my opinion, they're trying to get eyeballs. You know, it's like there is some marketing involved there where you know they want to give you a reason to watch, so I don't always think that they have the best interest of the general public in mind when they would report on it. And I think in a lot of cases, they, you know, sensationalize and blow it out of proportion and overdramatize what's going on for that reason... for me watching the news at that time for what's going on, I always try to take a step back and, you know, filter all the salesmanship of the news team out of it and try to really just focus on what's the weather map look like on the thing and "Where am I in relationship [to] that track of the storm and how concerned should I really be?" versus the local Home Depot that's sold out of hurricane clips³² and it's people fighting in line. I don't really care about that kind of stuff... I watch it for the radar. That's about all I can get out of that's useful to me but it's kind of a joke I mean. I mean I remember specifically after the storm there were several follow up stories and editorials about the sensationalism of the local news teams and, you know, making fun of certain reporters who were, you know, putting themselves in harm's way for the story. It was kind of a big joke to really—and disappointing too because they could really be a lot more useful in terms of what they're there for and they should be, but unfortunately because of the Daytime Emmys or whatever kind of awards they give out for newscasting and reporting and so forth, they probably feel like they

32. Hurricane clips are construction materials that are designed to help buildings resist damage from high winds. Depending upon their location, the clips may be used to protect the building structure or to keep roofing tiles in place. They are also employed to assist in window protection.

have to do something a little extra to get the recognition or whatever, the kudos for it.

It is important to note that the data about the storm is conveyed amidst a lot of other information—runs on grocery stores, empty superstore shelves, and the like. (These narrative motifs in media coverage were noted in the article analysis in the previous chapter.) Here, Brett C. seems to place himself as the person best suited to interpret the raw data of the storm via the radar, instead of relying on the officials to tell him what to worry about. Brett focuses on the track and where it is on a map in relation to his home.

Brett C.'s attitude that news media reportage is generally inaccurate or overblown was not in isolation. Another example came from Carolyn F., a resident of the Spring area for over thirty years³³. She has lived through several tropical storms and hurricanes that threatened the greater Houston area. During our interview, she made comments about her slant on media coverage. She explained:

They make you hyper. I remember with Alicia [in 1983]. Your cousin was down with us, and he, when he was a child, didn't deal with weather problems well. And he would be watching television, and then they would go into all the things about Carla [from 1961] and the devastation to Galveston and this, that, and the other thing. And he's terrified. I'm dealing with a kid that is going, you know, basically getting sick because he is so stressed out, and it's all because, for some unknown reason and I don't know why it is, they, I think, there is a difference between keeping you informed in a way that is helpful and seizing on something to make a major story from something that isn't. They don't seem to have a factor in there to recognizing the fact that the more they do it, they hype up something, the more terrified they make people when it's weather-related. [...] They can literally have people stay home from work or not do things because they are expecting these horrendous rains that don't come. So they really, they never filter it at all with a

33. Carolyn F. is my mother.

grain of what might happen or what, you know, they just keep going. And I don't know why. But this is a problem I think that they over—they'll grasp at something, and I don't know if it is because weather people have so few times to shine, and hurricanes and widespread tornadoes and rain have a tendency to make them shine. They all want to be Dan Rather and hang onto the lamppost during the hurricane and make their national name. And, you know, you don't need it³⁴.

In this discussion of Alicia, Carolyn moves into a critique of media coverage. The problem is not that she does not try to stay informed; instead, it is that the coverage is sensationalized to the point of obscuring the useful information, to the point of terrifying people, and in the case of my ten-year-old cousin, making a child sick with worry. She also notes a tension between heeding warnings and negative outcomes, in that listening to the media's calls to action may result in needlessly avoiding work or other activities. Ultimately, she tends to downplay the media calls to action, taking a much more reserved attitude towards hurricane preparation. As she commented:

I think to be aware that something is coming, to be given *reasonable* things you can do, because aside from evacuating, OK, about all you can do is make sure that you have batteries, canned food, and I can't think of much else that's literally going to help you get through anything. And propane if you happen to have any camp stoves or propane grills. But I mean aside from that, what can you do? You can't shield your house from high winds. You can't stop flooding. Now, actually speaking, if they *actually* could tell you that there is going to be flooding in your area, something that they do not seem able to do, you could maybe sand bag, but I doubt it in most cases, so aside from saying, "OK, we have this storm and, you know, take your necessary precautions and we'll give you updates on where it is," but they don't need to hype it, I don't think, as much. And like that thing with Galveston [the Ike evacuation], I'm sorry, someone should know, be it the mayor on down, whether 25,000 people did or did not go over the Causeway. It's not

34. Newsman Dan Rather became a national news correspondent for CBS after his role in the coverage for Hurricane Carla for local CBS affiliate KHOU.

exactly, you know, an eight-lane highway³⁵... I think they scare people. I have known your father to get terrified because of them hyping some weather system that's supposed to come through.”³⁶

In this way, she continues to differentiate the media warnings and, as she puts it, “reasonable things to do.” She also hones in on the need for “actual” information on the storm, as opposed to “hype.” For her, it again boils down to what she perceives as the media’s use of fear, and how that fear affects people, using here my father’s recurrent anxiety over potential storm threats covered by the media as an example.

In these instances, the media is seen as an “official source,” but one spreading slanted information, and whose intent is less than altruistic. Either the reporter wants to be a “Dan Rather” or the news team is angling for an award. In neither of these cases are news personnel seen as focused on protecting the population or informing the audience. Instead, they are focused only on ratings and accolades, which, in turn makes people such as Brett C. and Carolyn F. tend to react skeptically to the stories they are told by these sources.

Other informants had mixed positions on media intent and accuracy. For example, Houston resident Tamara F. generally praised the media after Hurricane Ike. She stated that much of the information shared was good and current, although some information,

35. This refers to the ambiguity reported in the media on how many people evacuated Galveston for Hurricane Ike and how many remained on the island.

36. It is interesting to note that Carolyn F. talks about Ronald F. being terrified. However, in Ronald F.’s interview, quoted earlier, he noted that they were not terrified before Rita, but were concerned about how it might impact Spring.

which she deemed as rumors in the sense of being untrue, were reported as fact, which led to confusion. However, she ultimately believed that the media stepped up and was more careful in their coverage of Ike than Rita. Regardless of beliefs about the media and the stances held towards the media, most of my informants still kept tabs on media information, whether or not they used it to inform their action plans.

History of Storm Experiences

For many people, other sources of information seem to play more influential roles in making pre-storm decisions. Another factor in the process is the experience of the individual and community in past storms. Examples seem to fall into two kinds of experience, which I conceptualize as short-term and long-term. To illustrate, in the short term before Katrina, many individuals remarked that they had seen New Orleans miss possible devastation from hurricanes. Several narrators pointed this out in their stories. In her story, Holly G. described how she had been in New Orleans long enough to watch other storms miss the city and expected Katrina to do so as well: “I’ve been through hurricanes before, but they’ve always veered away. You know, it didn’t really hit us smack-dab-on before. And even though it seemed like a serious one this time, and we should really leave, and I was boarding up my windows the day before...”³⁷. As a result, she and her ex-husband remained for Katrina. Pamela M. stated that “people thought it

37. “Writing Katrina” Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

would be as it always was” in describing the days before Katrina³⁸, and Chanda N., even though she had evacuated, was devastated by the aftermath of Katrina as “...it seemed like New Orleans had always dodged the bullet”³⁹. It is worth noting here the use of “always” in these three examples because, if we consider hurricanes in New Orleans history, as discussed in Chapter Two, the city has been damaged by other storms. However, after a series of storms that avoided the area in near history, some residents began to see this pattern as the norm.

Related to this thinking were people who felt that their part of the city was safe from Katrina. Christine M. did not realize Katrina’s threat until seeing artists at a local festival packing up and that the roadway contraflow⁴⁰ had started. Faced with the storm, she noted:

Well, my husband and I feel like the area of the city we live in has never flooded...you know never say never...but has never flooded, so we’ve um our house is a one story um surrounded by two story houses so we felt that we weren’t gonna flood and that our house was not gonna be damaged by trees so and we usually don’t leave for hurricanes, so we said you know what we’re not leaving because we’ve left in the past and it’s been shoo shoo’s⁴¹.

As in the “always” comments above, this one plays with the idea of things “never” happening, supported by the idea of “shoo shoo” evacuations in her past. Also of note in

38. “Writing Katrina” Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

39. “Writing Katrina” Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

40. Contraflow is when the flow of traffic is reversed in one direction of a highway, resulting in all traffic on the highway going in the same direction.

41. “Writing Katrina” Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

Christine's comments is the concept of the choice being informed by feeling (they "feel like" their area had never flooded; they "felt" that damage would not occur), with the verb shifts within this description pointing toward an uncertainty about this information.

For other people, these other, larger storms constructed a longer-term history to pull information from. New Orleans resident Stacy C. also recalled past storms in her own recounting of the time before Katrina:

I always grew up with stories like my MawMaw would always tell me about Camille, Hurricane Camille, you know, how horrible it was and how many people died, so when you grow up listening to those stories and your grandparents' stories of what they went through and how many days they were without power, you know, maybe friends that had maybe passed away because of the storm, in the back of your mind you always know you gotta, you know, it's dangerous and you have to be careful.

The example here illustrates how events in longer-term memory resonate with individuals in the process of deciding what to do. Storm memory can have varying meaning in the minds of people determining how to prepare for a storm.

In his story of Katrina, Adam F. connected the time leading up to the storm with stories of Betsy, even though he chose to remain in the New Orleans area for Katrina. Glen K. also made connections to Betsy and Camille, both of which he had experienced personally. He described Katrina as "...probably the worst I've ever seen and I've been through Betsy and Camille. I was young and I don't remember, I vaguely remember them storms, but this one really, it was something"⁴². In the course of Glen K.'s interview, he

42. "Writing Katrina" Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

both indicated the connection to past storms and that this storm history is often forgotten. He stated: “This generation is blind, we’ve never seen, don’t remember the bad storms...we’ve always had these near misses. New Orleans, Louisiana been getting these near misses for the last couple years. Bad storms, they miss us. And I think we got comfortable with that. And I didn’t ever think it was going to hit”⁴³. It is worth noting, again, the use of “always” here, even though Glen K. uses it as a negative example, and he chose to evacuate at the last moment. His comment, though, points to a tension between the short-term and long-term memories, and how short-term memory can make people “blind” to other threatening storms.

In Chanda N.’s Katrina narrative, she had planned to stay until her family compelled her to evacuate. She had already evacuated twice that year due to hurricane threats and was reticent to go again. Like many residents, another aspect of personal experience can come into play—the seemingly unnecessary evacuation. (Of course, perceiving the evacuation as unnecessary is something that usually comes after the storm has passed.) Evacuation is not simply leaving home for a bit—it is a decision that requires money, time, and connections to transportation and places to stay. In any given storm season, there may be no calls to evacuate or there may be several, and each evacuation incurs costs, both personal and financial, for the evacuee. To some, such as Chanda, two evacuations for storms that did not amount to much in the end made her want to stay for Katrina.

43. “Writing Katrina” Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

As with Katrina responses, recent memories of Katrina and its aftermath fed into reactions to Rita. Stacy C., the New Orleans resident who mentioned Camille earlier, evacuated to the Houston area before Katrina. She faced a long and difficult evacuation that involved leaving with four children, one of whom was only two days old. One month later, when Rita threatened and she was still in Houston, Stacy C. refused to evacuate. Her response was pointed: “Over my dead body. I will not get in that car again... If Rita wants to take me, she can take me. I’m done. I am done.” The repetition of her comment on being done helps to underscore the absoluteness of her resolve.

Houston residents were also influenced by the experience of Katrina. K.C. G.⁴⁴, for example, noted the following:

We had just had Katrina prior to [Rita], and I think that had we not had Katrina prior to [Rita] and seen the influx of everybody from New Orleans and had the experience in this city where we took everybody in. I think our response would have been a little bit different. I think my response would have been a little bit different. In the days before the storm we knew Rita was coming and it was humongous. At one point I think, if I am not mixing up my hurricanes because we have so many of them, it like filled up the Gulf. Looking at it was ridiculous. I remember they kept doing all these maps you know in the days prior saying, “it’s going to hit here. It’s going to hit here.” Finally, they were like, “It’s going to come straight up 45, and we were like, ‘Yea. OK that’s scary considering what just happened with Katrina.’”

In K.C.’s story, both media information and storm history came into play in her response to the storm. It was not only that the storm on the map was huge and its track was on course for her home area, it was also that Katrina just happened that added to the

44. K.C. is this informant’s first name, not a pseudonym.

urgency. She and her husband, who she described as a “nutball survivalist,” stayed because they had supplies at the house and, as she watched the mass evacuation from Houston, she did not want to get stuck in the gridlock.

Brett C. also connected the evacuation for Rita with Katrina. As he stated, “We were told to evacuate and that’s because it was in close proximity to when Katrina had hit so everybody was quite paranoid about what was going to happen based on that whole storm that occurred and so everybody left and we left probably late in that afternoon around four [o’clock].” Again, it was the memory of the recently passed storm that motivated the attention paid to the evacuation order. In the end, Brett C. joined the somewhere between 2.5 and 3.7 million people who evacuated for Rita. Many of these people would not have been considered people who *had* to evacuate, but they still chose to⁴⁵. In his book, *A New Species of Trouble*, Kai Erikson borrows the term “the evacuation shadow phenomenon” to describe “...the gap between what official wisdom called for and what the people at risk, acting upon wisdom of their own, actually did” (1994, 140). Although the term “evacuation shadow phenomenon” was coined by Zeigler, Brunn, and Johnson (1981) writing about evacuations due to the threat of a nuclear meltdown, the same general idea is apt here. Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski also note this aptness this in relation to Rita when they write, “...the evacuation shadow phenomenon was seen most recently [as written in 2006] immediately prior to Hurricane Rita. Despite the fact that they are common, and despite the fact that why they occur is

45. For Ike, residents in many of these areas were dissuaded from evacuating because of the issues with the massive Rita evacuation.

well understood, ‘inappropriate’ efforts to seek safety on the part of people whom authorities do not consider at risk have also been seen as indicative of panic” (2006, 59). They posit, however, that responses such as these are not indicative of panic but are from people being “risk averse or because they do not fully understand or trust the warning information they have received” (Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski 2006, 59). The idea of the evacuation shadow phenomenon is also worth noting because it illustrates a way in which residents apply approaches that have been promoted by officials in preparedness communications, but not necessarily in ways that officials would promote in the specific context. In the case of Brett C., his family was in a mandatory evacuation area south of Houston, but many families were not. It is interesting that Brett C. makes a panic assumption that Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski argue against, labelling people as being “quite paranoid” before Rita and that paranoia as motivating them onto the roads.

Ultimately, Rita left the greater Houston area largely unaffected, as the storm made landfall east of the city. Three years later, though, the memories of evacuating echoed in the decision-making processes of residents facing Hurricane Ike, a storm that did have significant impact on the Houston-Galveston area. Brett C., an evacuee for Rita, labeled the storm a “false alarm” and noted that: “Just talking about Rita, we were a bit gun-shy of just packing up and high tailing it out of town due to the bad experiences from that. And it was just the previous year [sic], and so we elected to stay mainly for that reason and ride out the storm wherever it was going to be when it hit.” Here, the experience with the last major threat (Rita) influenced the response for the current threat

(Ike). Regardless of the storm's track and potential threat to the area, Brett C. and his family put more weight in their experience with Rita and subsequent challenges with evacuation and chose to stay for Ike. Unfortunately, unlike Rita, Ike hit Brett's home hard, causing considerable damage, although none of his family was injured.

Vicki B., a resident of a town south of Houston recounted both evacuating for Rita and not leaving for Ike. She opened her evacuation story by stating that "Well, we evacuated for Rita because, because it was stupid. It was stupid. We saw what Katrina had done and everybody got into a great big hubub and Thursday evening before Rita hit we had packed up everything." Although she, her husband, and their pets were able to make it out to their evacuation location, unlike many people who were stuck on the road, other matters made her time away from home a miserable one. They stayed in a 20'X40', one-room camp house with more than eleven people and many animals. Although communications were limited, they knew that Rita had done "squat all" and that they had "prepared in vain." The experience was uncomfortable and negative for Vicki and her husband, and they swore never to evacuate there again. Based upon their Rita experience and the experiences of others, such as a neighbor having one of their children die while stuck on the road in the evacuation, they chose to stay for Hurricane Ike. Again, individual decisions for one particular storm are built out of prior storms, whether that influence is to promote evacuation or staying.

Sharan Z., the bookstore owner in Galveston and Houston area resident, also noted the effects of Rita on her Ike decisions with both how to prepare the shop and

where to go. In addition to Rita's effects, storms in 2008 also came into play in the decision making process. She commented:

So that summer we had already had a couple of scares. We had evacuated twice. After that, I didn't move anything in the shop because you know when we got back from Rita, we had to pay money again to put books back up and the brunt of the tourist season was over, we didn't have much money coming in...so after that I was like, next time we have a hurricane scare, that's it, not moving anything, that's what I have insurance for...With Rita we also had a five hour drive to Houston...and it was agonizing and we had two cats in the car with us in the heat of the day... So, that experience, I think, the experience with Rita, people just had really bad experiences...We felt that it was important to stay in Houston because we wanted to get back to the store as soon as possible. Plus, I grew up in Houston. I had been through Hurricane Carla as an elementary school kid. I had been through Hurricane Alicia as a young mother in my, like about thirty years old. And I had been through Tropical Storm Allison in 2001 and that was pretty scary also but, you know, you don't evacuate. You just stay home, kind of guard your property. Make sure if you're here you can take care of things better, if you have a problem.

She went on to explain that during Alicia, she had some property damage, but that she was able to take care of it quickly due to being home. Here, the effects of several storms were influential in her decisions to leave things as is in the shop and to stay put for Ike. Additionally noteworthy is that this decision comes out of personal challenges (a past agonizing drive) and of financial impact (the cost-benefit analysis of having to put books back on the shelves after the storm passes), as well as a history with storms farther in the past that inform her. Sharan's experiences on all these levels fed into how she chose to respond.

Immediate Context, Immediately Personal

Another influence on residents' decisions may be the immediate situation that people are living in before the storm. These immediate contexts can cause residents to have minimal exposure to official data altogether or to have matters that, to them, take priority over the storm itself. In the narrative told by New Orleans resident Elizabeth H., she was too busy planning a family party to keep up with the news about Hurricane Katrina⁴⁶. A celebration also affected the preparation plans of New Orleans area resident Lemel J. Her birthday fell on the same weekend as Hurricane Katrina, and her plans to go to a Biloxi, Mississippi resort originally caused her to ignore people's warnings for her to prepare for the oncoming storm. She eventually evacuated from the city "after being harrassed" and looking up information online⁴⁷.

To use another example from a different storm, Houston resident Mike M. —a self-proclaimed hobbyist hurricane tracker who uses weather reports to follow hurricanes on his own—noted that he was "caught off guard" by Hurricane Rita. Like Elizabeth H., personal events were the focus of his attention, as his wife Yvonne had recently had surgery at the time. By the time she was settled enough and he made note of the storm, he was "completely unprepared" and evacuation was no longer an option for his family.

In the case of Houston-area resident Kathryn H., her pregnancy affected her exposure to information on Ike. She recalled not really thinking about Ike until hosting a

46. "Writing Katrina" Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

47. "Through Hell and High Water: Katrina's First Responders Oral History Project" Collection, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

Bible study at her home a few days before its landfall. When discussing the days before Ike, she said

Well, I remember—I remember it because I was pregnant. My due date was September 20th, so, like that—I do have very clear memories of Ike because every day leading up to your due date you remember...Anyway, I remember at that Bible study [around the Wednesday before Ike's landfall on Saturday morning], like that's when we were first talking about there's this hurricane coming, what's going on with that? But I wasn't really that concerned, I was like, "I'm having a baby. That's kind of what I'm thinking about right now."

Kathryn's focus was primarily on being pregnant, not on the approaching storm. She did go to Target (a chain retailer) for supplies while her young son was in a Mother's Day Out daycare, giving her time to pick up some items. Kathryn noted that the store was not very busy, even though it was the Thursday before the storm. Many people at the store approached her about being nine-months pregnant, asking her if she was worried about "having the baby in the middle of a hurricane." In contrast, a store employee approached her to tell her about the time she was nine-months pregnant in Japan during a typhoon. The employee told Kathryn that she "knew she wasn't going to have that baby during the typhoon...[She] knew he or she wasn't going to come then. But as soon as that typhoon left, [she] went into labor." Kathryn remembered "thinking that would be nice. That would be ideal." As she wished, this scenario is what ended up happening to her. The scene in the store helps to illustrate the priority that the pregnancy took in Kathryn's approach to preparation and that it takes in her narrative of Ike.

Other kinds of events can also affect the preparation process. For New Orleans resident Mark M., participating in a parade played into his preparations. He explained:

There's a Mardi Gras krewe⁴⁸ called the Krewe of Oak that parades the Friday before Mardi Gras and also as a Midsummer Mardi Gras. This krewe's been parading now for twenty-two years and they had a parade scheduled on Saturday night outside the Krewe of Oak. It's a marching parade with a couple thousand people, pulling floats, and that kind of stuff. So a lot of people packed up their cars and put their pets inside their cars and everyone went out to the Maple Leaf⁴⁹ around nine o'clock, business as usual, and prepared to go ahead and have a great time...We paraded fast. We did a bit of a shortened route because of the wind gusts and the floats and the float heads and whatnot...After the parade, a bunch of those people jumped in their fully packed cars with their pets and drove on out of town, and a bunch of those people stayed and danced. I guess me and a lot of my friends were the ones who stayed and danced. A lot of people left Sunday morning. But Sunday morning, I was starting to get prepared⁵⁰.

Here, the strength of a long-standing tradition influenced the timing of storm preparation. For some of the participants, it delayed their evacuation until after the parade, and, for others, such as Mark M. it delayed the beginning of his own storm preparations, which included boarding up windows, filling up trash cans for a backup water supply, and storing supplies on a porch.

The influence of immediate context was also present in the narrative of Glenn Z., a student in Houston but previously from Florida, another place frequently threatened by hurricanes. When the threat of Hurricane Rita drove many residents to evacuate, Glenn Z.

48. A krewe is a social organization that puts on parades and other festivities around Mardi Gras.

49. The Maple Leaf is a local bar a music venue.

50. "Through Hell and High Water: Katrina's First Responders Oral History Project" Collection, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

wanted to stay due to his experiences with other storms, such as 1999's Hurricane Floyd.

However, he ended up evacuating due to his friends. As he explained:

I just moved here a couple of months beforehand for grad school and it was a couple of weeks or a month after Katrina...so Katrina was still on everyone's mind...Well, everybody started to panic, it was like oh let's evacuate, everybody's got to evacuate. And the mayor went on TV and was like don't evacuate unless you think you should. And then everybody said well that means we should evacuate because we don't want to be underwater like in Katrina. But I didn't want to evacuate at first because I had been through like four or five hurricanes that year already in Florida and in Florida it's just like something that happens...So at first I was like that's ridiculous just because with Katrina doesn't mean Rita's going to be anything like it. So I didn't want to evacuate but then all my friends, everybody I knew...they were like we're going to evacuate and I was like well maybe if I evacuate it will be fun.

Glenn Z.'s comment ties in several threads of the discussion thus far. His initial response

was to stay in place due to the "four or five" other storms he had dealt with in Florida.

His friends, many of whom were also incoming graduate students who were new to the area and to the threat of hurricanes, were instead focused on concerns stemming from Katrina. Glenn ended up more influenced by all of his friends leaving and the importance of a social network in a new place, an immediate concern to him, than by his own experiences, and he chose to evacuate the area. Ironically, Glenn Z.'s evacuation attempt did not succeed due to traffic and car troubles, and he eventually returned to his Houston apartment and was there through Rita.

Other people can influence the decisions made by residents. Returning to Sharan Z., she recounted being in Houston the Wednesday before Ike because she had a day off. Her employee, Paul, called her from the shop about the storm coming. Sharan had told

him that they would take a wait-and-see approach to the storm. Paul, however, told her about information he had gathered from another shop employee. Sharan explained

We had a part-time employee who was big into sailing ships, little boats you know. And he had all these sailing websites that kept talking about the storm surge. So he came in, he was in downtown Galveston to get some supplies, and he comes running in the shop and says, “Paul, you’ve got to evacuate. This is going to be horrible. It’s going to have a horrible storm surge even though it’s only a Category 2”... And most of us in Galveston, we didn’t even really understand what a storm surge was...All you think of with a hurricane is the wind. So, and you know, there was a Category 1 that hit near the end of [Galveston] Island and we had a blackout for about an hour or two and that was it...We didn’t even have a big rain event. So, you know, Category 1 is to us, here, is no big deal. Category 2, it’s like “OK. It’s a Category 2, we can live with that.” But, you know, because we are behind the seawall. We’re not out in the west end and we’re pretty far away from the ocean... So, Paul called me up and said, “Sharan, [the part-time employee] knows what he’s talking about. We’ve got to leave right away.” I said, “OK.” I thought, “Alright, so we’ll evacuate again. What the heck, you know.”

Sharan’s comments point to the employee’s expertise as influential in the decision to prepare the store in Galveston, even though her gut still told her that it would probably be a needless preparation process. She returned to the shop and boarded it up using specially designed boards for the windows. She and her employee also moved some books to other locations. They then headed north to Houston the next day to try to avoid the experience they had when evacuating ahead of Rita.

In addition, people make their decisions based upon the ability of family members to evacuate. In a few cases in the narratives I looked at, decisions were made due to medical constraints of family members. In Joel R.’s case, she was tied to New Orleans before Katrina due to a family member’s hospitalization. Her family knew they wanted

to do something because “...the storm had such a magnitude”⁵¹. However, given that her daughter had had a premature baby the week before the storm and the baby was still in a hospital in the area, her family evacuated to a downtown hotel. As she commented,

... [W]e did that, instead of leaving, because we thought, you know, usually a hurricane would be two or three days and, you could go back to, you can get back in and things like that...So, we thought that we would be close to downtown, because Touro⁵² wouldn’t be too far away and after the storm passed, we could get my daughter back to [the hospital] to take care of and see her newborn baby.⁵³

Medical and family reasons can override the official calls to action. Similarly, Slidell resident Adam F. noted family medical reasons as part of his decision not to evacuate: “I guess being hardheaded would be one [reason for not evacuating]. That’s most people’s excuse. I had a family member, my sister’s husband, who was in the hospital. He had an aneurism a few weeks before the storm and the initial plan was to...scoop him up [and take him to the downtown hotel where Adam F. worked as a manager]”⁵⁴. The need to help with an infirm family member tied him and his father to the area, but, he also notes his own attitude fed into the decision, a decision that caused his mother to be “balling [sic] crying” before she evacuated. Turning to a different storm, in the case of Michael M., the hobbyist tracker mentioned earlier, he remained in Houston for Rita due to his wife Yvonne’s surgery keeping her under medical care after her hospital stay. (Before

51. “Writing Katrina” Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

52. Touro is a New Orleans hospital.

53. “Writing Katrina” Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

54. “Writing Katrina” Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

Ike, Mike also noted that Yvonne was seven-and-a-half to eight months pregnant with their second child, so she was not very mobile if they had wanted to evacuate. Their choice for Ike, though, was to stay at home.) In cases such as these, family and friends can have a significant impact on the decision to stay or go. However, it is worth noting that some residents made decisions that did not agree with those of friends and family, so the influence of others is not an absolute one.

Preparing Resources

Regardless of whether residents stay or leave before a hurricane, they are faced with the need to gather supplies and other preparation activities. The matter of what materials to gather in preparation for a hurricane has variability within the lives of residents whose narratives I considered. Christine M., a New Orleans resident who remained for Katrina, did the following to prepare for the storm:

I had gone to the grocery Saturday morning [August 27] because even if the hurricane would not have hit us directly, I figured we were going to lose electricity, so I went to the grocery, got food that could be cooked on the grill...and of course bought a bunch of beer [laughs]...and, you know, munchie food, [of course] water, dog food because we have two dogs and two cats at the time...batteries, flashlights, the usual hurricane stuff...both cars were gassed up [in case of flooding]...we have tools, if we had to climb on the roof...⁵⁵

55. "Writing Katrina" Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

Many of these items are similar to those recommended via media communications, with some variations. Notable additions include the beer—an indication of some levity in the preparations—and the tools for getting onto the roof in case of flooding. The tools reflect the potential (and real) danger of becoming trapped in a house if flood waters rise too high for the structure.

Ronald F.⁵⁶, recalled gathering supplies in the days before Rita. He noted that they “got as much material as we felt was appropriate in terms of water and food and other products, stockpiled. Batteries and the like. And we have an interior closet on the first floor in our story and a half home that we periodically clean out for hurricane situations or tornado situations, as it’s the most interior closet that we have so that was ready.” Carolyn F. also described this safe room under the stairs, and that she gathered supplies for comfort in a place in the house thought safe from high winds. In contrast, she discussed how she did not do much for Ike, a storm that affected them more than Rita. She commented that she made ice in preparation, but that ultimately she said that was a “stupid idea that ice was going to help me” as it only lasted so long after the power outage they had for Ike, which lasted over ten days. The contrast between the preparations for the two storms highlights how preparation perspective can shift over time.

56. As noted in an earlier footnote, Ronald F. is my father. Until retirement, he was the sole wage-earner for my family. Rita is especially significant to him and to my family, in part, because he was laid off from the company (where he had worked for fifteen years) on the day of Rita's anticipated landfall. In this way, he had to worry about the loss of his livelihood and about the potential loss of his family's property at the same time.

The frame of individual reference, too, can affect what is gathered. Houston-area resident Kathryn P., for instance, noted differing styles between her and her husband. She evacuated for Hurricane Rita and recounted the following about her preparation:

I just remember running around and grabbing photos and mostly thinking, “OK, I can buy new clothes but, you know, these photos are going to be—any writing that I had that I didn’t have backed up, you know, like I had some old writings from when I was in high school that I have never put on computer. I grabbed those, of course. And one thing that Rita taught me was to keep—I realized that I hadn’t really thought about that before so I hadn’t really gathered, I didn’t really know where all the important stuff was and so when Ike came through I was much more prepared in terms of what I am taking and where is it, so I could really find it. But, you know, that was a weird thing... I had always wondered “What would I take in a situation like that?...It’s like when you are in a situation like that, it’s—it wasn’t *so* different from how I had imagined it but it was somewhat different...

To the date that I interviewed her, Kathryn P. still kept some of the stuff that she packed in her trunk. She guesses she “is still paranoid [she] might actually have to do it again.” Some of the items she keeps in her preparation kit include a favor from her wedding, pictures not on computer, albums, and journals from a trip to London. Kathryn P.’s construction of preparation is more dependent on emotional importance than physical importance, and few of the items she listed in her description of preparation are similar to those appearing in official lists. In contrast, her husband focused on clothes, laptops, and the family cats (as she put it: “so much more practical than I am”). Their preparations became an act of compromise and negotiation as materials were added to the evacuation vehicles and then removed due to lack of space. They disagreed over her taking student papers, some old and some current, as she felt responsible as a teacher for student work.

She did end up taking some student work with her. They removed items such as extra clothes (winter clothes, sweatshirts) and cat toys, as there was only so much room to pack. This kind of supply gathering looks very different from the clean-seeming checklists provided through official channels, but it also illustrates the impact of the personal on preparation.

This example helps to illustrate the differences between collecting items for physical survival and collecting items for identity preservation, and that, in situations such as hurricane preparation, different individuals in communities place different value on the physical objects they gather. As sociologist Ian Woodward writes about thinking about material culture:

There are two principal paradigms—which should not form mutually exclusive, or antagonistic, analytic frameworks—for the interpretation of consumer objects: one based in semiotics, which emphasizes the ability of objects to represent or signify something in social discourse; the other in cultural anthropology, which focuses on what people do with objects and the ways in which the objects are culturally embedded in social relations. (2001, 118)

In this way, objects collected for a storm can be signs of practicality and preparedness, as well as consumables that help for survival. In addition, they are objects embedded in the context of the person collecting them, and thereby have particular social meanings to the individual. Here, Kathryn P. and her husband have differing relationships to the objects they collect in order to prepare for the oncoming storm, and, as they are evacuating together, they must compromise on what to take with them. On one hand, Kathryn P.'s description of her husband as being more practical than she is speaks to the concept of

proper preparation. On the other, Kathryn P.'s objects speak to the importance, for some, of saving items that represent one's self and its relationship to the social world. In her discussion of material culture and identity, marketing scholar Marsha L. Richins discusses the difference between the public and private meanings of objects. To Richins, public meanings are assigned by people who do not possess the object, formed by shared social understandings of the object. Private meanings "...are the sum of the subjective meanings that an object holds for a particular individual" (Richins 1994, 506). However, these meanings are not completely separate from one another as clean-cut categories. In this way, the public and private meanings can both come into play in how an individual regards an object. Kathryn P. is aware of objects that have the public meaning of being prepared, but also she understands the private meanings of some of the objects she collects while preparing. What is useful to consider here, then, is that the connection of an object to a person's self can influence the value that the individual places on it and the importance that object can take on when someone considers issues of evacuation and preparation. This connection may not be clear to an outsider—someone seeing a wedding favor among objects in a hurricane preparation kit might consider its inclusion an inefficient use of space—but the connection can be strong to the person doing the preparation.

Not all supply gathering looked like Kathryn P.'s. Houston-area resident Tamara F. noted how preparing for Rita "...served us very well for Ike." It had taken her family about two days to prepare for Rita, so when Ike became a threat, they already had

plywood, canned food, and emergency supplies all in one place. She commented, “We knew pretty much what we needed to do.” As soon as the media started reporting on Ike, they bought what they did not have enough of three days out, including canned juices and food. They also withdrew cash, bought gas (not to evacuate, but to have in the car), and gathered emergency supplies, such as batteries for their radio, television, and flashlights. As a mentor to teaching assistants at a local university, she also communicated with them, as many of the teaching assistants had never been through a hurricane before. She advised them to get food, water, cash, and gas and to stay at home. In contrast to Kathryn P., Tamara F.’s description of how to prepare looks much more like the ideal goal promoted by media (but often missing in their stories).

Brett C. also highlighted some positive aspects of preparation. He described gathering items before Rita, focusing mainly on important documents and paperwork. He explained that

We didn’t really prepare a whole lot other than I remember, you know, we have a whole file cabinet, you know, they told everybody you know on as far as TV, the news, and so forth to give advice about what you should do in the event of needing to evacuate, what you should bring or what’s important or what’s not important. So, you know, a lot of it was dependent upon your situation, of course, you know...One of the first things everybody thinks about is like pictures and things that are valuable and memories and so forth that are irreplaceable. But, you know, for us, we didn’t really have like bunches of photo albums like my parents had and probably your parents have, that generation before the digital age of, you know, digital cameras and so forth. All of our stuff is on, you know, [an online photo service], so we didn’t have to worry about packing that stuff up, but we did still have a few little things. But I had a little portable...10X12 plastic file cabinet thing. I just loaded it up with all our important insurance information, you know, birth certificates, I think we had some resumes and stuff in there...Just all the important documents that we could think that we might need and could fit in a

decent size portable file, plastic file cabinet box that we had...Other than that, just the clothes on our back and a few changes of clothes and that was pretty much it...It was kind of one of those we'd never really thought about it until it actually happened of what we'd actually take with us, but it was probably a good exercise for us in determining what was really important and valuable to us that, you know, we needed. And I was actually pretty pleased that we actually gathered it all in one little box [laughs]. It just kind of makes you stop and think "Why do we have all this other crap?" If we had to flee for our lives, what would we take? And it all fits in one little box.

Brett's preparation, although it was something they had not thought about before Rita, reflected a methodical gathering of resources, partially based on media recommendations and partially based on their own personal situation.

Other residents had variations on what to gather for Ike. Glenn Z. explained that he filled up containers with tap water in his home, posing the question "Why can't I just fill up my containers with tap water?" He had food in the apartment, but this food was not bought for the storm. He felt they had enough canned goods that he and his girlfriend would not starve for a few weeks, so he was not concerned. K.C. G. commented that she usually has a good supply of water on hand, so she was not worried about getting more. She also explained that she had been "trained well" by her ex-husband and had prepared with a flashlight and a radio. Vicki B. noted how she and her husband cut plywood for their windows. They also filled five-gallon cat litter pails with water⁵⁷ and gathered

57. Glenn Z.'s reaction against purchasing and Vicki B.'s water collection could point towards another master narrative at play in addition to the one discussed later in this chapter—a pro-capitalist one that prioritizes the purchase of product in order to be properly prepared. In choosing to circumvent the buying process by using their own containers, these residents could be countering that narrative.

propane for the outdoor cooker and batteries. She commented that they did as much as they could to be sensible about it.

Concern over Resources: Looting and Protection of Property

In a few of the interviews that I conducted, the concern over the protection of property surfaced. Looting in the wake of Hurricane Katrina was a topic widely covered by media outlets, and it is a concept that is considered in several academic publications and presentations (e.g., Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski 2006; Miles 2007; Priesmeyer 2010; Goldstein 2011). After Katrina, stories of looting and unruliness were rampant, and the media helped to disseminate stories of looting, particularly in the heavily flooded New Orleans area. For example, news stories with the titles such as “Looters Take Advantage of New Orleans Mess,” “New Orleans Mayor Orders Looting Crackdown,” and “New Orleans Police Officers Kill Looters in Bridge Shoot-Out” splashed across media outlets. With the influx of people escaping Katrina coming to Houston, stories of increased crime in Houston also circulated (Fugarino 2011).

In preparation for Hurricane Rita, some residents were concerned about looting occurring in their own area. K.C. G. took several pictures after Rita of places in the suburb of Spring. One of the pictures she took was of a jewelry and loan store in a strip center that was boarded up in preparation for the storm. In large, black spray painted letters, someone had painted “Looterers will be shot!” with a hand-painted target next to the statement (Figure 13).



Figure 13. A storefront in Spring, Texas. Photo courtesy of K.C. G.

Even though Spring is well out of the downtown Houston area, and was well out of the storm surge threat area, the concern for the social problems that were described in the wake of Katrina were manifested in the preparation for Hurricane Rita. The “truth” of how people would behave after a potentially damaging hurricane carried weight, even though the reports of looting post-Katrina have been discussed as being racially biased and misrepresented. As Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski note, the reports serve to record “volumes of information on what the media and public officials *believed and*

communicated about looting in New Orleans...[T]hese reports characterized post-Katrina looting as very widespread, wanton, irrational, and accompanied by violence. Moreover, the media confined their reporting to the putative lawless behavior of certain categories and types of people...to the exclusion of other behaviors in which these disaster victims may have engaged during the disaster, producing a profile of looters and looting groups that overlooked whatever prosocial, altruistic behaviors such groups might have undertaken” (2006, 66). The message was sent that looting comes out of major hurricane events—and was received and applied by people in a different context. In response to this concern, part of the Spring store owner’s preparation activities was to send a message to potential looters in order to protect his or her store and the property inside of it.

Another Houston-area resident, “Cindy,” listed the items packed before she left her apartment for the last time before going to work, where she was going to stay for the duration of Rita⁵⁸. She described packing a variety of materials: documents, dog supplies, and food and water. She included several items that she felt had important sentimental value, but she also included a weapon with her items. As Cindy explained, “I grabbed my gun because after Katrina I didn’t know what to expect.” Unlike the “looterers” sign that proclaimed a kind of certainty that the concerns of Katrina would become relevant to Rita, Cindy’s comment rides the fence a bit. The possibility of threat is credible enough to warrant action in her case; the stories believable enough to justify carrying a weapon.

58. Cindy is a pseudonym.

Another story that reflected the mistrust of people surfaced in my interview with Joe M. Joe left Houston before Rita as part of a car caravan with his parents. After telling me the story of their evacuation, Joe noted that he had another story to add, and it was one of his parents' experience in a town in East Texas, when he was no longer with them. He recounted the following narrative:

But there is an interesting side story. Obviously gas was very scarce during [the storm] and at one point my parents went to go get—they went to get gas and they pulled in at East Texas. Here's the thing to realize is that this was off in the country like off in East Texas country, so they found this little gas station. And they found a place to get some gas. And this was after I left. But they found a place to get gas. There were these two guys out there with shotguns that were keeping order and making sure the place stayed orderly. Making sure people kept their place in line. And that was how things were maintained at that store. Yeah, that was how martial law was declared at that little store. And if you wanted your gas just don't get out of line. It wasn't threatening, they said it wasn't threatening, it wasn't—no one was held at gun point, but it was just to let it be known that no one was going to get out of line, no one was to—that there was not going to be any uproar, any kind of fighting at this gas station. So I thought that was interesting.

The behavior Joe describes here was echoed in his comments afterward about his general impression of the social situation surrounding Rita. As he put it, “It was very, I saw a different side of people during that experience. It was very, if you want to call it, for lack of a better term, like ‘post-apocalyptic.’ It was very, um, you really saw what happens when things break down and when people kind of had to fend for themselves.” He went on to talk about how he did not see a lot of altruistic, or, as he put it, “oh we’re one big family, let’s have a BBQ on the freeway” behavior.

In these ways, a sense of protection over resources and safety surfaced in some stories about the days before Rita. Interestingly, this concern did not crop up in Ike stories in my collection of interviews, which might be attributed to the debunking of media coverage of looting after Katrina or due to a lack of looting reports post-Rita. However, this is not to say that this concern did not surface for any residents in relationship to Ike. In my own article (2011) about online comments post-Ike, several commenters discussed the issue of effective law and order response, one even discussing being part of a roadblock north of Houston that protected his neighborhood from anyone who should not be there.

Evaluation of Preparation: Preparer's Remorse

While looking at several hurricane narratives, another aspect of the discussion of preparation that emerged was the presence of evaluative comments that were woven into some interviews. In these cases, it was not evaluation of the media information, as discussed earlier in this chapter, which was notable. Instead it was the evaluation of one's own preparation response that was interesting. In making evaluative comments regarding their actions, narrators assign value and significance to them. (It would be possible to tell the story and mention these actions without the evaluation.) Some residents, such as Tamara F., noted the positive aspects of her preparation. She noted that her and her family's experiences with Rita prepared them well for Ike, leaving them with little to do to prepare. However, most of the evaluative comments that jumped out during my

research were the more critical ones. Two examples of this negative evaluation were (emphases are mine):

- Vicki B.: In discussing her preparation and evacuation before Rita, she commented that “Well, we evacuated for Rita because, because it was *stupid*. It was *stupid*.”
- Carolyn F.: During her preparation before Ike, one of the activities she did was make extra ice in the freezer. While discussing this, she comments that it was a “*stupid* idea that ice was going to help me.” As previously noted, she added that the ice did not last the ten days that their power was out after the storm.

Considering these comments together, I began to think of them as examples of “preparer’s remorse.” When the preparation activities do not match the effects of the storm, either by being too much for little effects or too little for greater effects, in retrospect an individual may chide themselves for taking certain actions. These actions are often ones that may have been recommended to them to take by officials or often part of official response. Taking Vicki B.’s example, she lived in an area urged to evacuate. Considering Carolyn F.’s issue with making ice, ice is frequently provided by relief sources after a storm, so it is not irrational to think to produce it beforehand. However, in preparer’s remorse, the narrator places blame on him or herself for seeming to make a

bad judgment call or for losing appropriate perspective when they “should” have known better.

Borrowing from Labov’s narrative structure, preparer’s remorse comments feed into the evaluation of the narrative. They serve to tell some of the “so what?” of the story of a particular storm, to help to show “what the narrator is getting at” (Labov 1972, 366). In the case of preparer’s remorse in Rita narratives, it feeds into the sense of over-response for a storm that seemed to do very little, while in Ike narratives, it feeds into the sense of not being able to do enough or not being able to predict what could have been done (such as when Carolyn F. describes the ten-day to three- or four-week power outage in the area as being “inconceivable”). An undercurrent that runs beneath this idea is one of control. Even though they took recommended actions or seemed to align with official instructions, these narrators attribute fault to their actions inwardly (at least in part), as opposed to focusing blame on being told to do things that were not helpful. This internal placement of control and blame gives weight to the value of lay judgment in that the narrator can find flaw with their own action and, potentially, change it when faced with a different storm threat. Vicki B.’s critique of her evacuation choice, for example, made her determined to stay for Ike. The active critiquing of one’s own actions, therefore, plays into other actions. Preparer’s remorse can be an influencing factor, and, in this way, story can communicate experience and may inform action. The experience is formative as is the evaluative aspects of the narrative retelling of that experience. In this way, narratives can act as cultural scripts, providing a way in which “individuals are able to both give

expression to an experience which is intensely personal and at the same time (or, as part of the same process) give a culturally informed meaning to their experience” (Mattingly 1998, 14). Through narrating their experience, these individuals make sense of the choices they have made.

A different version of this concept seemed to come into play in other stories. When Brett C. described his Ike preparation, he said his family did “pretty much nothing” before laughing. He continued, “We got together with some friends and just visited with them. Had a time and as far as our family goes, we didn’t really do anything.” Even though he explains that he was not sure he would have done much differently, except board up the windows, the laughter around putting in no real preparation action seems to critique the action a bit by poking fun at it.

Complexities in Residential Response

As evidenced in the examples from this chapter, residential preparation and response to storm threats are complex in ways not communicated in media portrayals, in part due to the unique nature of individual experience and situations. Sharan Z.’s comment highlights some of these complexities:

Each time you’re like—because after Rita, we were like, we should have left at night. And we should have left at like two or three in the morning and driven an hour to Houston, you know. This time, it was—so that was on our mind. The next

hurricane that comes we'll be scurrying around putting our expensive books in our storage area, or at least up on our balcony area [they had massive losses due to high water in the shop from Ike]. And, you know, every hurricane leaves you with different priorities, but, you know, each hurricane is so different that you don't know how to plan for it.

In other words, hurricanes are different; priorities change; and individuals differ in the experiences they bring to every storm threat. As discussed above, these lay concerns can include choosing the best evacuation approaches, securing business and personal property, not wasting effort or financial resources, protecting self and family from perceived threats (including those beyond the storm), and choosing the “right” things to gather for living and for memory.

Master Narrative, Narrative Entitlement, and Hurricane Preparation

In Chapters Three and Four, I laid out traits in media narratives and residential narratives about hurricane preparation. Discussing them side-by-side facilitates thinking about how these two kinds of narratives interact. Officials and residents use many of the same conventions to construct preparation, but how they do it differs, creating complexity and tension. Using the concepts of master narrative and entitlement, both introduced in Chapter One, provides a framework for thinking about these interactions. From this discussion, I will draw forth some recommendations as to how this discussion can inform future preparation in the next chapter.

Master Narrative and the Narrative of Pre-Victimization

As discussed in Chapter One, master narratives (or metanarratives) are totalizing narratives that serve to create order to social life and to legitimize that kind of order. As Lyotard comments, “The decision makers...attempt to manage these clouds of sociality according to input/output matrices, following a logic which implies that their elements are commensurable and that the whole is determinable. They allocate our lives for the growth of power” (1979, xxiv). In doing so, the master narrative can create a “truth” that disallows or disregards the heterogeneity of human experience, if that truth is not destabilized.

Elaine Lawless notes in “Transforming the Master Narrative” that

Lyotard points out that until we recognize that there is a master narrative in place and that we have all been participants in the structuring and application of that master narrative can we call it into question, examine it, and ask ourselves whether or not we want to change it. Until this recognizing moment, he claims, the master narrative has been acting invisibly. (2003, 61)

In this way, we must try to identify master narratives at work before we can (if desired) attempt to change how they work or whether to shift the narrative. Although “hurricane preparation” may not seem as overt a master narrative as the cycle of violence from Lawless’s work or the “welfare mother,” “college student,” or “housing project resident” identified in Julian Rappaport’s discussion of dominant cultural narratives (1995, 803), the media-communicated messages of preparation seem to provide concepts that are

culturally familiar to those within the audience. These concepts, described in Chapter Three, include:

1. The idea that to be prepared, residents should listen to the media and follow instructions and checklists.
2. The idea that, generally, residents seem scattered, with many choosing not to follow actions well, leading to panic or poor decision making.
3. The idea that official sources, although potentially fallible, are the best to listen to and to follow.

Traits such as these seem to coalesce into a “narrative of pre-victimization” surrounding hurricane preparation. In this narrative, residents are placed within a narrative space in which they are quite possibly doomed. In this space, residents are set between following instructions provided by official sources and being on their own, outside the circle of official protection. Further, as pointed out in Chapter Three, residents are urged to use “common sense,” which is often aligned with following ideal direction, as opposed to lay knowledge. The narrative of pre-victimization is also conveyed in the emphasis on last-minute preparation. Amidst the frenzy at stores and the gridlock on the road, the imagery described points to a sense of being endangered, even while attempting preparation and

agency. In these ways, residents trying to be safe already seem dangerously close to being too late—to protect their homes, to gather supplies, or to head to safer locations.

Residential voice is used within these media stories to bolster the narrative of pre-victimization. By using these “sound bites,” the lay voice supports the more monolithic master narrative. In Chapter Three, examples of lay voice seemed to support portrayals of residents as resigned, panicky, misguidedly hopeful with their deviant plans, or aligned to official recommendations (and, therefore, more seemingly reasonable). Additionally, the names of past storms are frequently evoked to remind residents of damage and danger, not always to connect with preparedness. The emphasis falls in the disastrous aftermath more than successful danger mitigation through ample preparation. When residents seem to use past storms as rationales for not following orders, this is often set beside concerns of those around them or in the light of being hardheaded. A particularly vivid example of this discussed previously was the “stubborn old man” (self-described) who would only evacuate for Ike if Jesus Christ told him to, even if his wife was less certain. This situation is similar to the one Bonnie O’Connor describes in her discussion of patient compliance to medical advice. She comments that compliance is often considered a “one-way street” in which the patient should receive and follow the orders of health professionals (O’Connor 1994, 173). Within this conceptualization of compliance, the patient who is non-compliant is characterized as “deviant, uncooperative, negligent,

stubborn, ignorant, unreliable, or at the very least in default” (O’Connor 1994, 174)⁵⁹. A similar characterization of residents who do not prepare as determined by official recommendations seems to be at play in the narrative of pre-victimization.

These dimensions of the narrative of pre-victimization have potential negative impact on how residents respond. Instead of inspiring action, residents can be more inspired to take a stance of helplessness or to shut down or become distressed. A tension between the official and the lay can be felt in Carolyn F.’s comments:

I think to be aware that something is coming, to be given reasonable things you can do, because aside from evacuating, OK, about all you can do is make sure that you have batteries, canned food, and I can't think of much else that's literally going to help you get through anything. And propane if you happen to have any camp stoves or propane grills. But I mean aside from that, what can you do? You can't shield your house from high winds. You can't stop flooding. Now, actually speaking, if they actually could tell you that there is going to be flooding in your area, something that they do not seem able to do, you could maybe sand bag, but I doubt it in most cases, so aside from saying, "OK, we have this storm and, you know, take your necessary precautions and we'll give you updates on where it is," but they don't need to hype it, I don't think, as much.

Although she is critical of the media communications about storms, she also communicates a kind of limited agency in what can be done to prepare. In this sense, her “what can you do?” question could be applied to both the lay and official side. However, many residential narratives seem to play with the master narrative. The lay responses are more nuanced. As opposed to the “official” as serving as main authority for decision

59. O’Connor argues that this conceptualization of compliance ignores the agency of the patient and that they “...make treatment choices based on an enormous complex of independent variables” (1994, 174). This observation parallels those of this discussion of hurricane preparation.

making, the lay perspective weaves together authority from a variety of sources, weighted alongside other perspectives—past experiences, family experiences, community experiences, and the like. That information is taken into consideration: sometimes utilized, sometimes modified, and sometimes ignored. Taking into consideration Mary Douglas’s definition of risk as “the probability of an event combined with the magnitude of the losses and gains that it will entail” (1992, 40), it seems that many variables are used to determine probabilities and magnitudes that go beyond simply looking at the storm data. Some risk perception research tends to portray lay people as being ill-informed or irrational in their ability to assess risk, although more recent research in the field has pointed toward a more flattering image of the lay population. As Nick Pidgeon and Robin Gregory write, “...it appears that rather than being inevitably biased, or ill-informed, public risk perceptions exhibit a rationality that may be sensitive to factors sometimes ignored in expert analyses” (2004, 610). From a folkloric perspective, thinking of the lay person as able to make informed decisions, even when the information used to determine them might differ from that used by the “expert” population, is not difficult. The complexity in the process bolsters the need to understand the localized factors that determine risk perception. As Diane Goldstein writes in *Once upon a Virus*, “...understanding attitudes towards susceptibility is dependent on understanding the variety of cultural issues and influences that constitute risk for *the communities and individuals in question*” (2004, 67, emphasis in original). Granted, Goldstein is discussing risk perception within the context of AIDS, but the comment is still relevant in

this discussion. We need to understand how these factors are weighed on a local—be it a community, a family, or an individual—level.

With the weighting of a variety of authoritative (in this sense, meaningful) information, also comes the variety of priorities that come into play when residents consider what it is like to be “safe” and prepared. One example that surfaced in the wake of Hurricane Katrina was the priority people had of ensuring that their pets were taken care of, sometimes causing risks to themselves to include this family member in their plans and sometimes resulting in the difficult decision to leave pets behind. The interest in stories of people and their animals brought about several books in the years after Katrina, including Cathy Scott’s *Pawprints of Katrina: Pets Saved and Lessons Learned* (2008). This priority placed on animals also surfaced in some of the narratives considered in this project, with several residents discussing the impact of pets on their evacuation plans, including Kathryn P., Sharan Z., and Glenn Z. In Glenn Z.’s case, for example, his evacuation attempt for Hurricane Rita was, in part, ended due to sickly pets in the car. However, this priority is not one that can be universally emphasized. In her own experiences evacuating for Katrina, Stacy C. had to leave the family cat behind. This interest in pet preservation is worth noting because, due to public interest and support of people and organizations assisting animals post-Katrina, official changes such as the 2006 Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards (PETS) Act, have occurred. The federal PETS Act mandates that local and state governments include pets in their

evacuation plans, as well as federal funding for some shelters (Scott 2008, 229-230). This act is an example of a lay issue being addressed at the official level.

Livelihood priorities can also factor in, whether it is businesses or material items deemed necessary for survival. Earlier in this chapter, Sharan Z. had to weigh issues dealing with her bookstore in her plans for hurricane preparation. In Chapter Three, the woman who comments that she might as well go with her home, as it is everything she has, stands out as an extreme example of this kind of prioritization. The familiar comment about lives being more important than possessions is one that is referenced frequently in the days before a hurricane, but the value of recognizing the varying weight that can be placed on physical spaces and items can influence the choices individuals make in the preparation process. Fundamentally, looking at lay perspectives of preparation highlights how complicated hurricane preparedness is. The concept of preparation with residents is often tailored to the specific contexts of the individuals involved. This context-dependence forms some of the difference between the official and lay approaches in grappling with hurricane preparation. Official authority is often both heeded and questioned, met with a mixture of cooperation and resistance.

Narrative Entitlement in This Context

The simultaneous actions of cooperation and resistance between official and lay perspectives bring to light issues of narrative entitlement. By utilizing residential voices in support of the official narration, the media takes control of the representation of

residential experience. In this way, the characterizations of residents discussed in Chapter Three are created and then “given life” by the residents’ own voices. In this sense, the power in telling the story is controlled by the media, not by the residents themselves. By cherry-picking residential quotes, the news media—intentionally or not—reduces individuals’ entitlement to valid experience and narration of that experience through the larger media packaging. This packaging reinforces the characterization of pre-storm situations, much of which plays into the aforementioned narrative of pre-victimization. This pre-storm narrative also opens the door for an easy acceptance of the kinds of post-storm narratives discussed in other literature, such as those of looting and lawlessness (noted in pieces such as Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski 2006). These post-storm narratives frequently contradict evidence of “proactive and prosocial” behaviors of residents in these situations.

Undermining lay entitlement, all the while seeming to include residential perspective, attempts to further mainstream the decision-making process. This mainstreaming is intended to serve the public good, but still warrants critical discussion. It is not simply that the media misrepresent these situations. This discussion does not propose to demonize the media and officials and to presume that their intent is not at least largely motivated by public safety. What appears to be at work here is a misplaced emphasis on certain situations, which in turn creates a gap between mainstream narrative and lived experience.

Residents resist this master narrative when they choose various approaches to issues of preparation that align with their lived experiences and frames of reference. In this way, the concept of “common sense” becomes a contentious one. When used in official communication, it often represents a certain alignment with governmental and media recommendations. From a lay perspective, however, this may not be the case.

There is a struggle at play over who has the right to talk about what it means to be prepared. The actual preparation that occurs can, at times, stand as an example of when lay experience outweighs the preparation narrative of authorities. However, at other times, the result is more of a blending of narratives, a compromise. The “official” narrative of preparation is not simply accepted on its own because experts and authorities construct and disseminate it. Instead, the individual brings to these situations their past experiences and perceptions of risk which inform their construction of preparation. This seems similar to the “tension between monologic, coherent points of view and diverse understandings” that Shuman mentions when discussing narrative asymmetry⁶⁰ (2006, 151). In this way, gaps can form between these narratives of preparation, creating a situation in which, to outsiders, individuals can look woefully underprepared for a hurricane, even though their actions may have a rational, first-person component.

60. Narrative asymmetry is a term used in the work of Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps, a linguistic anthropologist and psychologist, respectively, who have written frequently on narrative and storytelling.

Chapter Five:

Challenges to Public Safety and the Value of Narrative

Taking into consideration the issues of master narrative and entitlement discussed in Chapter Four, a challenge emerges: to balance the need for public safety communication and education with the needs to allow for variation of experience and to avoid completely homogenizing the narrative of preparation. If issues of entitlement are coupled with a general distrust of news media, potential threats to public safety are created and propagated. As discussed in Chapter Three, alternate decision-making processes and outcomes are often framed as ill-conceived by official narrative. The aforementioned “stubborn old man” seems almost a laughable character in a serious time. In addition, residents are often shown as ill-prepared or scrambling last-minute to become prepared. On the other side of the equation, some residents, as discussed in Chapter Four, perceive the media as intentionally packaging the “sexy” news, more interested in ratings and readership than useful communication. Essentially, mistrust of the other is communicated by both sides. When this mistrust is inserted into a situation of uncertainty—as very little about a hurricane is certain in advance of its arrival—getting all parties to respond in concert can become even more challenging. To make headway in this challenge, it becomes necessary to, as Susan Ritchie comments “restor[e] difference as meaningful and irreducible differential” (1993, 376). In other words, it is important to

identify the differences and use them constructively as tools, not as obstacles to be eradicated.

At the core, it seems reasonable to assume that most people involved in a hurricane situation do not want harm to come to lives or, if possible, to property; there is a common goal at play. However, the relationships between official and lay perspectives are complex and necessitate consideration as to how to bring these perspectives to recognize one another more openly. The goal is not to mandate uniformity, but to promote cooperation.

Understandably, from a public safety perspective, this goal can be challenging in that it creates complexity in determining how to assist people before a potential disaster and how to communicate in ways to persuade action, but not to propagate hysteria. For example, in my interview with Charlie K., the Emergency Management Coordinator for Galveston, Texas, we discussed his experiences as both a resident and public servant during Hurricanes Rita and Ike. We also talked about what he anticipated the public would do in the future after Ike, which destroyed a large number of homes and flooded much of Galveston and the surrounding area. He commented:

The people that didn't evacuate this last time were people mainly behind the Seawall and said I've been here for bigger storms than a Category 2 and they thought it old hat. If they'd been here any time or knew the history that Category 2 storms don't top the seawall. And so that's the ones that stayed. And those people there from talking to them, those people there are probably going to be the easiest to evacuate this time... But the people that evacuated either on buses or their private vehicles and then couldn't get back on the island for two weeks will probably be the ones that we're going to have a hard time getting rid of this time. So have they learned anything? No. [laughs] It's really, and we preach it, we

don't take lightly when we tell the mayor and he calls for mandatory evacuation, it's not just because we haven't got anything better to do...it's because we're trying to save lives.

Also, in the course of his discussion of preparing the general public for hurricane season, he explained, "It's just a battle we fight every year." Although his comments seem to make light of the issues discussed here, they also point toward a desire to bridge the communication gaps between some of the "official" entities and the public they work to protect. Ultimately, the battle for public safety is a good cause, and through understanding local concerns and decision-making processes, what seems like a battle may become a more cooperative enterprise. Narrative approaches provide tools for understanding how preparation is constructed from multiple perspectives and how we may go about creating bridges between differing viewpoints.

The Contributions of This Research to Folklore Studies

As identified in Chapter One, this thesis seeks to contribute to several areas in the literature that have not been yet fully addressed. For one, it extends disaster folklore research by considering not only hurricanes, but by considering multiple storms within its scope. This extension is important given the tendency of certain geographical regions to be subject to storm threats repeatedly over time. Additionally, it adds to the discussion about the interactions between media and personal narrative (building on work such as

Lindahl's "Legends of Hurricane Katrina: The Right to Be Wrong, Survivor-to-Survivor Storytelling, and Healing"). By using media analysis, this study explored the complexity of the media discussion by uncovering trends in these constructed stories. By doing so, this approach allowed for both the official messages and lay stories to be considered through similar narrative lenses.

What is more, this discussion created space to consider preparation narratives as a subtype of the larger pool of personal experiences of hurricanes. By locating preparation narrative as an area to consider in addition to recovery narrative, this study deals with narrative material not strongly researched in the literature. This approach opened the way for applying concepts of master narrative and entitlement to a new kind of personal experience narrative. By doing so, I identified the "narrative of pre-victimization," a new concept brought forth through my analysis. The interactions between the narrative of pre-victimization and narratives of lay preparation provide a fruitful way of exploring the interplay between lay and official perspectives on preparation. At the crux of the discussion is a call to consider narrative as a way to understanding issues of preparation. In her discussion of AIDS narrative, Diane Goldstein notes the following:

The existence of health legends and health narratives should indicate to those who are concerned about public health and who are listening to lay responses that all information requires placement into cultural context. Narratives provide just that. Through narration, health information comes to life, exploring, affirming, rejecting, and sometimes replacing information that is offered by powerful outsiders without true cultural contextualization. Narratives take truth claims and hegemonic constructions and make them a culture's own (or not), twisting them and turning them in ways that force them to make cultural sense. (2004, 172)

Likewise, this thesis applies a similar approach to examine the ways in which narrative can be a tool for looking at differing responses to hurricane preparation.

Studying preparation also adds depth to the rich field of disaster folklore. Carl Lindahl emphasizes the need to recognize the importance of survivor narrative in understanding disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. As he comments, “A disaster survivor’s story is among her most important remaining possessions; many emerged from the ruins of their city with little more than their personal accounts of heroism and endurance” (2012, 171). The stories of the survivors are valuable to themselves, and they are valuable to helping in the recovery (both theirs and other survivors) after the disaster. As we consider the recurring threat of disaster from hurricanes in this region, we can also add a different angle to consider with narratives in this context. While in no way diminishing from the experiences of individuals identified as survivors in the works of Lindahl and others, we can consider that, in the act of preparation, one must acknowledge the possibility of the destruction of life and property. One must prepare with the hope that all will be well, but with the knowledge that it may not, the anticipation that one may need to survive destruction. This acknowledgment gives meaning to these acts of preparation, and it gives weight to considering these preparation narratives as worthy of study.

Limitations and Future Possibilities

As is the case of any research undertaking, there are limitations to the fieldwork and scope of this thesis. As my fieldwork was mainly guided by the snowball method, it does not offer a representative cross-section of the ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic diversity of these greater city regions. As such, this research does not necessarily generalize across all of these categories. In addition, the narratives tended to be focused on those of residents from the urban or suburban regions of these two greater city areas, so rural residents are not as well represented in the examples provided (though, Vicki B., for instance, is from more of a rural area). In addition, other coastal regions and storms were outside of the scope of the current discussion (Hurricane Sandy on the East Coast of the United States is a recent example). All of these areas offer valuable possibilities for future research.

Caveats and Applied Recommendations

In addition to contributing to the discipline's discussion of disaster folklore and personal narrative, this research can also contribute beyond the realm of folklore studies. At this stage, however, it is also important to note that, as a folklorist, I need to recognize a challenge in discussing these issues. Ritchie comments that there is a danger inherent in

talking about issues of representation, in speaking for other people and their experiences. She also argues that it is not enough to point out issues of lay and master narratives. As she notes, "... contemporary folklorists have done a great deal to interrogate the appropriation of local cultures by larger master narratives... Now, though, a truly postmodern folklore presents a different task than the mere critique of totalizing master narratives: the affirmative theorization of emergent difference" (1993, 366). The recommendations put forth in this discussion seek to point out emerging differences between residents included in this project and the master narrative that surfaced in the media pieces reviewed. There is no claim that these lay experiences represent those of all residents. This echoes the sentiment expressed by sociologists Kristen Barber, Danielle Antoinette Hidalgo, Timothy J. Haney, Stan Weeber, Jessica W. Pardee, and Jennifer Day in their article, "Narrating the Storm: Storytelling as a Methodological Approach to Understanding Hurricane Katrina": "Although we address various emerging themes, we do not claim to speak from the perspectives of all hurricane-affected residents; no work can do this" (2007, 105). The hope here is that the emerging differences can help to meaningfully inform the discussion of how to improve disaster preparedness.

In making recommendations, this discussion recognizes residential narratives as resources. Borrowing from Rappaport, "The ability to tell one's story, and to have access to and influence over collective stories, is a powerful resource" (1995, 802). In making these recommendations, the hope is to increase the pooling of narrative resources, allowing the media to diversify the ways in which mainstream narrative and lay narrative

relate to one another: instead of co-opting the residential voice in order to support the mainstream narrative, allowing residential voice and knowledge to help facilitate the communications about preparation.

In a 2004 article on communication of weather information, David King notes the importance of considering the lay audience. He writes, “Different worldviews and belief systems at least partially influence the way in which many people interpret hazard information. Science cannot automatically override these beliefs and attitudes” (King 2004, 65). King highlights challenges in knowledge of cyclone (hurricane) terminology, levels of risk acceptance in the audience, and perceptions of risk expectation (how dangerous the storm can be). Amidst these challenges, King concludes: “The basic message is to involve the community, prompt them to be the actors in taking information, and diversify the message. The warnings must remain clean and standardized, but the routes to understanding them must be as diverse as the people” (2004, 71). This concept is echoed by Larsson and Enander when they comment that “measures to increase people’s preparedness are more likely to be effective if they are selectively directed towards certain target groups” (1997, 20). In order to help facilitate preparation communication, the diversity of the lay audience is an important consideration.

Central to this enterprise is the recognition of lay knowledge and expertise as part of the communication of preparedness. This requires an awareness and mitigation of the narrative of pre-victimization to shift to a narrative that embraces and puts to the fore the agency of residents in preparedness. As Howard F. Stein notes, “Practically speaking,

since all planning for ‘disaster preparedness’ is at least partially shaped by looking into the rearview mirror, it behooves those of us who anticipate future catastrophes to know how others and we look into that mirror” (2002, 157). From a media perspective, re-treading on their own narrative is an easy touchstone, but tapping into the “other” can be more challenging when it diverges from the familiar narratives described here. News media, and the officials they facilitate communication for, need to relate preparation information to the public in the face of an impending hurricane as part of their service to the public good. However, the integration of certain approaches may assist in the impact of that information on the attitudes and actions of the audience. Some possible approaches include:

- Information should be concrete and actionable. Checklists may be helpful as reminders to people, but if they are convoluted or outside of the reach of residents, the likelihood of adoption may be reduced. Consider input from residents to simplify or present options.
- In conjunction with the above suggestion, relying on tropes related to the narrative of pre-victimization may turn people away from taking preparation action. In attempting to present dramatic stories of stripped shelves, the results may be to promote helplessness (Why bother?), distrust (Why listen to the news?), or anxiety (Why should I remain calm?). There needs to be a balance

struck between media storytelling and avoiding “hype.” Credibility in official messages is not a given in the minds of residents. Credibility here can be seen on two levels. One, it deals with the credibility of the information surrounding a hurricane, and, two, it deals with the credibility of the information sources, the news media outlets themselves. On one hand, the audience may deem the information credible and act upon it or pass it to others. On the other hand, the audience may also hold a noted skepticism about the bearer of the information and, in this way, downplay or disregard the information provided. Depending upon how the individual deems the information and its source, their perception of how to deal with the threat of a hurricane and their responses to media can vary widely. As Georgina Boyes comments about rumor legend performance, “*The* truth is a shifting concept, dependent on viewpoint and accidental presence at a place and time; *a* truth exists wherever it is perceived...” (1996, 50-51, emphasis in original). In the case here, these perceptions of truth, in turn, are reflected in media messages and audience responses. The media needs to be vigilant to strike balance in their narrative construction.

- The media needs to be aware of the impact of long-term and short-term storm memory. As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, the invocation of a storm’s name can mean many things to different people. Attention needs to be paid to

how historical storms are referenced in order to consider the impact of those references. A storm reference is not a monolithic thing. Referencing storms can be a very powerful thing to audience members, or not resonate at all.

- Officials should consider ways to promote more images of positive lay preparation both during hurricane season and during the days leading up to a specific storm threat. They tend to do well promoting what they have done, whether it be governmental officials improving contraflow or different news outlets having improved storm tracking technologies. Partnering with lay people and communities to promote proactive responses may help to improve future preparation responses. Authority figures calling upon residents to be good neighbors in preparation three days before a storm threat can only do so much; promoting and recognizing lay preparation regularly may do more. These kinds of activities do exist, but more active promotion of them may further benefit residents and their communities.

That official sources communicate about hurricane preparation is not in question. As pointed out in other works, such as that by Choi and Lin (2008), messages geared toward preparation and risk prevention are in the media for public consumption. At the core of this discussion, then, is the call to spur considerations of how these communications can be improved in the hopes of increasing public safety. Bridging

official and lay perspectives seems to be one way to approach this improvement. Looking at hurricane experiences over time can help us learn from one another, to help one another, and, when the time comes, to stay safe in the face of disaster.

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