THESIS

HURRICANE KATRINA: DISPLACED SINGLE MOTHERS, RESOURCE ACQUISITION, AND DOWNWARD MOBILITY

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

HURRICANE KATRINA: DISPLACED SINGLE MOTHERS, RESOURCE ACQUISITION, AND DOWNWARD MOBILITY

This thesis examines the needs and experiences of single mothers who have been displaced to Colorado after Hurricane Katrina. The research draws on data gathered through interviews with 15 disaster relief professionals and 8 single mothers. In particular, this study identifies what resources were made available to single mothers in Colorado, how single mothers accessed these resources, and what they still need to reestablish their lives. Further, I explore how intersecting vulnerabilities influence the downward mobility of single mothers after displacement. In addition, this study looks at the institutional participation in the long-term recovery process and offers policy recommendations to aid in the development of preparedness and recovery plans for single mothers in future disasters.

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For Ella Jade Gurley, my daughter, who gives me the inspiration and motivation to do my best. You are what makes life worth living.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Four days before Hurricane Katrina made landfall, government officials and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) became aware of a storm forming in the Bahamas and heading towards the Gulf Coast (Gheytanchi, Joseph, Gierlach, Kimpara, Housley, Franco, and Beutler 2007). Katrina was formally recognized as a Category 3 Hurricane on Thursday, August 25, 2005 (Gheytanchi et al. 2007; Ripley 2005). The following day, Louisiana’s Governor Kathleen Blanco declared a state of emergency (Natural Hazards Center 2006). By Saturday, President Bush had declared the state of Louisiana a major disaster area, which allowed basic supplies such as food, water, and ice to be funneled into military bases throughout the state (Natural Hazards Center 2006; Ripley 2005). This was an unprecedented declaration that was put in place to make resources ready and available before the storm (Natural Hazards Center 2006).

Concurrently, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin publicly recommended that people evacuate as the storm reached its peak as a Category 5 Hurricane and flooding was imminent (Gheytanchi et al. 2007). However, it was not until August 28 that the Mayor issued the first ever mandatory evacuation of the city of New Orleans (Nigg, Barnshaw, and Torres 2006). Although an estimated 80 to 90 percent of the population of New Orleans evacuated, between 100,000 and 300,000 people were stranded and forced to brave the storm alone (Wolshon 2006:31-32). Some citizens did not have transportation
out of the city, were in poor health, had jobs that required their presence, or did not believe that the hurricane was a threat to their safety (Nigg et al. 2006). Moreover, approximately 27 percent of the households in New Orleans did not have personal vehicles to use as transport out of the city (Takeda and Helms 2006:404).

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall, severely damaging many areas along the Gulf Coast region of the United States. The wind and rain from the storm was extreme; however, the real danger ensued when the levees that surrounded New Orleans were breached in multiple places and the city began to flood (Nicholson 2005). Many scientific reports predicted that a storm the size of Katrina would create levee failure with subsequent flooding of up to 25 feet, leaving many New Orleanians abandoned in the flood, awaiting rescue on their rooftops (Natural Hazards Center 2006).

About 24 hours before the storm, a team from the Emergency Operations Center in Baton Rouge warned disaster officials from FEMA, the Red Cross, the United States Military, and the National Guard that water would indeed flow into the city (Ripley 2005). As predicted, a little more than 24 hours later, the first call of rising water was made. Over the next two days, water steadily rose 20 to 30 feet above normal tide levels (Federal Emergency Management Agency 2006). The storm surges resulted in the breaching of three primary levees leaving 80 percent of New Orleans under water (Natural Hazards Center 2006). With some areas experiencing depths of up to 20 feet and many people stranded in their homes, the military mobilized one of the largest deployments of the National Guard in United States history (Natural Hazards Center 2006). Even with several days to prepare and years of scientific research predicting the
magnitude of each unfolding event: the local, state, and federal response to this impending disaster was abysmal (Ripley 2005).

According to Nigg et al. (2006), the evacuation planning by local and state government and declarations made by public officials would have looked successful had the flooding not ensued. They describe how “the failure of an un-integrated emergency management system exacerbated threats to the safety, health, welfare, and emotional well-being of evacuees” (p. 114). Since the September 11 attacks, the federal government had been engaged in catastrophe planning. Unfortunately, many of these programs were not tested and too new to implement during Hurricane Katrina. This unintegrated emergency management system contributed to the unclear expectations of roles and intergovernmental relations between the major political actors responsible for responding to the disaster. Most alarming was “the realization that the misappropriation and underutilization of strategic resources such as transportation vehicles, boats, helicopters, and first responders may have cost the lives of some citizens in the flooded areas” (p. 125). On every level, the local, state, and federal government were not prepared for the damage and loss caused by Hurricane Katrina.

Hurricane Katrina was one of the deadliest and most costly disasters in the nation’s history. People outside of the Gulf Coast watched from their homes as communities were destroyed and lives were devastated. Families were stranded on rooftops and highway overpasses as their houses flooded and they awaited rescue. Those that made it out of the city had to patiently wait in limited shelter space, overcrowded expensive hotels, or homes of friends and relatives with increasing uncertainty regarding the outcome of their future.
LOSS AND DISPLACEMENT

Hurricane Katrina impacted 90,000 square miles of U.S. coastline, killed more than 1,800 people, and created damages to property and infrastructure in excess of $100 billion in economic losses (Cutter, Emrich, Mitchell, Boruff, Gall, Schmidtlein, Burton, and Melton 2006: 10). Over 302,000 housing units were seriously damaged or destroyed by the hurricane, and 71 percent of these structures were affordable or low-income housing (Crowley 2006). This catastrophic event resulted in the forced relocation of 1.2 million people, making this the largest mass displacement of individuals in United States history (Appleseed 2006; Vaill 2006; Walker 2006; Williams, Sorokina, Jones-DeWeever, and Hartmann 2006).

People fled the destruction and were scattered throughout cities and towns in all 50 states. Nigg et al. (2006) report that by September 30, 2005, every state had registered evacuees. However, the majority of displaced individuals ended up closer to home. In fact, two-thirds of the displaced population relocated to other Gulf Coast cities such as Atlanta, Baton Rouge, Houston, Birmingham, and San Antonio (Appleseed 2006; Nigg et al. 2006). There were still tens of thousands of evacuees over one thousand miles away from their pre-Katrina homes (Nigg et al. 2006). Many people thought this was going to be a temporary evacuation. However, as of November 2007, 30 percent of the population of New Orleans was still displaced (Greater New Orleans Community Data Center 2008).

This massive forced relocation warranted a nation-wide response. Within two weeks of the storm, at least 25 states sheltered of Gulf Coast evacuees (Nigg et al. 2006). Thousands of volunteers responded to the crisis in the affected states as well as across the
nation. Red Cross issued a call for approximately 40,000 volunteers to aid the 74,000 workers already trained in disaster response (Villagran, Wittenberg-Lyles, and Garza 2006). This was the largest mobilization of resources ever called upon from the Red Cross for a single natural disaster (Villagren et al. 2006). In addition, communities and businesses across the nation donated time and money to assist in disaster relief and recovery.

**DISPLACED TO COLORADO**

Of those people forced to evacuate their Gulf Coast homes, as many as 15,000 are estimated to have ended up in Colorado (Deam 2006). People either self-evacuated or were flown or bused out of the affected areas into Colorado. The federal government was responsible for the organization of flights to bring approximately 400 evacuees into the state (Sterett and Reich 2007: 135). The military barracks at the former Lowry Air Force base in Denver were re-opened, cleaned, and outfitted in order to house up to 500 people for six weeks (Sterett and Reich 2007; Walker 2006). This space also served as a central and primary location for services and activities related to the needs of the evacuees-needs that were well beyond the capacity of the local community to provide. This organized response resulted in the reimbursement of approximately one million dollars to the state of Colorado for the rehabilitation of the dorms at Lowry and a reception center for Hurricane Katrina evacuees (Sterett and Reich 2007).

Most of the men, women, and children who came to Colorado from the Gulf Coast arrived with only the clothes on their backs, some still wet from their exposure to the storm (Sterett and Reich 2007). Their needs were countless and had to be addressed immediately. In addition to the food, clothing, shelter, and psychological counseling
provided at Lowry, FEMA created an on-site office to provide adult evacuees with initial payments of $2,000. This was issued under FEMA’s temporary housing assistance Section 408, giving every registered person immediate disaster relief which would later be applied to the $26,200 limit of assistance per displaced household (Crowley 2006: 128). This amount is the maximum allowance that can be given to displaced people after a disaster; specifically, for use towards rent, home repairs, and other personal costs. This financial aid can be distributed in the form of rental assistance for up to 18 months or $26,200; whichever comes first (Crowley 2006).

The initial $2,000 payment from FEMA was distributed to all adult evacuees, regardless of family structure (Fothergill and Peek 2006). Therefore, a single man would receive the same amount as a single mother with multiple children. This inequitable distribution of funds placed the most vulnerable people in even more precarious situations. Fothergill and Peek (2006) subsequently recommended that FEMA reevaluate their “one size fits all” approach to offering relief assistance in order to promote the well-being of all individuals, especially those that need assistance the most (p. 124).

Approximately 3,600 evacuees registered at Lowry in the weeks following the storm (Center for Disease Control 2006). Walker (2006) found that the people who were not informed of the services at Lowry and those not able to stay at the base resided with relatives or in local hotels. There were displaced disaster survivors still occupying hotels long after Lowry closed its doors in October 2005. With hurricane evacuees scattered across many counties, Colorado was eligible to be one of the 29 states that was granted funding from FEMA for case management (see Ch. 4). In January 2006, a non-profit
program entitled Katrina Aid Today was established to assist with the recovery process for Hurricane Katrina evacuees in Colorado.

SOCIAL CONTEXT

The Congressional Research Service reports that of the more than one million people displaced by Hurricane Katrina, over half were residents of New Orleans (Gabe, Falk, McCarty, and Mason 2005). Those that evacuated out of the city were more likely to be minorities, economically disenfranchised, and living in inferior housing prior to the storm (Frey and Singer 2006) with the poorest families ending up the farthest from the Gulf (Women’s Funding Network 2006). Prior to the storm, unemployment rates in New Orleans were 50 percent higher than the rest of the nation, with a quarter of the women in the city living in poverty (Jones-DeWeever and Hartmann 2006). This extreme poverty made the affected areas particularly vulnerable to such a large-scale disaster.

Hurricane Katrina disproportionately impacted the poor and African-Americans (Gabe et al. 2005). Specifically, 44 percent of storm victims were African-American and 30 percent lived off incomes that were below one and a half times the poverty line (Gabe et al. 2005: 16). Prior to Katrina, African-Americans made up 69 percent of the population in the city of New Orleans (Allen 2007: 466). Louisiana ranked worst in the nation with the earnings of African-American women reaching a deplorable $19,400 per year and those that were hardest hit by the storm suffered even worse economic conditions (Jones DeWeever and Hartmann 2006). These women had the least amount of resources and therefore had the most difficult time getting their families out of harms way as disaster struck (Jones DeWeever and Hartmann 2006).
The vast majority of the media coverage that followed Hurricane Katrina highlighted the racial and class disparities revealed by the storm without mentioning the fact that 52.4 percent of the population of New Orleans was female (Gault, Hartmann, Jones-DeWeever, Werschkul, and Williams 2005: 2), and that women are far more likely to be living in poverty than men despite their high levels of participation in the workforce (Jones-DeWeever and Hartmann 2006). The Institute for Women’s Policy Research (Gault et al. 2005) reports that women in New Orleans were more likely to be poor, to hold low-paying jobs, and be single parents. Specifically, two out of every five single-mothers in New Orleans lived below the poverty line prior to Hurricane Katrina. This left many single-parent-families stranded to face the storm and evacuation on their own.

Of the victims displaced by Hurricane Katrina, single mothers were the least likely to return due to family displacement, economic instability, lack of transportation, and childcare responsibilities (Williams et al. 2006). Although more than half of the households in the city of New Orleans were headed by a single-mother prior to Katrina (Gault et al. 2005), little research has focused specifically on displacement and the unique challenges that Katrina evacuees, especially single mothers, have faced.

Jones-DeWeever and Hartmann (2006) indicate that many evacuees will still face severe poverty in their new homes. This is particularly true for female-headed-households and African-American women. In some areas of the Gulf Coast region these displaced women are experiencing poverty rates even higher than before the storm. Alternately, displaced women relocated in other areas of the country such as North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee have shown lower poverty rates for women and single-mother-households
as well as a higher earning potential for African-American women (Jones-DeWeever and Hartmann 2006).

Disasters are not only the result of the extreme natural events that cause them; they are also the product of social, political, and economic systems and the ways that these structure the lives of different groups of people (Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, and Davis 2005). In disasters, just as in everyday life, there are many populations of people that go unnoticed, including the poor, racial and ethnic minorities, women, the elderly, children, immigrants and other non-native speakers, and the mentally and physically disabled. These vulnerable groups are often socially marginalized, isolated, and living in economically precarious situations before disaster strikes (Klinenberg 2002), thus making preparation for, response to, and recovery from disasters exceedingly difficult, if not impossible. Single mothers, especially if they are racial minorities, can face many barriers to recovery after a disaster. Given that these women are understudied and underserved, their recounted knowledge and insight into the recovery process will add to the gender and disaster literature and assist policymakers in more effectively managing disaster related response efforts.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis examines the needs and experiences of single mothers who have been displaced to Colorado after Hurricane Katrina. Through in-depth interviews with disaster relief professionals and single mothers, I identify what resources were available to single mothers, how single mothers accessed these resources, and what they still need to reestablish their lives in this new context. I am interested in the methods that these women used to gain valuable resources and rebuild their lives in Colorado. Given that
most disaster recovery models focus on the impact phase and short-term recovery, I explore the institutional participation in the long-term recovery process. I address the following research questions in this study:

1.) What resources were made available to relocated single-mother families living in Colorado, and what resources were single mothers most likely to access?

2.) What challenges have single-mother families faced in the pursuit of social and economic resources?

3.) How have gender, class, race, and cultural differences shaped the overall experience of displacement for single-mother families?

OVERVIEW

The second chapter of this thesis provides an overview of the literature on gender and vulnerability to disasters, gender and Hurricane Katrina, and the downward mobility that women experience in times of crisis. The third chapter describes the methodology that I used to conduct this research including the research design, settings, sample population, data collection, analysis, and the methodological challenges that I encountered.

In the following three chapters, I discuss the resources that were made available to evacuees in Colorado, I outline the resources that were accessed by single-mother families, and I discuss the trends of downward mobility and resiliency as they pertain to displaced single mothers in Colorado. In these chapters I elaborate on what I have found through my research drawing on the voices of single mothers and resource providers. I also compare how mothers experienced these economic changes and how the resource providers interpreted their situations.
This thesis concludes with theoretical considerations and policy recommendations to assist governmental and non-profit agencies that deal most directly with vulnerable populations in times of crisis. The goal of this research is to contribute knowledge to professionals who aid in the implementation of new programs and the distribution of resources to disaster victims. This research will help society continue to deal with the long-term displacement of individuals and the impact on the existing infrastructure of social services in receiving cities across the nation. It will also benefit future disaster victims by alleviating some of the issues that arose from the lack of understanding and inadequate preparedness that were laid bare in Hurricane Katrina.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis explores how single-mother-headed families accessed resources after being displaced to Colorado in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. To date, no research has been done that focuses on single mothers in disasters or the specific emotional and socioeconomic challenges that they faced following Hurricane Katrina. Learning about the experiences of 8 displaced single mothers and 15 disaster relief providers in Colorado revealed that single mothers are especially vulnerable in times of disaster and their vulnerability only worsens after displacement. In addition, single mothers who were living just above the poverty line before Katrina experienced significant downward mobility after the storm.

In this section, I address the literature on women’s vulnerability before and after a disaster, the limited scholarship on gender and Hurricane Katrina, and finally, how women may experience downward mobility and resiliency after disaster strikes.

GENDER AND VULNERABILITY TO DISASTER

Social stratification directly influences exposure to risks and vulnerabilities in everyday life (Tierney 2006; Enarson, Fothergill, and Peek 2006; Enarson and Morrow 1998). However, it was not until the past several decades that disaster researchers began to explore how structured inequality and stratification intersect with experiences in disasters (Barnshaw and Trainor 2007; Alway, Belgrave, and Smith 1998; Enarson 1998;
Fordham 1998). It is clear that factors such as wealth, poverty, race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexuality, age, disability, and other power relationships influence a person’s ability to prepare for, resist, and recover from a disaster (Barnshaw 2006; Tierney 2006; Enarson et al. 2006; Morrow and Phillips 1999; Enarson and Morrow 1998).

Gender has not been as systematically studied as race and class in the context of disaster (Tierney 2006). However, it is a central organizing principle in everyday social life and contributes to the vulnerability and stratification of women during extreme times (Enarson 1998). Vulnerability is a concept that focuses on “limitations or a lack of access to resources (Bradshaw 2004: 10). Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, and Davis (2005) define vulnerability as “the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist, and recover from the impact of a natural hazard” (p. 11). Although women, as a group, are more vulnerable than men to disasters, it is important to understand that no vulnerability exists in isolation (Tierney 2006). It is the combination of vulnerabilities that disadvantage women before, during, and after a disaster (Enarson et al. 2006).

The heightened vulnerability experienced by women is a direct result of gender inequality (Fothergill 1996). This includes gendered social roles, such as primary caregiver for children and elderly, a lack of mobility, and a dearth of status, power, and resources (Enarson and Morrow 1998; Fothergill 1996). Enarson and Morrow (1998) argue that, women-maintained households are economically and politically disadvantaged and have acute needs and reduced resources when disaster strikes their home” (p. 5). All women may face challenges in disaster, but those challenges are different based on the woman’s location in the larger social strata. For poor and African-American women, the
ramifications of gender inequality are magnified, leaving them even more vulnerable to extreme events (Enarson et al. 2006).

One of the main indicators of vulnerability to disasters is poverty (Enarson and Morrow 1998) and the poorest people in the world are disproportionately made up of women and children, particularly women and children of color (Fothergill 1996, Gowens 2006). Diane Pearce first coined the term the “feminization of poverty” in 1978, which she used to describe the increasing rates of poor families headed by single mothers (Schein 1995: 4). Once attention was focused on the disproportionate rates of poverty among women, social scientists began to research gender and poverty.

Structural vulnerability theory focuses on macro-economic, structural changes that affect those that have low human capital making them more vulnerable to economic crises (Moller 1999). Single mothers are especially sensitive to these changes given the strain of performing dual roles of primary caregiver and breadwinner (Moller 1999). For many people living in poverty, welfare and/or homelessness may only be a paycheck away (Fothergill 2003; Williams, Sorokina, Jones-Deweever, and Hartmann 2006). The preexisting structural inequalities experienced by women are exacerbated in times of disaster, leaving women and children dependent on limited social capital and differential access to resources (Barnshaw and Trainor 2007).

Single mother families that are situated below the poverty line are growing steadily in the United States. There was a 77 percent increase in the number of single mothers from 1994 through 2003, and 47 percent of all single mothers were either “near poor” or had incomes below the national poverty level (Women’s Work 2005). In fact, female-headed single parent households have a poverty rate almost three times that of
male-headed households (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). The single-mother population is 62 percent Caucasian, 32 percent African-American, and 6 percent comprised of Asian Pacific Islander, Native American, or Hispanic1 (Women’s Work 2005). Sixty-two percent of all single mothers have no college education and live on less than $20,000 a year (Women’s Work 2005). Given that single mothers tend to earn less than non-mothers and partnered mothers, financial constraints are magnified. In times of disaster, when economic cushions are vitally important, poor women and women of color suffer disproportionately and are at a greater risk to both natural and human-made disasters (Fothergill 1996).

Poverty disproportionately affects single mothers and ethnic minorities forcing them to rely on social networks of family and friends to provide childcare and economic assistance (Moller 1999). According to Margolis (1989), the power to pool resources increases the integrity and condition of its least member while strengthening the overall dynamic of the group making it more resistant to outside forces. This social support system has also been found to decrease stress and increase the psychological well being of single mothers (Turner 2006). Stratification in our society is structured in a way that limits the life chances and opportunities of these individuals, causing them to seek assistance (Moller 1999). The ability to access and utilize resources before a disaster directly impacts one’s ability to “bounce back” and recover from extreme events (Bradshaw 2004: 11).

Over the past decade, the United States government issued dramatic funding cuts from survival programs such as the Temporary Aid To Needy Families (TANF), adding to the stress and decreased livelihood of poor families. These programs have now increased

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1 Hispanic is defined by the 2003 Census Bureau as people who may be of any race.
the amount of hours in which moms are required to participate in work-like activities (job
searching, visiting temp agencies, participating in employment fairs, etc.) without
increasing childcare expenditures to cover those hours (Gowens 2006). When public
transportation time is included, these women are spending far more time away from their
families than ever before. These kinds of institutional barriers make it hard for women
living in poverty to survive. Gowens (2006) calls this war on the poor a “social disaster.”

The intersecting vulnerabilities of poverty and gender are also compounded by the
influence of race (Enarson 1998; Enarson et al. 2006). The poorest women of the world
are disproportionately women of color (Fordham 1998) and are often “demonized” in society because of their social position (Fothergill 2003). Patricia Hill Collins (2003)
states that, “within the U.S. culture, racist and sexist ideologies permeate the social
structure to such a degree that they become hegemonic, namely, seen as natural, normal,
and inevitable. In this context, certain assumed qualities that are attached to black women
are used to justify oppression” (p. 321). For single mothers these stereotypes may be
exacerbated. “Political conservatives contended that their [black single-mothers] low
marriage rates and high levels of non-marital childbearing were mostly the result of
moral decline and generous welfare policies” (Hill 2000: 436). These beliefs hold true in
everyday life as well as during disasters.

In fact, most citizens hold negative images of the poor and particularly poor
people of color as being “dishonest, uninterested in education, and dependent, while the
welfare system overall is seen as wasteful and unproductive” (Fothergill 2003: 676). This
directly impacts a woman’s desire to apply for assistance after disaster, given the social
stigma that is attached to welfare recipients, regardless of the circumstances. Social
welfare policies are hardly generous and the perpetuation of this type of belief system helps to keep the “others” in our society in an easily subjugated position. In this case, the “others” are too often made up of single mothers who happen to be women of color.

Black women carry the double burden of stigmas associated with being black and female (Lewis 1989). Women of color also have to assume all the roles and responsibilities of being a mother and being single, however, they are expected to achieve these goals while maneuvering through the often “caste-like” restrictions prescribed to them in their ethnic status (Lewis 1989). Black mothers are also shown to need welfare benefits longer than their white counterparts due to the differences in varying social and economic opportunities (Rank 1988). Out of all low-income single mothers in the United States, the majority tends to be black, have greater health problems, less education, and have more children residing in their households (Zahn 2006). This places them in a particularly vulnerable position when disaster strikes.

In their research on Hurricane Andrew, Greinier and Morrow (1994) found that African-American women, as a group, were more likely to be poor and live in low-income, substandard housing units that were the most severely damaged during the storm. They were also greatly disadvantaged after the storm, given the highly competitive, socio-political nature of the recovery environment. Pre-disaster socioeconomic and political status can greatly affect one’s ability to recover from extreme loss. In particular, African-American women with children may have the hardest time preparing for, enduring, and recovering from a major disaster.

Adding to the theoretical literature on single-mother issues, it is important to look more closely at the social underpinnings that may degrade the formerly empowering
duties of motherhood providing strength to many women. Societal norms greatly impact the identity of single mothers and reinforce stigmas that disempower this population. The differences in gendered and racialized “knowledges” (Swidler and Arditi 1994: 320) need to be addressed in order for our society to move in a direction that alleviates the dilemmas associated with the continuing trend of single-motherhood. Through applying a framework of multiracial feminism, disaster scholars may be able to “go beyond a mere recognition of diversity and difference among women to examine structures of domination, specifically the importance of race in understanding the social construction of gender” (Baca Zinn and Thorton Dill 2003: 353).

It has been shown in the past that single-mothers are more likely to cohabitate, rely on kin networks, have free childcare, share household duties, and gain financial support from family and friends (Hogan, Hao, and Parish 1990). This, however, only translates into income adequacy for white mothers (Folk 1996). Black women, by contrast, are more likely to live with other single-mothers, live with only one parent versus two, or to have kin that are just as economically disenfranchised as themselves (Folk 1996).

Ethnographic studies (see Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg 1993) demonstrate that multigenerational, matrifocal, black families are deteriorating in their ability to provide kin support due to increasing rates of socioeconomic disadvantage. Kin support also deteriorates as proximity between members grows (Lewis 1989). This is especially significant when looking at displacement. So, while black women are more likely than white women to have networks providing other types of support, economically they are still the most vulnerable to poverty and at greater risk in times of disaster.
In the context of disaster, there are many factors that contribute to the survival of low-income-women. Many poor women are greatly affected by the structural policies of relief assistance. Disaster recovery programs and organizations often rely on the nuclear family model that identifies one family member as the “head of household.” This commonly allows men easiest access to this money, often reportedly using it to purchase items that do not support the rest of the family (Enarson and Morrow 1998; Fothergill 1996). Relying on the classification of a hetero-normative family to provide social assistance and disaster relief has punished individuals who fall out of this category for some time. Without access to this sole relief check, women and children may take the longest to recover from disaster (Morrow 1997).

Social vulnerability theory looks at the impacts of disasters rooted in gender, class, race, culture, nationality, age, and other power relationships (Cutter, Boruff, and Shirley 2003; Enarson et al. 2006). Thus, it is important to examine the structural relationships and institutional discriminations that exist prior to a disaster. As was evident in Hurricane Katrina, poverty and race have been ignored for far too long. There is a direct parallel between the social issues that are ignored before a disaster strikes and the people who are left behind and unassisted after the destruction. In addition to understanding the challenges that women in poverty face, it is equally important to uncover the coping mechanisms that they use to provide for their families and themselves. People with the least resources are most likely those who have to rely on creative alternatives to financial and social support.

All of these variables influence the abilities of single mothers to recover from disasters and begin to reconstruct their lives. Research shows that the poorest women,
and particularly single mothers, may be left out of the recovery and relief process altogether (Scanlon 1998). It has also been shown that disasters generally leave women even more impoverished (Enarson et al. 2006). Although there has been some research done on the recovery process, usually defined as the one year period following a disaster (Mileti 1999), much less is known about the long-term reconstruction process, particularly for internally displaced populations within the United States.

**GENDER AND HURRICANE KATRINA**

Over the past three years, dozens of books, special issues, and articles have been dedicated to exploring the race and class issues exposed by Hurricane Katrina. Gender has not been given the same attention and overall has been largely ignored (Enarson et al. 2006). Although Hurricane Katrina was obviously a racialized and classed disaster, it is equally important to highlight the fact that it was the women and children of color who suffered the most (Ransby 2005). In fact, Seager (2005) points out that even during the media coverage following Hurricane Katrina, gender went completely “unnoticed.” This lack of attention had significant consequences for the women and children whose needs were overlooked and under addressed following the storm. Although experts clearly understand that disasters magnify preexisting forms of disadvantage, little was done to address gender-specific emergency planning and the post-disaster recovery needs of women.

Prior to Katrina, approximately 69 percent of the population of the city of New Orleans was African-American (Dyson 2006, Seager 2005) and 56 percent of these households were female-headed (Gault, Hartmann, Jones-DeWeever, Weshckul, and Williams 2005). Long before Hurricane Katrina, the women in the Gulf Coast states were
the poorest in the nation (Jones-DeWeever and Hartmann 2006). These women were disproportionately poor and African American. Of the victims displaced by Hurricane Katrina, single mothers were the least likely to return due to family displacement, economic instability, lack of transportation, and childcare responsibilities (Williams et al. 2006). In fact, the number of poor, female-headed households in the city dropped by 83 percent in the months following the storm (Williams et al. 2006).

Hurricane Katrina was a catastrophic event that caused the forced relocation of over one million people. Numerous families, many of whom are headed by a single-mother of color, were separated from their family members, friends, and social support networks that they once relied on to survive. Social networks and the conversion of social capital into resources was key to survival after Hurricane Katrina. The economically disadvantaged were the least likely to benefit from these networks, making it particularly hard to recover (Barnshaw and Trainor 2007). The literature suggests that, “relocation following a natural disaster contributes to the environmental, social and psychological stress experienced by disaster victims” (Riad and Norris 1996: 163).

Barnshaw and Trainor (2007) propose “social capital offers a powerful theoretical lens for understanding the social processes of stratification at work for individuals in disaster” (p. 96). They explore resource networks after Hurricane Katrina. Instead of focusing on the presence or absence of material resources, they instead explore the ways individuals transform preexisting social capital into material resources post-disaster. They found that people who had spatially dense social capital (i.e. friends and family that live in close proximity to one another), which were concentrated in the affected areas, were less able to convert social capital into economic resources. However, those that had
extended social networks were able to evacuate and recover with greater ease. Many low-income individuals had never left the state due to limited economic resources and therefore, rarely had extended social networks on which they could rely. Marginalized people are in precarious situations before disaster strikes and it is clear that the inequities they experience directly determine their ability to prepare for, cope with, and recover from a disaster. This is particularly true for low-income single mothers.

Gault et al. (2006) and Williams et al. (2006) thoroughly evaluated the situation of Gulf Coast women before and after Hurricane Katrina. They propose that it is absolutely instrumental to address the multiple disadvantages and inequalities that are faced by women in disasters. Their policy recommendations include: ensure the right of return, restore basic services, make public assistance available for those in need, provide training to include women in the planning and rebuilding process, respect communities in the rebuilding process, increase economic well-being by expanding access to education and training, provide childcare, provide employment with living wages, include discussions of the gender and race dynamics in the dialog of poverty, and continue data collection efforts.

**DOWNWARD MOBILITY**

Andersen and Taylor (2006) define social mobility as “a person’s movement over time from one class to another” (p. 232). Imbedded in the “American Dream” is the belief that everyone has a chance at upward mobility and that children will do better in life than the generation that came before. Unfortunately, this is quite uncommon and the focus on upward mobility has masked the reality of an increasingly downward spiral of middle class individuals into poverty. Although mobility can be intergenerational, when disaster
strikes, families quickly lose class status making it difficult for their children and themselves to recover from the loss.

It is astounding how many individuals in the U.S. live on the margins of poverty before disaster strikes. In fact, Newman and Chen (2007: 3) report that 57 million people fall into a category labeled the “missing class” or “near-poor” making between $20,000 and $40,000 a year for a family of four. A single mother with two dependant children needs approximately $30,000 to afford basic necessities (Boushey 2001). Between 1996 and 2002, 16 percent of those living on the margins lost a tenth or more of their incomes contributing to the downward mobility of many in this fragile position (Newman and Chen 2007). There are many types of crises that can push someone over the edge of poverty, however, in times of disaster these issues are magnified and individuals on the margins may have little to no chance for recovering to economic stability.

The number of Americans experiencing downward mobility has been growing rapidly. Newman and Chen (2007) add that in the 1990’s the number of people who found themselves falling into poverty doubled. With growing economic insecurity and unpredictable labor markets people are more likely to fall farther into debt and eventually become bankrupt. As Newman and Chen argue, this freefall robs hardworking people of their privacy, dignity, and the freedom to manage their lives as adults (p. 179). Individuals are at an even greater disadvantage if they are a member of a minority group or lack a college education. For example, African-Americans are two times more likely to be unemployed than white workers. This extreme unemployment rate is a direct result of racism that prevents African-Americans from gaining upward mobility. Given that
displaced single mothers from the Gulf Coast were more likely to be African American, this places them in a particularly subjugated position when trying to rebuild their lives.

Fothergill (2004) first introduced the effects of downward mobility after a disaster. Given that there was no prior research on this topic, Fothergill investigated how downward mobility affects victims of disaster, how they cope, who they blame, and how, or if they recover. Although her research focuses primarily on middle-class, white women after the 1997 Grand Forks Flood in North Dakota, she posits that downward mobility is even more severe for women who were poor before disaster struck. My research will contribute to the literature on downward mobility, offering an examination of the effects disaster has on women living just above the poverty line before Hurricane Katrina.

After a disaster, people who were living “near” poverty often find themselves unable to recover from the loss. Hurricane Katrina magnified these issues for many Gulf Coast residents. Due to the extreme amount of loss, bureaucratic disorganization, and displacement, many single mothers found themselves in vulnerable positions. The loss of housing, employment, savings, credit, and social safety nets pushed these women further into poverty with little to no means for recovery (see Ch. 5).
CHAPTER III

METHODS

Given my goal to study the experiences of single mothers displaced by Katrina, in December 2006, I began writing a research proposal and formulating interview guides, consent forms, and recruitment speeches to submit to the Human Research Committee (HRC) at Colorado State University. In March 2007, HRC accepted the proposal and granted me permission to begin the interview process. From March through June 2007, I researched local scholarship and news media to begin identifying the leading resource providers who offered services to Hurricane Katrina evacuees. Although I had planned to interview 15 resource providers first, followed by 10 single-mothers, it became apparent that I needed to interview participants as they became available. Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) found that it is quite common for leads to be lost if referrals are not followed up immediately. This knowledge resulted in the interviewing of resource providers and single mothers concurrently.

From June 2007 through February 2008, I conducted 23 in-depth qualitative interviews with 15 disaster relief professionals and 8 displaced single mothers living in Colorado. The eight single mothers consisted of four African-American, one Cuban, one Latino, and two Caucasian women. Some populations have a low social visibility and therefore pose particular problems for researchers who wish to locate and contact individuals for interviewing purposes (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). This situation was definitely the case for single mothers displaced from Hurricane Katrina. Therefore, I was
only able to attain eight of the ten single mothers I had originally planned to interview. In addition to recruiting and interviewing participants, I spent time exploring the literature that was rapidly emerging on the events following Hurricane Katrina.

In this chapter, I describe the events leading up to this project, explain my interest in this topic, and outline my research design. Next, I describe the research settings and the sample population and explain my data collection methods. Then, I outline the steps I took to analyze the data. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the methodological issues and challenges I faced during the course of this research.

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH INTERESTS

Upon entering the graduate program at Colorado State University, I met with Dr. Lori Peek and we discussed her area of specialization and her ongoing research on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. My interest was immediately sparked, and I proceeded to enroll in her Sociology of Disasters course during my first semester at the university. I have always had an interest in women’s issues. During my undergraduate education I completed the Women’s Studies Certificate Program. This experience paired with eighteen years of living in hurricane-prone south Florida made me personally interested in the gender and disaster scholarship.

Less than two months into my first semester, I had decided that I wanted to understand more about the women who were displaced from Hurricane Katrina. Given that I have a small child of my own, the needs of women with children stood out in my mind. Colorado, at one time, had the fourth largest number of evacuees outside of the Gulf Coast region. Living in the state provided me with the unique opportunity to study the displaced population two years after the storm. After a thorough evaluation of the
literature, it became obvious that there was a lack of research focusing on displacement to Colorado after Hurricane Katrina. Little scholarship has explored the needs of displaced disaster victims in general, and even less examines the needs of single mothers post-disaster. In this research, I decided to focus on single-mother-headed households in an effort to contribute to the gender and disaster literature on this important and seriously understudied topic.

**Research Questions**

Based on my research interests, geographic location, and knowledge of the literature, I developed a research plan focusing on the needs of single mothers that have been displaced to Colorado after Hurricane Katrina and their ability to access resources. This thesis explores the following research questions:

1.) What resources were made available to relocated single-mother families living in Colorado, and what resources were single mothers most likely to access?

2.) What challenges have single-mother families faced in the pursuit of social and economic resources?

3.) How have gender, class, race, and cultural differences shaped the overall experience of displacement for single-mother families?

**Post-Disaster Research**

Although disasters have always been a part of the human experience, they have only begun to receive scholarly attention from sociologists over the past 50 years (Quarantelli 2006), with the number of studies increasing steadily over the last 25 years (Norris 2005). Disasters provide social scientists with the unique opportunity to study
human behavior, group life, and social interaction during extreme times that cannot be replicated otherwise (Fritz 1961).

In the literature, there is a clear distinction made between what constitutes a *hazard*, a *disaster*, and more recently, a *catastrophe*. Drabek (2005: 4) defines a hazard as “a condition with the potential for harm to the community or environment.” Alternately he posits, “A disaster is an event in which a community undergoes such severe losses to persons and/or property that the resources available in the community are severely taxed.” These distinctions have provided a frame of reference to contextualize these events in the broader field of sociology (Drabek 2005). It is obvious that large-scale disasters need to be classified according to their magnitude.

Quarantelli (2006) outlines the characteristics of the events most commonly referred to as *catastrophes*. The six ways in which catastrophes differ from disasters are:

Most or all of the community built structure is heavily impacted; local officials are unable to undertake their usual work role, often extending to the recovery period; help from nearby communities cannot be provided; most, if not all, of the everyday community functions are sharply and concurrently interrupted; the mass media system socially constructs catastrophes even more than they do disasters; finally, because of the previous five processes, the political arena becomes even more important (p 3-6).

Hurricane Katrina has been noted as a textbook example of a catastrophe (Quarantelli 2006). Although it is important to understand these distinctions, Hurricane Katrina is most commonly referred to as a disaster and therefore is identified as such throughout this thesis.

It is widely understood in disaster literature that the methods involved are no different from those employed in general sociological research (Stallings 2002; Phillips 2002; Mileti 1987). Disaster research has a long tradition of using qualitative methods,
starting in 1920 with Samuel Henry Prince’s Halifax explosion study (Phillips 2002). In 1963, E.L. Quarantelli and Russell Dynes established the Disaster Research Center (DRC) (Stallings 2002). These men carried on the tradition of fieldwork from the University of Chicago’s school of social scientists (Phillips 2002; Tierney 2002). Today, the trend is only increasing with in-depth interviews and case studies being the most common forms of qualitative data (Phillips 2002). The tradition of going into the field has helped to identify the needs and recovery strategies used by underserved groups in affected communities (Phillips 2002). Going out in the field and speaking with resource providers and single mothers gave me an in-depth understanding of the barriers that these women faced in their attempts to access resources and reestablish their lives after displacement from Hurricane Katrina.

Although disaster scholarship has grown substantially over the years, the focus of inquiry still tends to be of the quick-response variety (Tierney 2002). It is recommended that researchers arrive at the disaster site as soon as possible, if not before the event occurs (Stalling 2002), in order to “capture human behavior at its most open, realistic moments” (Phillips 2002: 202). This phase of data collection is imperative to understanding the “emergency/crisis periods of disaster” (Quarantelli 2002: 94). However, there has been a lack of attention focused on long-term recovery from disasters (Kreps 1984). In fact, the most understudied phase in disaster research has always been recovery (Phillips 2002). There have also been numerous calls for more longitudinal, disaster research (Tierney 2002; Phillips 2002). This thesis contributes to the dearth of literature on displacement and long-term recovery. Although single-mothers have been given more attention in disaster literature over the last ten years (Enarson, Fothergill, and
Peek 2006; Enarson 1998; Fothergill 1996), this is the first study that specifically addresses the needs and experiences of single mothers after displacement.

**Qualitative Methods**

This thesis is based on a qualitative study that examines how social stratification affects single mothers in times of disaster and how these women were able to secure vital resources (childcare, shelter, affordable housing, clothing, etc.) post-disaster. The purpose of this study is exploratory and descriptive; which is perfectly suited for the implementation of qualitative methods (Phillips 2002). Similar to most qualitative research, the goal of my study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of a small group of research participants rather than a breadth of knowledge that can only be attained through large, representative samples (Ambert, Adler, Adler, and Detzner 1995).

I conducted 23 in-depth interviews,\(^2\) actively participated in observation of the interview sites, and recorded field notes whenever possible. Becker (1996) explains that while a researcher is in the field, they need to be acutely aware of the data that surrounds them and strictly enter all of the things they hear and see into their field notes. For example, this approach was particularly useful in tracking the organization of key players mentioned throughout the interviews, while noting how each respondent reacted when speaking of the individual or organization at hand. This method helped me to understand the attitudes and beliefs that were carried between disaster victims and disaster relief professionals.

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\(^2\) I was also granted the opportunity to act as a research assistant to Dr. Lori Peek and Dr. Alice Fothergill before entering the field on my own. I gained valuable information from flying to New Orleans and conducting interviews with parents, teachers, and children under the supervision of experienced professionals. This aided me in the process of forming my own research questions and helped me to be more efficient during my own interviews.
Lofland, Snow, Andersen, and Lofland (2006) identify the interview process as the interweaving of observation, ordinary conversation, listening, and the use of an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions. The primary data collection method for my study was in-depth interviews. The interview guide that I used for the disaster relief professionals was more structured allowing for a clear question and answer discussion (see Appendix B). However, the questions I had for the single mothers were more open-ended (see Appendix C). This interview design prompted the women to provide rich detail about their experiences with displacement to Colorado after Hurricane Katrina. Phillips (2002) explains that qualitative methods provide the opportunity for the researcher to alter the design plan and identify new questions that could “empower and give voice to respondents” (p. 203). I wanted to be flexible in my attempt to access the voices of this marginalized group of women. Less structured interview questions ensured that I would not lead the conversation or make assumptions regarding their experiences. I chose to use qualitative methods because they create a context for understanding that allows participants to tell the story through their own voices.

According to Michaels (2003: 18), “exploratory research requires a flexible and wide-sweeping strategy, open-ended techniques, and the use of atypical samples…to begin to identify important variables and questions of interest.” I chose to interview disaster professionals and single mothers concurrently to uncover themes that I may have otherwise been unaware. This approach provided a more compelling and thorough analysis of the experiences of single mothers post-Hurricane Katrina. This method allowed me to create new questions as themes emerged and to validate claims made
between disaster professionals and single mothers. The use of these methods is imperative in understanding the needs and experiences of single mothers after disaster.

**RESEARCH SITES**

In this section, I describe where I traveled during the data collection phase of my research, the people I interviewed, and how I came to access this hidden population. I provide a detailed account of the experiences and barriers that I faced in pursuit of interviewing disaster relief professionals and displaced single-mothers.

**Research Locations**

Over seven months of fieldwork, I traveled to Denver, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo multiple times to conduct in-depth qualitative interviews. I also used my position as a resident of Fort Collins to establish contacts in the community. I chose Denver as a research site because it was the city that had the largest number of evacuees in Colorado. The city provided me with a network of disaster relief agencies that worked closely with the evacuees, granting me greater opportunity to find displaced mothers. Next, I chose to conduct interviews in Colorado Springs because they were the second largest evacuee intake site in the state. Colorado Springs was also known for being distinctly different from other evacuee intake sites in their ability to organize and provide resources to the disaster survivors. Interviewing disaster professionals from both locations provided me with rich data allowing me to compare relief efforts between cities. Through the relationships I created with my contacts in Colorado Springs, I was referred to two evacuees living in Pueblo, one of which I was able to interview. Finally, I conducted one interview in Fort Collins, which became available to me as a member of the community. To my knowledge, there were few evacuees that stayed in Fort Collins, limiting my
ability to do more research in the area. I interviewed both disaster relief professionals and single mothers to get a holistic view of the resources being provided and to distinguish any unmet needs.

As mentioned previously, I originally planned to conduct my interviews in two phases. First, I would interview 15 disaster relief professionals and next I would interview 8 single mothers. I would then compare the data to determine the outcome of single mothers in regards to acquiring resources and reestablishing their lives after displacement. Given the difficulty of finding the displaced population and the nature of qualitative research in general, I interviewed the participants as they became available. This strengthened my research design because it allowed me to compare the data between the groups as I proceeded with my interviews. It also gave me insight into the mother’s experiences, providing me with valuable information to use when addressing the disaster professionals and vice versa.

**Gaining Entrée**

Initially, I began contacting the social workers/evacuee case managers through the three main organizations that were coordinating the FEMA-funded long-term disaster recovery services in the state of Colorado: Volunteers of America, Catholic Charities,\(^3\) and Lutheran Family Services. I called the select organizations and asked questions regarding who was most involved with the evacuees. I then contacted those individuals and explained the purpose of my research and invited them to participate in my study. I immediately began interviewing willing participants who frequently informed me of other disaster relief efforts in the state. I proceeded to interview professionals from the Red Cross, Colorado Coalition of Faith, Salvation Army, Colorado Department of Mental

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\(^3\) I was never able to access anyone from Catholic Charities who was willing to be interviewed.
Health, and two community-based efforts in Colorado Springs ran by a city council member and a United Way affiliate. Most of the professionals I spoke with were interested in my study and readily agreed to be interviewed. All relief workers were selected based on their interaction with displaced single-mother families and their involvement with participating community organizations.

In addition to the disaster relief professionals, I began trying to locate displaced single mothers. At first, my thesis advisor assisted me in establishing contact with three individuals that she had built relationships with during the course of her own research. These women gave permission to share their contact information with me for research purposes. Out of one of those interviews, I was invited to interview a friend of one participant, who was also a single mother displaced by the storm. I also located a displaced single mother living in Fort Collins. I was connected with her through my mother, who is a midwife in town. She was interested in my study and offered to be interviewed. These five were the only women I found with relative ease. After each of these interviews I asked for the names of other evacuees. Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) note:

The use of chain referral sampling yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who posses some characteristics that are of research interest… and is particularly applicable when the focus of study is on a sensitive issue, possibly concerning a relatively private matter, and thus requires the knowledge of insiders to locate people for study (p. 141).

This approach was definitely appropriate for my research. Unfortunately, it quickly became apparent that evacuees had little knowledge of the whereabouts of other evacuees. Also, due to confidentiality, disaster professionals were usually unable to refer
me to evacuees. In an attempt to conduct more interviews, I began to employ a variety of techniques to locate single mother evacuees in the state of Colorado.

First, I created a flier that described the details of my research and invited women to participate in my study (see Appendix D). I distributed these to all of the disaster professionals and single mothers I interviewed in hopes of acquiring more participants. I also gave them to anyone I met that even hinted at a connection with Katrina evacuees. Next, I called school districts in Fort Collins, Denver, and Colorado Springs. I left many messages and spoke to many people, which unfortunately did not result in finding any displaced single mothers. I then began searching newspaper articles that discussed Colorado’s participation with resettling evacuees. I called and emailed journalists, conducted Internet searches on the individuals mentioned, and contacted any organizations that were highlighted in the articles. I also contacted housing authorities and random apartment buildings that I had heard participated in the housing of evacuees. I used the Internet to locate churches that were involved in the recovery process and spoke with many pastors. I was also given the opportunity to have my flier published in Springs Magazine, which is a community-based magazine in Colorado Springs that prints adds for local businesses. This publication resulted in conversations with evacuees that were interested in my study; however, none of them were single-mothers. Finally, I used message boards such as MySpace and Craigs List to post requests for research participants.

In addition to these office-based searches, I went out into the community. I attended a Katrina Symposium where many people involved in the relief efforts spoke of their participation and the process of recovery. I attended a Boil-and-Boogie, Cajun event
that was being held in Mead, Colorado where Katrina evacuees were preparing the food. I was hoping to find people to participate in my study. Unfortunately, there were no single-mother-evacuees present. I also searched for other events that could be associated with Hurricane Katrina. However, given that my research began close to two years after the storm, many of these events had ended. I trained and became a volunteer with Disaster Childcare Services in order to participate in future disasters as well as come into contact with people who had worked specifically with the displaced population. And finally, I scheduled follow-up appointments with professionals I had already interviewed in hopes of gaining access to their clients. This approach resulted in two more single-mother interviews, one in Pueblo and one in Colorado Springs. Last, I was connected to one more single mother with the help of my thesis advisor. All of the other efforts did not provide me with any willing participants.

Waters and Biernacki (1989) say that it becomes easier to access hidden populations once they enter institutional settings. Given that I began my search two years after the disaster, most of the recovery efforts had ended and few evacuees were still involved with disaster relief agencies. This was also a protected population, and therefore strict confidentiality rules were followed by relief providers to protect the identities of their clients. This made it extremely difficult to gain referrals from those people most involved with my desired population. Another problem with reliance on chain referral or snowball sampling is that sometimes the researcher is trying to access different and non-overlapping social networks (Waters and Biernacki 1989). This was definitely true when trying to find single mothers for my study. Although they had just experienced the same disaster, they were not a homogenous group of people. There were not geographic
locations where multiple groups of evacuees congregated and there were not any specific social networks that represented them as a group. Given that these women were part of hidden population and were largely disconnected from each other, I had to go to great lengths to find the single mothers that I interviewed.

**SAMPLE POPULATION**

During the course of this research, I interviewed 15 disaster relief professionals in Colorado who were a diverse set of individuals, both male and female, with various ethnic and social class backgrounds that I did not attempt to explore in this study. Specifically, I interviewed nine male and six female disaster relief professionals. Eleven of them were Caucasian, three African-American, and one Latino. Given that the focus of my research was not on the personal lives of disaster relief professionals, I only focused on information that was pertinent to understanding the recovery process for evacuees.

I also interviewed eight displaced single mothers who were all from Louisiana, but had a variety of ethnic and social class backgrounds. Although the large majority of people displaced from Hurricane Katrina were African-American, my sample was not representative of this fact. It is estimated that roughly 95 percent of all evacuees being flown and bused into Denver were African-American (Sterett and Reich 2007: 140). However, only four of the eight women I interviewed identified as African-American. I interviewed all of the women I was able to find and therefore did not have the privilege of securing a demographically representative sample.

The mothers I found ranged in age from 23 to 47. They consisted of four African-American, one Cuban, one Latino and two Caucasian women. They ranged from middle

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4 This is a highly suspect term given the complicated identities of Cajun women. In this case, I mean Caucasian by how their identities would be interpreted by the dominant society.
to lower class economic backgrounds. They did not specifically state their exact incomes or acquired wealth, however, through their stories they self identified with particular lifestyles (I return to this in Ch. 4). The women all spoke fluent English and did not indicate speaking a second language in their households. Similarly, they all had a distinct accent native to southern Louisiana and expanded on the cultural uniqueness of New Orleans and the surrounding areas. The ages of the dependant children ranged from two to eighteen. It was quite common that the children were present during the interviews. Aside from school and work hours, single mothers are rarely without their children.

DATA COLLECTION

I employed a qualitative interviewing method using guided, open-ended questions. This provided me with an in-depth understanding of the needs of single mothers directly related to acquiring resources after displacement to Colorado. Prior to each interview, I had each participant read and sign an informed consent form (see Appendix A). I was also able to gather information pertaining to the challenges that these women faced in pursuit of social and economic resources and how gender, class, race, and cultural differences shaped these experiences. I gathered data, in the form of in-depth interviews, observation, and field notes from June 2007 to February 2008. I conducted semi-structured interviews that lasted from 45 minutes to 3 ½ hours. The average interview with disaster relief professionals lasted 50 minutes and the average interview with single mothers lasted one hour and 45 minutes. I recorded the sessions using a digital voice recorder in conjunction with written field notes. I interviewed 15 disaster relief professionals during 13 interview sessions. Two of those interviews had two participants whom I interviewed at the same time. All of the mothers were interviewed
individually. For each interview session I met the participant at their preferred location. For the disaster professionals, this was usually their office or a coffee shop. I met seven mothers at their homes and one at a restaurant.

The women I interviewed lived in low-income housing, usually in an apartment or trailer. Only one woman lived in a house. In most cases the furnishings consisted of donated items and hand-me-downs. Two-years-out, most individuals had acquired enough furnishings to decorate and fill their homes. Their homes were often in isolated areas far from public transportation or shopping centers, making it particularly difficult to get by without a vehicle.

The interviews were made up of open-ended questions to ensure an exhaustive account of distributed resources. In particular, I asked questions about finances, housing, transportation, childcare, mental health, loss, identity change, and culture. In addition, I asked specific questions about the disaster as well as gathered background information on the individual. The interviews with the disaster professionals were more structured, operating on a question/answer basis. There was a particular status difference between types of interviews. When interviewing the disaster professionals, they were in the position of authority and conversations resembled a teacher/student relationship.

Alternately, the interviews with the single mothers transpired in a more organic way, listening to their stories and using my interview schedule as a guide to facilitate the conversation. Here, the status shifted. Although it was always a friendly conversation, it was obvious that I was in the position of the outsider. Some women were reluctant to share specific details of their experience and others seemed to answer questions based on what they thought I wanted to hear. This reaction varied from interview to interview.
There were some cases that more closely resembled a mother/daughter relationship. This was particularly interesting and a direct result of having a female/female interview. Tierney (2002) explains:

Gender issues are extremely relevant to the conduct of field research, because the researcher’s gender affects the ability to gain access to research settings, the roles in which the fieldworker is cast, and how the fieldworker is perceived and treated by those who are studied (p. 365-66).

In these mother/daughter conversations, women shared openly and were determined to make sure I got all of the information I needed for my study. They expressed that they were proud of the research I was doing and of my personal accomplishments. This reaction was highly unanticipated and gave me a deeper respect for who these women were as individuals.

I only interviewed each participant one time. However, I have maintained relationships with two of the mothers that keep me updated on their situation regularly. I have also maintained email contact with some disaster professionals who regularly send me updates on evacuee statistics and organizational achievements.

In addition to interviews, I gathered field notes and observational data. After leaving each interview, I would spend time analyzing what I had seen, heard, and felt. I would take notes during and after the interviews to ensure an accurate account of the situation. Although this was not the primary source of data for my research, it helped to contextualize each interview and provide rich detail about the environment and any unspoken emotion that was shared.

My Role in the Setting

It was important to acknowledge my role in the setting as a white, female, 28-year-old graduate student. Having a young daughter of my own helped me relate to the
mother’s fears and concerns about parenting and protecting the children involved. I was able to speak to them, mother to mother, which made the conversations flow easily. I also shared similarities with them culturally. I am from the South and have experienced hurricanes throughout my life. I found that once I revealed where I was from, they candidly expressed how they felt about Coloradans in general and the treatment they have received from the community. They went into great detail about how people “here” are different from people in the South.

I was also aware of the ways that I was hindered in the interview process. Being white made it particularly difficult to have in-depth conversations about race. As much as I tried to be open and straightforward, I found that the African-American women were hesitant and resistant to my questions about differences in the racial makeup of their new communities. I would try to alleviate some of this tension by referencing my affiliation with the South. For example, I would often say, “Coming from Florida to Colorado was extremely weird for me because there were so many white people here, and I am white. How did that feel for you?” This usually made them laugh and then they seemed slightly more comfortable speaking about the race issue. The Caucasian women I interviewed were more candid about the race questions, providing insight into some racial conflict that existed in New Orleans and the attitudes that are still present for evacuees living in Colorado.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Rubin and Rubin (2005) say that data analysis is a process that begins with raw interviews and moves to an interpretation that entails, “classifying, comparing, weighing, and combining material from the interviews to extract the meaning and implications, to
reveal patterns, or to stitch together description of events into a coherent narrative” (p. 201). Throughout the interview process I performed preliminary data analysis to become aware of any emerging themes. Ambert et al. (1995) contend that “qualitative research often begins initial analysis even while data are being collected” and that “the process of doing qualitative research is cyclical and evolutionary rather than linear-as is the process typical of quantitative research” (p. 884). This proved to be true as new concepts would emerge every time I went back to the data. I also had all of the recorded interviews transcribed verbatim soon after they were finished. I printed all of the typed interviews and thoroughly read them many times to identify patterns and ideas that were relevant to my research questions. I treated each individual interview as a single case, requiring an in-depth look at all of the details of their story. I then compared cases to uncover identifying variables that were common among the sample. As I read through each interview I paid close attention to any similarities in their stories.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) define this process as recognition and synthesis. During recognition, the researcher finds the “concepts, themes, events, and topical markers” (p. 207) in the interviews and then uses synthesis to examine each interview and clarify what is meant by each concept and theme in order to piece together an understanding of the overall narrative. During this process, I made sure to analyze my field notes and observational data concomitantly with each transcribed interview.

Next, I started coding the data I collected in order to categorize general themes. This process consists of making labels for each identifying theme and concept in order to group them together at a later time (Rubin and Rubin 2005). I then selected the core concepts from those categories and regrouped them under different identifying codes.
Throughout the coding process I kept a written log of my ideas and made sure to define all of the concepts that arose (Rubin and Rubin 2005). I then combined any concept that could apply to a single theme and weighed the evidence between interviews to check for validity and reliability (Rubin and Rubin 2005; Ambert et al. 1995).

Finally, I identified the major themes that I would use to discuss the experiences of single mothers in my study. In the data chapters of this thesis I will elaborate on those themes, relating my findings to feminist and disaster literature to support my argument and “enhance the voices of women who have been overlooked in previous research” (Ambert et al.1995).

**METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES**

During the course of my research, I experienced some methodological challenges that were both expected and unexpected. I will discuss these challenges as they pertain to the research design that I employed, the research settings in which the interviews took place, and the emotional issues that I faced along the way.

**Research Design**

In the beginning stages of my research, I quickly realized the difficulty I would face taking on this project two years after Hurricane Katrina. Many people who had originally participated in the relief efforts had either changed positions or changed occupations completely. People also had experienced an obvious emotion burnout by the time they discussed their experiences with me. For example, resource providers expressed less sympathy for the evacuees and often recounted the events that took place as historical facts rather than emotional experiences. Similarly, many of the mothers indicated that they were sick of telling the same painful story again and again.
Over time, the disaster relief workers had less contact with the single mother population I was trying to contact, making it more difficult to utilize their knowledge on the whereabouts of disaster survivors. Initially, there were high levels of contact between service providers and evacuees. An outpouring of support combined with an extreme need for services kept Hurricane Katrina and its destruction visible for months. Eventually, support and services began to decline and evacuees became hidden from the public eye, joining the poor or near poor already existing in Colorado.

In addition, many of the single mothers still living in Colorado had moved multiple times and did not have consistent phone numbers. There were two cases where I spoke with women who were willing to be interviewed, and when I returned their call, their phones had been disconnected. I also had two mothers cancel interviews with me at the last minute due to health and schedule complications. Many of the survivors were ready to put the experience behind them and sometimes I felt like a nagging reminder of their painful history. Most of the mothers I spoke with had already been interviewed by reporters or had been asked the same sorts of questions repeatedly by community members and disaster relief professionals. This made accessing and acquiring single mothers very difficult.

Research Sites

Although my research design kept me in relatively close proximity to my desired population, I still found it difficult to travel the two-hour drive to Colorado Springs and three-hour drive to Pueblo. Often, interviews can happen spontaneously, especially with women who have full time jobs and young children. This limited my ability to create connections in Colorado Springs because I could only set up interviews weeks in
advance. However, having interviews in Denver was very manageable. I could easily set up an interview for the next day and drive the 60-minute commute, interview the participant, and be home in the course of a regular workday.

It can take many days to physically search a community for interview participants. Given that this has been an extremely difficult population to access, I was limited in the time I could spend in Colorado Springs finding displaced single mothers. I spent two separate weeks in Colorado Springs to conduct this search. I was able to interview two single mothers and eight disaster professionals during this time.

Fortunately, the Colorado Springs Salvation Army office offered Katrina Relief case management through March of 2008, the longest in the state. This provided me with a connection to single-mothers that I otherwise would not have been able to interview.

Also, there was a slight concern for my safety. Being a young woman places me in a precarious situation when entering the houses of previously unknown interview participants. Even though I was interviewing women, it was unclear what kind of neighborhood I would be entering, what living situation the participant was in, and what state of mental health she or her living partners were experiencing. Fortunately, I felt extremely welcomed and very safe in every interview. All of my safety concerns were from a preventative standpoint. All researchers need to be aware of the possible dangers that they face when conducting fieldwork and for women this is particularly true.

**Emotional Challenges**

This research has been emotionally charged at every level. I interviewed people who recently went through what might have been the most extreme loss they have ever experienced. Hurricane Katrina inspired a wealth of compassion, community support, and
strengthening of friends and family. It simultaneously inspired a collective distrust of government and social stability in general. I chose to handle these emotions with honesty, empathy, and understanding. I tried to treat each individual single mother as a friend and actively listen to her stories with an open heart. Although this was emotionally draining for me, it was nothing compared to the pain they must have felt through the entire transition from the impact of Katrina to being displaced to Colorado, including sharing openly with me. It was through this understanding that I was able to process my own emotions and better connect with the survivors.

I experienced different kinds of emotion with the resource providers than I did with the single-mothers. In many cases, the resource providers would get emotional while telling specific stories of the victims that they helped. I often had tears in my eyes, reliving the experience with them. I felt very comfortable sharing my emotion with them, given that we were both in the same position as outsiders looking in. It was actually refreshing to be able to discuss my own feelings with them and share stories that I had that were similar to their own. It became a cyclical process of understanding our post-disaster related emotion.

Oppositely, I rarely got emotional with the mothers I interviewed. This was surprising to me since I am a very emotional person who can rarely hide feelings of sadness. The mothers often cried and shared painful stories with me. I felt that it might be interpreted as unnecessary sympathy if I joined in their sadness. I also did not want to deprive them of their time to experience those feelings. It was difficult to maintain a boundary of professionalism. I often hugged and comforted these women that I barely knew. This display of affection was well received and welcomed. It was often difficult to
finish the interview as I felt so intimately connected with them by the end. I have maintained relationships with two of the women, which has reduced my uneasiness about the interview process that requires we get personal information from people and then move on with our studies. I often released my own emotion during the car ride home or on the phone with my husband. It was extremely helpful to have supportive friends and family that were willing to hear my stories and happy to comfort me when I was sad.
CHAPTER IV

DISASTER ASSISTANCE IN COLORADO

To date, no research has been published that focuses specifically on displaced single mothers and their ability to access resources after Hurricane Katrina. In Colorado, disaster relief providers did not offer any resources that were specific to the needs of single mothers. However, relief efforts were made to ensure that all evacuees were provided with life-sustaining resources. This chapter offers an in-depth description of the resources that were made available in Colorado Springs and Denver in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the challenges that disaster relief professionals faced while trying to provide these resources. I draw from in-depth, qualitative interviews that I conducted with 15 disaster relief professionals, community members, and volunteers that participated in the distribution of resources.

NEEDS AND RESOURCES PROVIDED

Although there were no specific resources offered to single mothers after Hurricane Katrina, all persons who were displaced to Colorado had immediate and immense needs in the areas of shelter, housing, food, transportation, employment, childcare, schooling, and health care. There were also a variety of additional resources, such as clothing, furniture, identification, airline tickets, cash, and a social support system that were needed in order for evacuees to begin to rebuild their lives. Given the magnitude of Hurricane Katrina, disaster assistance was extended in Colorado in the form
of case management in order to address the unique, long-term needs of displaced persons. In this section, I detail the immediate and longer-term needs of evacuees and the multiple efforts that were made by disaster relief agencies and community members to meet those needs. In particular, I discuss the specific resources that were made available to evacuees who were displaced to Denver, Colorado Springs, and the surrounding areas.

Denver and Colorado Springs received the largest amount of evacuees in the state of Colorado. Immediate assistance was offered in shelters and recovery centers for the six weeks to three months following the storm, while long-term assistance continued in Denver through September 2007 and in Colorado Springs through March 2008. Funding for disaster recovery varied by city, although there was one specific grant issued to the state of Colorado: Katrina Aid Today. This grant was offered through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), which is a national case management consortium. In Denver, Volunteers of America, Lutheran Family Services, and Catholic Charities received the grant money and began case management for Katrina evacuees. In Colorado Springs, the funds were divided between Lutheran Family Services and the Salvation Army for case management. In addition, evacuees were offered services through the American Red Cross, the United Way, the Colorado Coalition of Faith, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Seventh Day Adventists, the Urban League, and a variety of local businesses and organizations that became involved in the recovery process.

In order to address long-term needs, evacuees were assigned to a case manager through Volunteers of America, Lutheran Family Services, Catholic Charities, or the Salvation Army. The main goal of case management was to establish a relationship with
the evacuees and create a recovery plan that would help them reach their goals and begin to reestablish their lives. Steve, a case manager from Volunteers of America, stated, “Our primary role is to make assessments of what the needs of evacuees are. Then work to get them resources, primarily through referrals to community agencies.” This was a partnership where the case manager had responsibilities as well as the evacuee. David and Pamela, case managers with the Salvation Army, defined their work as:

A long-term recovery program. We are working with our clients, who are all Katrina evacuees, on long-term self-sufficiency and independence. Our primary goals with our clients are housing: permanent and stable, income: permanent and stable, and what we refer to as self-determination.

They explained that the Katrina Aid Today grant only provided funding for administrative costs and salaries to be able to provide case management. Case managers were able to provide evacuees with information, help them fill out paperwork, connect them with agencies that could provide material items, and get them on the road to recovery. They also had a direct contact person at the FEMA regional office in Denver that they could call to get specific information about a client’s case.

**Shelter and Housing**

The majority of people who came to Colorado after Hurricane Katrina had lost their homes and all of their material possessions in the storm. They arrived with little more than the clothes on their backs. A top priority was to establish shelter and housing so that evacuees would have a safe place to stay upon arrival. The cities of Denver and Colorado Springs set up temporary shelters where evacuees could sleep, eat, and access resources while more permanent housing was being arranged. The construction, use, and management of these facilities varied between cities.
In Denver, immediate shelter was offered at the former Lowry Air Force Base. Initially, approximately 400 evacuees were flown and bused to Lowry from the storm ravaged areas along the Gulf Coast (Sterett and Reich 2007: 135). Many others came through Lowry on their own after self-evacuating to Colorado. A member of the Salvation Army estimated that, “about 8,000 may have gone through Lowry at one time or another, but typically the numbers at any given time were somewhere around 800.” This space was used as a dormitory to house evacuees and to serve as a central location to provide resources to Katrina victims.

Many evacuees had to stay in large, overcrowded shelters before coming to Denver. Fortunately, the former Lowry Air Force Base was able to provide private rooms for evacuees who were waiting for permanent housing. James, a member of the Salvation Army, reported:

> At least with Lowry, you have dorm rooms, you had some privacy, and I think that makes a big difference, as opposed to sleeping on cots in large gymnasiums. I have seen a lot of shelters over the years where basically that’s what is done. But you are also typically thinking a few days as opposed to weeks and months. The fact that Lowry was set up with individual rooms in the dorm for some privacy was probably the best of all the response.

Lowry was open from Labor Day through late October, was capable of providing beds for up to 500 people per night, and was servicing up to 1,000 evacuees on any given day (Walker 2006).

The organizations providing resources at Lowry included FEMA, the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the Colorado Coalition of Faith, Catholic Charities, Colorado Department of Human Services, Denver Public Schools, and other community

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5 The Colorado Coalition of Faith was formed by African-American church leaders in Denver to advocate for the needs of Hurricane Katrina evacuees displaced to Colorado (Sterett and Reich 2006).
organizations that were contracted to address immediate needs. Catholic Charities was responsible for coordinating housing for evacuees in Denver. They were tasked with connecting donated units with evacuees, locating landlords that would be willing to accept FEMA payments, finding housing through the Fannie Mae Foundation, and helping to get people into Section 8 housing. Those individuals who were receiving Section 8 housing in the Gulf Coast prior to Hurricane Katrina were immediately moved to the top of the list in Colorado.

In Colorado Springs, the incoming evacuees were taken to the emergency management location and temporary shelter established by the Colorado Springs Fire Department, the City of Colorado Springs, Colorado Springs Utilities, El Pomar Foundation, and the American Red Cross. The evacuees were not flown into the city on federally funded flights like those who were relocated to Denver. Instead, evacuees either self-evacuated or were brought to Colorado Springs by buses that were donated to drive to the Houston Astrodome and recruit people to come to Colorado. A man in Canyon City donated these buses to Robert, a city council member and disaster relief provider, to use for transferring evacuees. Colorado Springs was the first city to have a booth set up at the Houston Astrodome advertising, “Come to Colorado Springs.” Robert contacted local African-American churches and asked members to go with him to the Houston

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6 The Fannie Mae Foundation provides affordable housing and homeownership to revitalize communities across the United States (Fannie Mae Foundation 2007).
7 Section 8 is a government-funded program that provides vouchers and certificates for low-income families to live in privately owned homes as an alternative to public housing (U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development 2000).
8 El Pomar is a Colorado Springs based private foundation that works to enhance, encourage, and promote well-being for citizens of Colorado and raises money to support Colorado non-profits involved in health, human services, education, arts and humanities, and civic and community initiatives (El Pomar Foundation 2008).
Astrodome and welcome the Katrina survivors. He and his crew of volunteers were responsible for bringing over 2,000 people to Colorado Springs.

Although the American Red Cross organized 125 cots that could be used for sleeping in the shelter, Robert thought that staying in the shelter would be traumatizing for the evacuees. He worked with FEMA and the American Red Cross to make sure that the evacuees had a comfortable place to stay. During our interview he stated:

I think people were treated quite well here. We had a mission not to let people stay in the shelter because a lot of people had stayed in the Astrodome. It’s really traumatizing to go from one shelter to the next. We wanted to get them in houses. We wanted to get families together. That seemed to be one of the most important things.

And from that point on, Robert and many other volunteers, local businesses, and community members made sure that this became a reality. As an alternative to staying in shelters, Hurricane Katrina evacuees were immediately checked into hotels and later transferred to housing in and around Colorado Springs.

Concurrently, the Pikes Peak Recovery Center was being set up to meet the most immediate needs of the Colorado Springs evacuees. This was organized through a collaboration of community members that wanted to help victims of Hurricane Katrina. El Pomar and other private donations of over $100,000 funded the operation. Community members and organizations could come to the center to offer donations and resources to incoming evacuees. Volunteers worked with the Colorado Springs Housing Authority and FEMA to help sign 650 new leases. In addition, approximately 1,200 people offered homes in which evacuees could stay. The city-run emergency management shelter and the Pikes Peak Recovery Center worked together to provide the immediate resources necessary to help the evacuees.
This center was open for six weeks and then taken over by the Urban League and United Way as the Katrina Resource Center for another six weeks. City officials became concerned that too many people were coming to Colorado Springs and declared that they’ve “done enough for hurricane evacuees” (Associated Press 2005). Fortunately, this did not eliminate services. Instead, they decided to transfer the responsibility to local faith-based charities and the NAACP (Associated Press 2005). These community organizations continued to find housing and provide services for evacuees residing in Colorado.

After immediate shelter needs were taken care of, efforts were made in Denver and Colorado Springs to secure permanent and stable housing for the evacuees. Rental assistance through FEMA proved to be unstable and inconsistent. Many evacuees would find housing, receive rental assistance temporarily, and then be denied further assistance. In other cases, evacuees received letters stating that funding would end at the end of the month and then, at the last minute, get a letter saying that assistance would be extended. Case managers often experienced that the fluctuation of assistance greatly impacted the success rate of recovery plans for evacuees. Craig, a mental health provider, explained:

It definitely added to the impact and stress level. Shelter is a basic need. And when basic needs are not met, you can’t go on to address other needs. The fluctuation of on again, off again, definitely created barriers for folks. It added to their stress levels in a negative way and negatively impacted their experience. There is no doubt about that.

Case managers were able to work with a FEMA representative to help clients understand their eligibility for assistance. Unfortunately, one of the most difficult problems they faced was finding the evacuees housing that was comparable to their pre-disaster income levels. Since housing was such an immediate need, many evacuees got
placed in FEMA funded houses that were above their means and much more expensive than what they paid in the Gulf Coast. Gary, a Lutheran Family Services case manager, told the story of a client who was struggling with this issue:

There was a fella I did an intake with a couple of months ago. He was in a two-bedroom apartment, $900 a month. He said, “Once my FEMA rental assistance goes out, there is no was I can pay this.” He could afford something much less. We began looking in safe neighborhoods, but more in the price range he could afford. He said, “I don’t need a two bedroom. It’s just me here. I can go down to a one bedroom.”

Housing was a need that case managers had to repeatedly address as Maria, a relief provider from Colorado Springs, recalled, “It is consistently inconsistent. Housing was a real concern the entire time.” Although this was an obstacle for many evacuees, Tracie, an associate of Gary’s at Lutheran Family Services, pointed out, “Katrina has been the exception to the rule. No disaster before this, or since, has there been rental assistance past three or four months. It has been a huge learning process.”

White (2007) reported that in December 2007, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) assumed FEMA rental assistance payments for Hurricane Katrina evacuees. In March 2008, HUD began implementing a transitional approach to rental assistance with the goal of helping evacuees become more self-sufficient. Payments are based on incremental increases where residents will pay 50 dollars of their rent in March, 100 dollars of their rent in April, and so on until they become responsible for the entire amount. This plan will not fluctuate and promises of prolonged FEMA payments will no longer hinder the recovery of evacuees.

Food

Some evacuees, especially low-income individuals, came to Colorado after enduring great loss, stays in mass shelters, and often a lack of proper nutrition. Due to the
loss, many evacuees did not have money to purchase food for themselves and their families. Thus, an immediate, life-sustaining need was food and water. The Salvation Army provided all of the food at the shelters and recovery centers in both Denver and Colorado Springs. Evacuees were able to get two to three meals a day at these locations, regardless of where they were staying. Food drives were also held to gather donations for evacuees that could be stored and distributed upon arrival.

In addition, some people came to Colorado with food vouchers or food stamp cards. The Red Cross and other agencies were able to provide these vouchers to people on a case-by-case basis in order to make sure everyone was fed. The Colorado Department of Human Services (2005: 2) made food stamps available to all Katrina evacuees residing in Colorado for the first four months following the storm. They were able to apply for this temporary installment through October 30, 2005, after which they would be required to follow normal application procedures to prove eligibility.

Evacuees were also able to access food through local food banks and community churches. There is a national hotline, 2-1-1, which can be dialed to get information on health, human services, and referrals for additional community services. Evacuees could call this number to locate open food banks in their area or they could get this information from their case managers. In fact, Maria described how she would go out of her way to help clients navigate the food bank system, because of the delays families were experiencing getting food stamps. She admitted:

It was bad, but we taught them how to work the food bank system. Because some, you can only go twice a month here, or once a month there. It was because they were having problems with food stamps. They would lose the paperwork or they would do the paperwork and then they would have to go back and tell them every month what they were doing. It was frustrating because the Colorado Department of Human Services would
say, “They should know that,” but then we would sit down with the family and realize how much they are having to deal with. And that was one of the things, the families that were on assistance in Louisiana never had to do that [repeatedly fill out paperwork], I mean you got it and that was it. We always tried to find ways to fill the gaps.

Other means of acquiring food was based on public donation. The El Pomar Foundation was able to gather hundreds of coupons from McDonalds and distribute them to evacuees visiting the recovery center. Many evacuees came early in the morning and had to sit all day in order to fill out paperwork and speak to a disaster relief provider. One volunteer, Angela, remembered how painful it was to watch mothers with hungry children waiting for hours in the recovery center:

You know these parents are coming here at 8:00 in the morning. These children had not had any breakfast because they had to be ready when their ride went to pick them up, and it would just hurt my heart. I probably bought more food for children than I should have, but you just couldn’t do it, you cannot see a child hungry.

This type of experience is what prompted community members and disaster relief providers to solicit major restaurant chains, such as McDonalds, to donate coupons for free food.

Also, many volunteers were amazed at the local donation drop offs from community members. Maria recalled the constant outpouring of community support:

It was kind of cool watching some of the wealthy families. I was in charge of unmet needs… so I would take the donations and these people would back their Suburbans up, and they had gone to Sam’s Club and spent a couple thousand dollars, no big deal. They just started unloading formula and diapers and it was amazing. And the way that the process worked was we would get this from the community and it would go directly into the hands of those that needed it.

This process was regulated in Colorado Springs for the first three months following the storm. After this period, evacuees had to rely on private income, churches, soup kitchens,
food banks, and government assistance to meet the nutritional requirements of their families.

**Transportation**

Although some Hurricane Katrina evacuees arrived in Colorado with their own transportation, many were transported out of the city on buses and planes. In fact, one in six residents of New Orleans did not have access to reliable transportation out of the city (Nigg, Barnshaw, and Torres 2006). Many residents of New Orleans relied on public transportation prior to Katrina and therefore did not own a car or have a valid driver’s license. Many had never even driven a car. Denver, and the west in general, is not known for having efficient public transportation. This proved to be especially difficult for evacuees who had children, were housed in suburbs, or had employment opportunities far from where they were living. Many case managers found that evacuees struggled to keep appointments and access resources due to lack of transportation. Tracie explained why evacuees in Denver found this particularly frustrating:

Transportation has been the hardest. Denver metro public transportation is not the easiest to maneuver. It seems like evacuees live in one area, but all of our offices are located in another…you have to have a car to live here and you didn’t in New Orleans.

Initially, efforts were made in Colorado Springs to provide transportation to evacuees. Churches and volunteers organized transportation to pick people up from their hotels and homes and drive them to recovery centers and public service locations around the city. The NAACP participated in providing transportation for evacuees that were looking for work. Local residents could sign up to adopt a family for a day and help them run errands around the city. This transportation system lasted for approximately six months. At that point, disaster professionals worked on transitioning people into using the
bus system. Daniel, a member of United Way, explained that they made great efforts to help people navigate the city and use public transportation:

We have bus tokens and you’ve got to learn how to use these buses. We had the city bus people come to the Urban League and show people, this is the bus and this is what you do. We have all of these different schedules and this is how you read a schedule. They did it like a seminar.

In Denver and Colorado Springs, bus tokens and vouchers were issued to Hurricane Katrina evacuees on a per need basis. Long before Hurricane Katrina, the working class, poor, women, and children were the most frequent users of buses. The lack of adequate public transportation in the Mountain West may be a direct result of the lack of attention given to the needs of these already disadvantaged groups. Case managers reported that bus schedules did not meet the needs of everyone. David mentioned that for those individuals who found jobs working swing shifts or night shifts, the bus system was useless.

In addition to public transportation, efforts were made to secure vehicles for evacuees. There was private funding and donations of vehicles through community members, churches, and Habitat for Humanity. In Colorado Springs, Robert and other community members put together a car bank and managed to acquire 85 cars for evacuees. The Salvation Army also had additional funds that could be used to purchase vehicles for those in need. However, case managers had to be creative and utilize community networks to make sure that all of their clients had the opportunity to have reliable transportation. In our interview, David explained the process of accessing transportation, “We have set up relationships with several different car lots, both here and in Pueblo, that work with our clients and give. They know how much we can spend and, you know, they give us pretty good cars.” This seemed to be a very common approach to
solving problems. A need would be presented and the case managers would go out in the community and find a solution.

In Denver, a car program was set up through the Colorado Coalition of Faith. They would take requests from evacuees in hopes of connecting them with reliable vehicles. Unfortunately, there were far more requests than cars. James explained the complications associated with finding a car, “The trouble was obviously that there were a lot more requests than there were vehicles available. And something that you have to take a look at is, realistically can you afford to run them?” Donations were sporadic and individuals would still be responsible for obtaining a valid driver’s license, registering and insuring the vehicle, and providing mechanical repair if needed. If evacuees lost their vehicles in the flood and had insurance, case managers were sometimes able to help them get reimbursed through FEMA and purchase new vehicles.

**Employment**

Upon arrival to Colorado, Hurricane Katrina evacuees were typically unemployed⁹ and the poorest evacuees had little to no savings that they could access in order to begin the recovery process. People across social class lines were in desperate need of a steady income that they could rely on to provide for themselves and their families. As an immediate need and life-sustaining resource, employment became a top concern for many disaster relief professionals.

In Denver and Colorado Springs, employment specialists were made available to evacuees at the shelters and recovery centers. Lutheran Family Services was able to provide employment specialists that could be accessed by any of the case managers

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⁹ Some who worked for large corporations, such as Wal-Mart, were able to transfer employment. However, this was the exception rather than the rule.
working under the Katrina Aid Today grant. These specialists would help evacuees write
resumes, navigate the workforce system, provide job skills training, and prepare for
interviews. Jessica from the Red Cross explained why this service was so important:

It’s huge, you can’t get back on your feet if you don’t have a source of
income to do that. And quite honestly a lot of the individuals that we were
seeing had a lot of employment challenges where they came from. So
getting them trained on some basic skills, job interview skills and that kind
of stuff was pretty key.

In fact, Maria recalled that an initial survey given out to evacuees in Colorado Springs
found, “72 percent of evacuees had no skills and were unemployed or underemployed
prior to Katrina.” This made finding good paying, permanent employment quite difficult.

In addition to employment specialists and workforce centers, evacuees were able
to locate jobs through an employment website that was created specifically for Katrina
evacuees. Community members were able to post their job openings and connect with
evacuees. Initially, communities embraced the evacuees and were willing to offer them
jobs. Robert remembers, “If you said you were from New Orleans, people would line up,
“what can I do?” But it didn’t last too long and I don’t think that many of them got great
jobs and a new start in life.”

Case managers also experienced that cultural differences hindered employment
opportunities. Appropriate dress for job interviews was far different in Colorado than in
New Orleans. For instance, Tracie pointed out, “So, having gold teeth is fine in New
Orleans, here not so much. No one wants you representing their company. Several of us
have come across that.” Also, the types of employment offered in Colorado were not ones
in which most evacuees were accustomed. A case manager at Lutheran Family Services
had a client tell him, “Look, I can make more money than you make right now by selling
food out of the back of my car. I could make some really good money.” The case manager elaborated:

You cannot sell food out of the back of your car here in Colorado, not without a lot of hoops and licenses and permits. We could find jobs for them, but we couldn’t find ones that paid what they were accustomed to. It could be pretty seasonal work and they could move on and find something else, it is pretty flexible down there. That is not the case up here. Those were tough resources. Getting jobs that met their needs.

The evacuees who did have professional employment prior to Katrina quickly realized that their state licenses were not transferable. There were many teachers, nurses, postal workers, police officers, and salon professionals who also had difficulty finding adequate employment once relocated to Colorado.

**Childcare and Schooling**

Families arriving in Colorado had to stand in long lines and sit in waiting rooms for hours in order to access resources. Numerous hours were spent filling out paperwork, looking for housing, and accessing life-sustaining resources. Parents, and especially single mothers, had the added task of watching over their children through this entire process. Many volunteers and disaster relief providers realized that this process created added stress to the already traumatic experience these families were having. Angela pointed out:

I think that was the hardest thing. They would bring the children into the center and the children would be crying, noses running, they would be dirty, and then they had to go to this big room downstairs. They had nobody to watch their children. They had to hang on to all of their children while they were trying to find clothing and sizes and all these things.

It quickly became obvious that free childcare needed to be provided in order to allow parents the opportunity to complete the required steps to secure vital resources for their families.
Denver and Colorado Springs were both able to provide temporary childcare during the early stages of the evacuation for parents who were coming into the shelters and recovery centers to fill out paperwork. In Denver, the Church of the Brethren Children’s Disaster Services program provided free childcare for evacuees at Lowry. In Colorado Springs, the Urban League and local churches were able to step in and provide minimal childcare for evacuees that still needed it after the recovery center closed its doors. None of the case managers I interviewed were aware of any additional, longer-term childcare services that were available specifically for evacuees. Angela was sure that childcare was a resource that was not made available to these parents. She recalled, “As far as daycare so these women could get their minds straightened out or get jobs or whatever, we had none of that. That was on them.” However, case managers did encourage parents to apply for the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP), which offers a sliding-scale fee for daycare in order to support efforts towards self-sufficiency for low-income families that are working or searching for employment (Colorado Department of Human Services 2006).

Many evacuees were accustomed to relying on family members for support and cooperative childcare. Families were often split up during evacuation and displaced to different states. They no longer had the luxury of having close friends and family nearby to help with the children. This greatly impacted their ability to find employment and begin the recovery process. Tracie found this experience to be especially difficult for single mothers. She explained, “Childcare is the biggest thing. They are used to their mom or grandma watching their kids. Not having that is the biggest downfall, not being around family. You can’t go to work and leave your kids at home.” Although some
evacuees tried to form new social networks to compensate for this loss, many of them did not see employment in Colorado as feasible. Maria remembered:

What I saw most often was that mothers did not want to work. Many of them hadn’t put their kids in daycare before, “and so you’re telling me I have to go work and let go of my kids?” I did notice a few times that they made connections with other evacuees that would watch the kids. In one instance we did have two mothers that moved in together and helped each other out.

Many case managers found childcare to be one of the most difficult resources to provide during the immediate and long-term stages of recovery.

In addition to childcare, many parents needed to enroll their children in public schools. The storm occurred at the beginning of a new academic year and upon arrival many children had already missed a significant amount of class time. Representatives from local school districts came to the shelters and recovery centers in Denver and Colorado Springs. They were there to help parents coordinate school districts with housing, fill out paperwork, and get children enrolled as quickly as possible.

There was a mixed response to the changes that students experienced attending school in Colorado. In some cases, schools were able to provide better quality education, a support system for the children, and additional support and resources for the parents. In other cases, children found the schools to be more stressful and too challenging academically. Craig, a mental health provider, explained that integrating into Colorado schools was quite a culture shock for parents and students. He said:

It was some of both. Some expressed, “Oh my goodness, my kids will finally start to get a good education and start having some opportunities.” And others said, “This is too much of a shock and it’s just too much of a stress to the kids as they try to adjust. They are a year, year and a half, two years behind.” That was a double-edged sword.
Although having children in school during the day provided relief to parents in the form of childcare, it also had a large impact on their decision-making. At first, housing was unstable and many parents found themselves struggling to keep children in the same schools as they searched for more affordable living arrangements. Some case managers reported that parents were also more reluctant to move home because they felt they needed to create a stable environment for their children. They did not have the luxury of putting their own desires first, even if it meant staying in a state without family and friends to rely on for support.

**Health Care**

Incoming evacuees had a variety of physical and mental conditions that needed to be immediately addressed in order to successfully access and utilize the resources being offered. Denver and Colorado Springs health care professionals worked closely with the United States Department of Health and Human Services in order to provide health care to Hurricane Katrina evacuees.

**Physical health.** Many of the poorest people evacuating the Gulf Coast had spent some time in extremely unsanitary conditions. Some people had to wade through contaminated floodwaters with dead bodies while others were trapped for days in overcrowded shelters. Evacuees arrived to Colorado without their medications, dentures, eyeglasses, and other medical equipment. It was essential that Colorado provide immediate medical care to incoming evacuees. For example, Angela recalled the deteriorating medical conditions of evacuees that needed immediate attention upon arrival:

We had several ladies and they had asthma and were on oxygen and different things were going wrong with them. They couldn’t get glasses,
their glasses were broken and their dentures were gone. I mean all of the things that we take for granted, those people could not get.

The federal government granted waivers to host states in order to allow five months of free Medicaid to Hurricane Katrina evacuees (United States Department of Health and Human Services 2005). This allowed health care providers the opportunity to provide immediate health care without concern of non-payment.

In Denver and Colorado Springs, medical professionals set up clinics at the shelters and recovery centers to provide services. They would keep track of all incoming evacuees and their medical symptoms. In addition, free health care was offered through some participating hospitals, health clinics, and private practices. Free prescriptions were available for evacuees on Medicaid. If there was a fee for prescription, evacuees could call 2-1-1 and receive financial assistance for health care needs.10 Dental services were also offered in Denver through the Metro Caring Provider Network (MCPN).

**Mental Health.** Hurricane Katrina was one of the largest disasters ever to occur in the United States. People were stranded in their houses and on their rooftops for days awaiting rescue. Families were separated and displaced far away from one another with no means of communication. Many people, almost all African-American, spent time in dangerous, overcrowded shelters with no access to information regarding their future. These traumatic events resulted in a widespread need for counseling and mental health evaluations. Case managers agreed that mental health was the largest determining factor of successful recovery for evacuees relocated to Colorado.

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10 2-1-1 is a nationwide hotline that connects the needs of community members to local organizations that can provide services. Although there were some services offered specifically for Katrina evacuees, financial assistance for prescriptions is available to all qualifying community members.
Upon arrival, evacuees had not had a chance to debrief and begin to deal with their loss. Families were concerned about having their basic needs met, first and foremost. Once those needs were met they were able to begin the grieving process. Jessica, a representative of the American Red Cross, explained that in many cases evacuees just needed someone to listen:

Our cases probably took twice as long as a normal disaster case, but these people, by the time they reached us, they have been displaced, maybe stayed in the Superdome, separated from their families, and then made this long journey to Colorado. A lot of what they needed was to be able to talk about it. So that was a resource that we were able to provide and it was very helpful just to have someone to talk to. You know they didn’t want advice or anything like that. They just wanted somebody to hear their story.

In both cities the intake process resembled a triage of services. Mental health providers would set up at the shelter and recovery centers, hand out information about trauma, stress, self-care, and children’s responses to trauma and disaster. They would partner with other resource providers to address the many needs of evacuees all at once. Jeff, a case manager from Lutheran Family Services, explained the communication between the case managers and mental health professionals:

The counselors and us were located in the same building, so there was a triage thing that we did. They were able to come in and the first people they would see were the counselors. They would assess if it was post-traumatic stress, they would assess if they were doing okay, and then they would dispatch them back to case management. If there was a mental health issue, if there was post-traumatic stress then that would be a barrier to case management.
The lead mental health provider in Denver found that post-traumatic stress was not the most serious issue. He explained that the loss of social networks and extreme poverty impacted the evacuees most:

Really addressing issues of loss and grief were the primary concern, then addressing issues around anxiety and depression. Some post traumatic stress, but really not major by any means; fifth or sixth on the list… Not seeing specifically mental illness, directly being caused by the event… For those that are the lowest level socioeconomically and have had a previous history of trauma, that’s who is impacted the most negatively.

Counseling was also provided through the Katrina Relief Team, the Healthy Eating, Active Living (HEAL) grant, and the American Red Cross. Representatives would go to the homes of evacuees for short-term psychiatric care. All mental health services offered at the shelters and recovery centers were free and services through the public mental health system remained free through August 2007. After this point, evacuees were considered residents of Colorado and subsequently became responsible for finding funding for these services on their own. Craig noted, “They will have to fit in the system like everyone else. If they are economically disadvantaged they will have to apply for Medicare/Medicaid or they will have to pay for it on their own.”

Due to stigma associated with mental health care, many case managers found that, even with multiple referrals, it was difficult to convince evacuees that they needed to get a mental health evaluation. David and Pamela indicated that the majority of people who still needed assistance two years after the storm were suffering from a variety of mental illnesses and needed serious professional help. They could help them access these resources, however, they could not force them to get the help they needed.
**Additional Resources**

In addition to meeting the basic necessities of shelter, housing, food, transportation, employment, childcare, schooling, and health care, many disaster relief professionals realized that there was a variety of unique needs that each individual evacuee presented. In order to address these needs, case managers would often build relationships with local business and community organizations. Pamela commented on these relationships, explaining how community members came together to help out:

I really have to give kudos, not only to other agencies in town, but also to the businesses in this town. A lot of them have really stepped up to the plate. We are providing the funding for it, its not like they are doing it for free, but we are getting good discounts, we are getting reliable vehicles, and sometimes if there is an appliance or something needed. Just anytime I have approached a business, “this is what we need, this is what we have, this is what we can afford to do,” they have been very cooperative in helping us and have been very happy to do what they can.

Wal-Mart, the Salvation Army, and the Goodwill were able to come together and provide vouchers for clothing and household items. The American Furniture Warehouse, a large furniture chain in Colorado, partnered with FEMA to furnish the apartments and homes of evacuees. This collaborative effort helped to provide a variety of additional resources to evacuees.

The physical and material needs of the clients were met through accessing FEMA, Red Cross, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Food Stamps, Medicaid, or community organizations such as local churches that were donating goods to Katrina evacuees. In addition, there were many local grants that were issued to address specific needs. For instance, case managers could apply for money through the Road Home program or through the Unmet Needs Committee, which was a grant issued by the Colorado Trust for $70,000. Case managers would have to present their clients case to
receive money for any unmet needs such as schooling, car repair, utility bills, one months rent, or money for traveling back to New Orleans. However, many of these grants were offered sporadically and were quickly depleted. For instance, a Lutheran Family Services case manager explained the uncertainty of the process:

We, as case managers, have trouble keeping up with what is going on. We hear about programs and it’s almost like “don’t worry about it, it’s going to be done in a week.” There is no point in even spending the time learning about it.

The case managers, in all three agencies, had to communicate effectively with one another in order to find community resources and avoid a duplication of services.

There was also a great need for information and social support services. Many individuals were flown and bused into the state, not knowing where they were or what would happen next. These people needed to talk to someone, tell their story, and access information. Even after shelters closed their doors, case managers often served as a source of emotional support. Many people just wanted to connect with someone who understood their experience. This led to potlucks and get-togethers, organized by case managers, where evacuees could connect with other evacuees and begin to form a community. Unfortunately, these gatherings were limited, hard to organize, and often unsuccessful due to a lack of transportation, difficulty contacting evacuees, and timing of the events.

Another commonly requested resource was money for airline tickets. In Colorado Springs, Robert and his crew raised tens of thousands of frequent flyer miles to connect stranded family members all over the country. They would wire people money to get to the airport, feed their families, and help them to stay in hotels. They noticed that many people had never left New Orleans and were terrified of getting on a plane. They would
fly a volunteer or a family member down to sit with them and comfort them during the flight. They would also pay for transportation so evacuees could pick up family members from other states. Robert explained that for many people who were displaced from their families, reconnecting was a top priority:

There was a woman who was in her fourth FEMA trailer. She was in this camp in Florida; it was like Lord of the Flies. Her mother was up here. “You gotta get my daughter out of there.” She couldn’t drive more than an hour herself because she had been exposed to all of these molds and mildews. She had two young kids. So one of my helpers here, we flew her down. She went down and drove them back with Hurricane Rita on their tail. I would spend thousands of dollars buying airline flights.

This was just the beginning of the efforts that were made to reconnect families across the country. With the support of volunteers, community members, private donations, and local organizations, Colorado Springs evacuees were financially assisted with airline tickets, bus tickets, online services, and telephone communication to connect with displaced family members.

In addition, one of the African-American churches in Colorado Springs provided buses to transport people back to Louisiana. Angela, a local volunteer remembered, “They paid for their hotel and paid for everything, so that they would be able to stay and get some kind of closure down there and see what they had left.” Local churches also participated in distributing donations, providing food, donating Christmas gifts and Thanksgiving dinners, and offering a community of emotional support.

In general, one of the hardest needs to meet was identification. Many individuals lost all of their identification in the disaster and needed a birth certificate to access the available resources. The process of acquiring a birth certificate could sometimes take up to 6 months. Metro Caring Provider Network developed a system where they would pay
the $45 fee for expedited processing in order to reduce the wait time for birth certificates. The state was lenient for the first few months, allowing people to receive public assistance with no identification.

In addition to local organizations and agencies, community members played a significant role in distributing goods and services to Hurricane Katrina evacuees. There was an outpouring of volunteer time and donations of housing, cash, clothing, furniture, hygiene supplies, and many other life-sustaining resources. Without this community support, relief efforts would not have reached as many evacuees.

CHALLENGES

Colorado Springs and Denver were successful in providing many necessary resources to the survivors of Hurricane Katrina. However, many relief professionals were concerned with the amount of challenges they faced during this process. In this section, I detail the major challenges experienced by case managers and disaster relief providers: bureaucracy, communication, cultural differences, locating evacuees, and illegal activity. Below, I explain the immediate concerns and provide examples of these challenges.

Bureaucracy

Colorado disaster relief professionals encountered many challenges while trying to connect resources to evacuees in need. The disorganization and bureaucratic control at the former Lowry Air Force base slowed and possibly prevented evacuees from receiving what they needed. Daniel, a member of the Colorado Coalition of Faith, explained how he got involved as an advocate for recovery. His services were requested to help clean up the barracks and get them ready for incoming evacuees. He recounted a story about a
woman he met in the dormitory. This was the first time he realized that there would be major challenges in helping the incoming evacuees:

It was so perplexing that she couldn’t get a change of clothes. They allowed her to shower, get something to eat, but then she had to put the clothes on that she had on before. I thought that was kind of ridiculous. So, as a pastor, you know, we just started saying, “Okay, now who is in charge of giving out clothes?” That led to a series of meetings to create some kind of advocacy for that one single woman. We found out others were having some similar difficulties of actually connecting with resources that were right there on campus, So, that’s how I got involved.

He and other pastors in the Colorado Coalition of Faith worked to identify the needs of evacuees and remove barriers between donations and needy families.

Daniel was also concerned with the way individuals were being treated. Evacuees were expected to be grateful for the resources being provided, even if those resources did not meet their needs. He explained that the mindset of many bureaucratic organizations was, “I know you’re a size ten, but I bought a size two. Just put it on and make it work.” Individuals and organizations were donating loads of clothes, but unfortunately there were not many clothes made available for larger people.

There were also bureaucratic controls that hindered people’s ability to donate to needy families. Many times, donations would come in that were not authorized or professionally contracted. These donations would be turned away and denied instead of being delivered to the appropriate individuals. One volunteer expressed his frustration with not being able connect people to resources that were sitting and waiting to be utilized:

I personally know people who physically had truckloads on hold. In some cases they were brought up there and were turned away because it didn’t come through their central distribution process, you know, where the state brought the stuff. We had coats and blankets, all of those kinds of things
that were not purchased by the state. They didn’t have an inventory for all of that. Other private citizens and citizen groups had them and they wouldn’t let them in.

In addition, when evacuees received gift cards and Salvation Army vouchers for clothing, it was still warm outside. Many found themselves in shorts and flip-flops as the weather became increasingly colder. This created another round of need for winter clothes. Many people had never experienced snow and did not know how to dress themselves and their children properly for Colorado climate.

Another challenge commonly faced by case managers was getting evacuees proper mental health care. In order to successfully complete a recovery plan, individuals first needed to be emotionally stable and deal with the series of traumatic events they had just experienced. Although there were free mental health services offered at Lowry and other recovery centers, once they closed their doors it became increasingly difficult for evacuees to receive the mental health services they needed. Case managers reported that, even with proper referrals, evacuees were reluctant to get diagnosed and rarely followed through with treatment. The ones that did follow through found the mental health system to be frustrating and difficult to access. For example, one case manager explained how the bureaucratic network of funding for mental health in Denver greatly affected his ability to get clients the proper treatment:

You follow the money. So if you are schizophrenic in Denver, you actually have more resources than if you were morbidly depressed and not psychotic... Aurora mental health would say, "We do these special things and we do these special things." No, I am working with a client who is depressed because her life sucks. She is overwhelmed by her kids. She wants basic mental health counseling. She is not psychotic, but her functioning is significantly affected by her emotional and psychological state. Aurora would just dump her into some group that half the time wouldn’t meet and "we do a great job with people who are victims of
domestic violence.” Well, no, my client doesn’t need a domestic violence group.

The lack of adequate mental health treatment continually decreased the ability of evacuees to successfully follow a recovery plan and access the help that was being offered to them. Unfortunately, it is the poor, women, and minorities who are structurally neglected and often excluded by health care systems, making it difficult for these individuals to access proper mental and physical health care after displacement.

Colorado Springs disaster relief professionals also encountered challenges while trying to provide for Hurricane Katrina evacuees. There were many problems with the larger network of bureaucracy. Robert experienced many instances where this impeded his ability to help those in need. He explained:

It was just amazing. I would get on the phone with Western Union and there was a woman whose kids hadn’t eaten for over three days. We had money for her to get a cab and fly to Colorado Springs to be with her family. I paid the hotel, but I couldn’t get Western Union to release cash to her to feed her kids because her driver’s license had expired like five days earlier. They just said, “We can’t.” I was on the phone with them for hours, supervisors and directors. I was like, “Give her the money so she can feed her kids.”

Similarly, there were bureaucratic problems with agencies operating in Colorado Springs and Denver. One volunteer explained problems that were occurring with their local American Red Cross chapter:

The Red Cross, as much as they were helpful, there were things that they just weren’t doing well. One of them was that they would put people in hotel rooms and motel rooms way over on the other side of town and they couldn’t get to the recovery center. They would put mothers in motel rooms with no microwave to warm the baby bottle. We were just constantly solving problems because the Red Cross was just not thinking it through. Luckily we were here as a kind of safety net for them.

Operating under extreme conditions, with many people in need, and many organizational barriers to overcome was difficult for both the evacuees and relief providers.
Another challenge was finding people beds. FEMA joined with Furniture Row to provide people with specific furniture sets out of a catalog. Unfortunately, these were living room and dining room sets and did not include beds. In addition, local communities were not able to give vouchers for or give away used beds because they are not safe. The Goodwill and Salvation Army do not sell them unless they are completely refurbished. Robert explained his attempt to resolve this issue:

We actually spent a huge amount of money on air mattresses. We must have bought at least three to four hundred air mattresses and we were just giving them out. You wouldn’t think that there was a real shortage of beds to give to them. Couldn’t we get FEMA to say that they needed beds? Big, families, big people?

Air mattresses served as a temporary solution to an ongoing, long-term problem.

Finally, Robert gave an example of areas where bureaucratic challenges were overcome. He commended the fire department for acting on immediate needs and not allowing organizational control to limit their abilities to help:

The fire department was a great model. They are such doers. They are very proactive. There’s no bureaucracy. They just go out and save lives. By putting them in charge of the recovery center, we had the Red Cross in charge for about three days and everybody said, “No, that’s not working,” Red Cross was just too bureaucratic and weren’t able to handle it. It was the firefighters, the 640 leases that we signed. We got vouchers to furnish every room of every apartment, every house. The fire department moved all of the furniture.

It was through these community efforts and improvisation, that many bureaucratic challenges were overcome.

**Communication**

Another challenge that disaster relief providers faced was the inability to effectively communicate the processes involved with accessing resources. There were many evacuees who were not able to navigate the disaster relief system effectively. New
Orleans was a family-based community where the elderly and indigent would often have their daily needs taken care of by family and other community members. There was a significant amount of people who were illiterate or experienced major language barriers. Angela told the story of an illiterate man who did not understand how to use the food stamp card he was given and therefore spent days not having a healthy meal. She recalled:

I had this one man, maybe he was 65. He came here, the man could not read or write or understand how to use the food stamp card. There, I guess the community takes care of their own. One day I took him to Red Cross and pulled up on their computer that he had gotten these cards. So, I said, “Do you have a card?” And he said, “Ma’am this is all I got,” and he opened his billfold and there was this card that he could have been eating off of the whole time, but he didn’t know. How many people are lost, not only the ones who died, but how many people are lost because they couldn’t read or write or understand what was going on?

This inspired Angela to organize private tutors and literacy training for individuals, but because of a lack of transportation and understanding, fewer than ten people participated. Disaster relief providers were not prepared for the amount of communication barriers that they would face when working with Gulf Coast evacuees.

Another challenge with the larger, national network of communication was identification. For instance, in New Orleans there were two types of birth certificates that people could use. There was a small, wallet size birth certificate or a larger, traditional one. People who fled rarely took the larger copy with them because they assumed the smaller version would be accepted, as it was in New Orleans. In addition, when people were ordering a replacement for lost birth certificates, they usually opted for the smaller, less expensive version. They waited for weeks, sometimes months, just to find out that they needed the other, larger copy. Communication was lacking and many obstacles could have been avoided had these issues been thought out.
Cultural Differences

Another challenge that case managers and volunteers faced when attempting to provide resources was a cultural difference in language, food, housing, and family dynamic. Connecting large, New Orleans based families that were displaced around the country became increasingly important to evacuees living in Colorado. In addition, when housing representatives were trying to connect families with permanent homes, they found that many large families did not want to be split up into separate living spaces. Andrew, with the Colorado Coalition of Faith, remembered how one large family struggled to stay together:

They are a very family oriented culture and we are not talking about one mother and one father. We are talking about grandma, uncle, you know? We had one case where there were 24 family members in one family. Now all 24 of these family members wanted to be in the same house. I said, “No way are we gonna put 24 people in one house!” So, we got housing for six or eight and they said, “we can not take that, we will not take that.”

Unfortunately, this living arrangement would decrease their eligibility for assistance. Under FEMA, rental assistance is only paid per household and therefore does not allow multiple family members to access the same resources if they are all living together. Some families suffered because more than one family member would apply for rental assistance under the same address. This caused FEMA to believe they were being fraudulent, resulting in the termination of rental assistance as well as the request for repayment of any monies had been received. This was most common among adult children living with parents.

In addition, the food that was being provided at Lowry was an issue. The evacuees were not accustomed to eating this type of food and little sensitivity was given to the issue. Furthermore, many of the areas hardest hit by Hurricane Katrina were also
those with the highest levels of poverty. This resulted in the dislocation of many people who were illiterate, had extreme language barriers, or lacked a professional appearance that made it difficult to find employment in Colorado. Many of these people did not have social networks to rely on outside of New Orleans and therefore desperately needed personal attention when applying for and accessing resources. Many relief providers did not have the time to provide the type of personal attention needed to overcome these extreme communication barriers.

**Finding Evacuees**

Locating evacuees was one of the greatest barriers to providing resources. Originally, if individuals registered with FEMA or the American Red Cross, case managers could access these lists and gather addresses and phone numbers. Unfortunately, many people were living in extreme, low-income conditions, were not able to keep a consistent phone number, and had to move multiple times. Over the long-term, it became increasingly difficult to reach out to those in need. Organizations had to find creative ways to contact evacuees and advertise services. Craig, a member of Colorado Department of Human Services, explained the strategies they used to find evacuees:

This is such a mobile group that you could have a good address one day and it was bad the next. We did mass mailings to these folks. We went door to door. We asked for referrals. That was an active process for about twelve more weeks [after Lowry closed its doors].

If a person self-evacuated, they may not have been aware of the services at Lowry and therefore had to rely on “word of mouth” and the media to find out about available resources. The Hurricane Assistance Network of Denver (HAND) hotline was created to expedite this process, connecting evacuees with community resources. The
representatives interviewed in this study asserted that they did everything they could to get in touch with those in need.

**Illegal Activity**

Lastly, many disaster relief professionals encountered people that were trying to take advantage of the disorganization and influx of resources. Some local citizens would pose as evacuees in an attempt to acquire goods. Other times, case managers would experience evacuees who would try and gain as much as possible, duplicating resources far beyond their immediate needs. It was difficult for cities to reliably track a person’s connection to the disaster zones. It was also challenging to track the resources individuals and families had already received. This was largely due to the wide-scale loss of identification and paperwork among evacuees.

Illegal activity and the misuse of resources was an issue in both Denver and Colorado Springs. Uniquely, resource providers in Colorado Springs viewed this behavior with understanding instead of blame. For example, Maria told a story about a single mother who would come in everyday and demand resources. She would even send her kids in and she seemed to feel entitled to all of the material items that were being provided to evacuees. Maria stated:

I try not to judge, she was doing that because that was what her survival instinct told her to do. And I had seen that in people when you go through that kind of trauma and because she had come from this kind of background that she had this social conditioning that you did go out and hustle and make it happen and then she was under duress and the trauma hit and all of these compounded issues. If she could control her outcome by saying that “I will have this and you will do it for me” at least she could go home and have what she needed. So, I tried to follow her emotion.
These perceptions had a direct impact on the experiences of evacuees. Many disaster victims were aware of the media reports of increased crime rates in Houston and Dallas and the fraudulent behavior noted by FEMA. Evacuees commonly felt that people would automatically assume they were trying to rip off the system if they said they were from New Orleans.

Although illegal activity was widely reported and televised, the actual incidents were minimal compared to the number of people in need. In fact, only four residents in Colorado were convicted with Katrina related fraud (Department of Justice 2006). Many relief providers realized that it was unproductive to control resources in order to protect from illegal behavior. For example, Robert explained that most people were very appreciative of the help being offered:

We had people that were scammers and we felt bad that somebody’s money went to somebody that maybe didn’t deserve it. But you have to live with that. We were helping 99 people and then there was the scammer. People were very appreciative and not used to taking things. In a lot of cases you had to talk them into taking it. “Well, I don’t want to trouble you.” “You’re not troubling me, you haven’t slept in three nights, haven’t taken a bath, here is the money, go do that.”

It made a significant difference that the people in charge of the majority of resources in Colorado Springs were the community members. There were not as many barriers to getting people material resources. There was a level of humanity exhibited in all of the interviews I had with Colorado Springs resource providers. They were not operating under strict protocol and were often able to say, “You have a need, here is the cash get what you need.”
CHAPTER V

DISPLACED SINGLE MOTHERS IN COLORADO

The study of women and children in times of disaster is gaining much needed attention; however, there has been no research that addresses the specific needs of single mothers after displacement. Over half of the households in the city of New Orleans were female-headed prior to Hurricane Katrina (Gault, Hartmann, Jones-DeWeever, Weshckul, and Williams 2005). These women were more likely to live in poverty, hold low-paying jobs, and be single parents (Gault et al. 2005). Specifically, 25.9 percent of all women and two out of every five single mothers in New Orleans lived below the poverty line before Hurricane Katrina (Gault et al. 2005). Of the victims displaced by Hurricane Katrina, single mothers were the least likely to return due to family displacement, economic instability, lack of transportation, and childcare responsibilities (Williams, Sorokina, Jones-DeWeever, and Hartmann 2006). This finding warrants an in-depth evaluation of the experiences of single mothers post Hurricane Katrina.

In everyday life, single mothers tend to have greater responsibilities than two parent families and single adults without children. In times of disaster, and particularly after displacement, these responsibilities are magnified creating immediate and long-term needs that are specific to single-mother-headed-families. Although many general
resources were offered to evacuees in Colorado, there was no attention given to the needs
of single-parent-families. This chapter details the experiences of eight single mothers,
drawing from in-depth, qualitative interviews two years after Hurricane Katrina.
Specifically, I begin by providing background information for all of the mothers in this
study. Next, I address the immediate and long-term needs of single mothers after
displacement and the challenges that they faced in the pursuit of life-sustaining resources.

BACKGROUND

The eight single mothers in this study moved to Colorado after experiencing great loss. Each mother had unique experiences and specific needs upon relocation. The personal stories of these women speak to the many struggles that women and children faced while trying to rebuild their lives after displacement. In this section, I introduce the personal experiences of eight mothers that I interviewed.

Denise is an African-American woman who has one teenage son and lives with her mother in Colorado Springs, Colorado. She is disabled and suffers from diabetes and asthma. Prior to Hurricane Katrina she lived in New Orleans, Louisiana and subsisted below the poverty line, living off of disability benefits and government assistance. Once relocated to Colorado, she was able to resume those benefits and had no plans to find employment due to her disabilities.

Christina is a 22-year-old Latino woman who was eight months pregnant at the time of the interview. She also had two children under the age of five. Her son had Cerebral Palsy and required frequent therapy. She lived with her mother, stepfather, and sisters in Saint Bernard Parish in New Orleans, Louisiana before Hurricane Katrina. She now lives alone with her children in Fort Collins, Colorado. Prior to the storm, Christina
relied on government assistance for her family. She was not working at the time of the interview, but was hoping to go back to school when she turned 23.

Ruth is a 47-year-old, African-American mother and grandmother living in Pueblo, Colorado. She is solely responsible for the care of her two youngest teenage children, ages 10 and 16, and her 2, 3, and 5 year old grandchildren. Before the storm, Ruth lived in Orleans Parish in New Orleans, Louisiana with her two children. She worked for the same business for seven years and did not rely on government assistance. After moving to Colorado, she went back to school and became a Certified Nursing Assistant. At the time of the interview, she was still struggling to pay her bills.

Kathryn is a Caucasian woman who has one teenage daughter. She lived in Lake Charles, Louisiana and evacuated before Hurricane Rita destroyed her home. She now lives with her daughter in Denver, Colorado. After arriving to Colorado she was diagnosed with Lymphoma Cancer and was still on medical leave at the time of the interview. Before the storm, Kathryn received a degree in drafting and was working for an architect. She was excited to start a new career after struggling to get through college as a single mother. She hopes to find a comparable job in Colorado when her health improves.

Tabatha is a 37-year-old, African-American mother of three. Her children were 18, 16, and 2 at the time of the interview. She evacuated from New Orleans, Louisiana and now lives in Lafayette, Colorado with her children and her mother who is in poor health. Prior to Hurricane Katrina she lived in close proximity to a large extended family that she relied on for support. She had the same job for 13 years and rarely needed to access government assistance. After the storm, she fell through the floor of her mothers’
house and shattered her arm and leg. It took her a year to recover from the injury. At the
time of the interview, she was having a hard time finding stable employment.

Natalia is an African-American mother of two. She and her two daughters
evacuated to Denver, Colorado after Hurricane Katrina. Her oldest daughter recently
went back to New Orleans to attend college. Prior to Hurricane Katrina she and her
children lived in New Orleans, Louisiana. She now lives with her boyfriend, whom she
met after moving to Colorado, and youngest daughter in Denver. Natalia worked two jobs
before the storm and never had to rely on government assistance to get by. She has found
stable employment in Colorado.

Veronica is a Caucasian woman with two young boys. Before the hurricane, she
lived on the south side of Lake Pontchartrain in New Orleans, Louisiana. After losing
everything in the storm, she moved herself and her boys to Denver, Colorado. Back in
New Orleans she had a good job as a medical transcriber and worked hard to stay off of
welfare. She eventually found comparable work in Denver, but was still struggling to
rebuild her life.

Suzanne is a Cuban mother of one. She and her 13-year-old son moved to Denver,
Colorado from New Orleans, Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. The night before the
storm, Suzanne took her motorcycle out for one last ride before evacuating. She got in a
terrible accident and was in the hospital while her son was home alone awaiting the
storm. She ended up leaving the hospital, broken and bruised, to make sure they were
able to get out of the city in time. After staying in hotels throughout Louisiana and
Alabama, Suzanne finally accepted an offer from a man she was dating to come and live
with him in Colorado. Weeks after arrival, he was diagnosed with cancer and passed
away shortly thereafter. She was completely self-sufficient, working as an editor and bartender in New Orleans. After relocation, she had a hard time finding comparable employment and was struggling to make it on one job alone.

NEEDS OF SINGLE-MOTHER FAMILIES

From the moment they heard the mandatory evacuation warning, single mothers were solely responsible for taking control and removing their children from the potential danger that lay ahead. Immediate life-changing decisions needed to be made. Single mothers needed to gather their children and personal items, decide where they would be going, organize finances to fund the evacuation, and access reliable transportation to take them out of the city. This was the beginning of a string of events that would place single mothers in an extremely vulnerable and precarious situation in the years following Hurricane Katrina.

All of the women in this study decided to avoid mass shelters, even if they had no place else to go, in order to keep their children safe from harm. Natalia, an African-American mother, explained how she and her two children managed to stay safe while traveling from place to place:

I slept in my truck because I didn’t want to go into the shelters with those types of people: the dogs, handicapped, homeless, pedophiles, you know? And then I would be in jail [for bringing children into harms way]. So, we all just slept in the truck.

Other mothers stayed in hotels for days before they realized they would not be able to return home. Before assistance was made available, many women were paying for hotel stays out-of-pocket. They quickly had to decide on a more permanent destination, before they exhausted the modest funds on which they relied. For example, Christine, a pregnant mother of two remembered:
We left for the evacuation and we went to Texas. Then we saw the news that we were not allowed back home… We were paying $80 a night for our hotel and we had already been there a week. We didn’t know what we were going to do. My aunt lives in Severance [Colorado] up here. She was the only family that we had out of town.

After evacuating from Hurricane Katrina, many families moved from state to state looking for a place to call home. Single mothers had the challenge of facing these multiple dislocations on their own. As the sole providers for their children, these mothers were responsible for keeping their children fed, making sure they had a place to sleep, and keeping them safe from harm. They also had to put their own emotions aside in order to comfort and care for their children.

These women came to Colorado for any of the following reasons: they had relatives that lived in the state, they found housing on the Internet, or they thought Colorado would be a nice place to rebuild their lives. All of the women in this study self-evacuated to Colorado and were in need of immediate life-sustaining resources upon relocation. The needs of single mothers included: stable housing, food, childcare, employment, health care, and social networks. Although these are resources that are needed by all disaster victims, these needs are magnified for single mothers after a disaster.

The pursuit of resources in Colorado was time consuming and difficult. At the time of the interviews, many women were barely making enough money to survive. Two years after Hurricane Katrina there were still many needs that were unmet. Each mother had a unique set of circumstances and abilities that impacted access resources after relocation to Colorado. The next section will address the immediate and long-term needs
of my sample of mothers and explore the challenges that these women faced in their pursuit of vital resources.

**Housing Stability**

After evacuating from the storm, the women and children in this study needed housing immediately. Many of them stayed in hotels or with relatives in the Gulf Coast before deciding to come to Colorado. All of the women arranged to have temporary housing in Colorado before making the trip across country with their children. Five women had relatives that lived in the state, two found housing through Internet searches, and one was offered housing through Posada.\(^\text{11}\)

Many of the women quickly recognized that staying with relatives, even for a short period of time, was not a reliable option. Natalia, Suzanne, and Tabatha all realized that the friends and family they chose to stay with were not able to provide adequate support for their recovery. A major issue with displacement of the economically disenfranchised is that the social capital they rely on through networks of friends and family often does not translate into material resources after disaster (Barnshaw and Trainor 2007).

It is common for single mothers to cohabitate with other adults in order to afford stable housing for their children. For example, Suzanne, a Cuban mother of one, invited friends from New Orleans to come and stay with her in hopes of creating a communal living situation. She struggled to establish a strong social network in Colorado:

> When you have a bigger family dynamic, you have more help. That was the idea when I took my friends in, I was like OK, maybe you will work during the day and I will work at night and we can help each other out. I mean it is hard when you are one person and you are in a strange place.

\(^{11}\)Posada is a Pueblo-based organization that helps to provide shelter and homes to the local homeless population.
Unfortunately, Suzanne’s friends were unreliable, stole from her, and created even more stress in her life. A lack of reliable social networks leaves low-income single mothers in a particularly vulnerable position after displacement.

As the eight single mothers in this study began to secure permanent housing they encountered a number of challenges. For instance, two women, Suzanne and Natalia, were placed in housing through Catholic Charities. In both cases, rent was $1,200 per month and FEMA assistance was denied after three months. Suzanne was rejected for assistance because FEMA claimed she was not a resident of New Orleans. She was also expected to pay back the assistance that they had provided. She explained:

And all of a sudden it’s Christmas… And I am here alone with Chris [13-year-old son]. I am freaking out. I have roommates that are coming here and stealing from me. I can’t go to work because I do not know anyone to baby-sit and I was stuck here all day freaking out living on the last bit of savings that I had and all of a sudden I had to come up with rent and a deposit. I mean that was not secure. There was no security in that.

Suzanne was still living in the same house at the time of our interview. Even though she was struggling to make the rent each month, it was important to her to keep her son in a stable environment and was not going to make him change schools, friends, and neighborhoods all over again.

Natalia was also rejected for FEMA assistance after three months because she started attending school. She explained that the entire process of getting FEMA assistance was frustrating and unfair:

FEMA sent me a letter and said, “Well, since you are in school, you are no longer qualified for FEMA assistance.” It is like you are trying to better your life by going to school and getting a better education to get a better job. I was in school before FEMA, so my life has not really changed, except I have relocated. I mean, I am at a point of being evicted and rent
was $1,200 per month and I called Catholic Charities and it did not work out.

Her only option at that point was to move in with her new boyfriend because she could no longer afford her own housing. She was living off of her savings and did not have the energy to continue the fight for FEMA assistance.

Tabatha was struggling with the reality of having to pay the full amount of rent on her own. FEMA had offered her family rental assistance on and off over the last two years. Tabatha was still unemployed and was facing homelessness, despite her concerted efforts to find a job. She was fearful about not being able to provide for her family:

If FEMA does not pay our rent for next month all of my savings are gone. We are literally one step away from being homeless. If I get a job this week or next, I will not get a paycheck until the following week. I have been looking for a job for over a year, what are the chances that I am going to get anything anytime soon? You know, just being realistic.

The stark reality of homelessness is just around the corner for many single mothers living in poverty and especially for those trying to recover from a disaster.

The other three mothers also experienced frustration accessing rental assistance. Veronica, a single mother of two, received one payment from FEMA for $5,000 after losing her townhouse in the storm. This helped to cover her moving expenses, but did not last long. Denise was given enough money to purchase a trailer for, her, her son, and her mother after coming to Colorado and Kathryn was not eligible for any assistance given that she was a victim of Hurricane Rita, not Katrina.

Ruth and Christina were the only two mothers in my study still receiving FEMA issued rental assistance two years after displacement to Colorado. Even though they were still receiving assistance, they were never sure when it would end and how they were
going to pay for housing on their own. Ruth described how stressful this was for her family:

To be honest with you, I am in one of those rental assistance houses right now and when my time is up, where are we going? That is why I have to find a job that is going to level me and my family out. Because I cannot wait around for them to decide my life, saying, “Maybe we won’t, maybe we will.” My next step is to be in a place where my children do not have to worry, like “Mama, what are we gonna do now?” Since we have been out here I have been grateful for every place that we have lived, but I am not at a place where I can balance. Where you can come in your house and just relax.

For Ruth and Christina, affordable, permanent housing was the greatest need they were struggling with two years after Katrina.

For those women who did not receive any rental assistance, making enough money to pay rent was an ongoing housing issue. The lack of FEMA money hindered their ability to start replenishing their savings, pay for other necessities, and begin to reestablish their lives. FEMA was organized to provide rental assistance to victims of Hurricane Katrina based on a standard model of eligibility and monetary assistance. The experiences of these women show the disparity and disorganization of this process, and how these challenges negatively affected the life chances of single parent families after displacement.

Another challenge of finding housing for single mothers was safety. Often, affordable, Section 8 housing is located in dangerous neighborhoods that are not appealing for single women raising children. One of the reasons Veronica chose to come to Colorado on her own is because she was able to find affordable housing in a safe neighborhood with good schools. She described the sacrifices she would make in order to keep her children safe:
The Section 8 housing here is great. All the Section 8 housing in Louisiana were in crack neighborhoods. Here, there is Section 8 housing in nice neighborhoods. I mean I will eat beans and rice every night before I have my children grow up in a neighborhood that’s bad. I will make the sacrifice somewhere else. I mean I would not put them in that area.

Finding stable, permanent housing was a top priority for all of the mothers I interviewed. A lack of reliable social networks, rental assistance, and affordable housing made this quite challenging. Although all of the women did find shelter, in many cases their living arrangement was still temporary and uncertain two years after Hurricane Katrina.

Food

Upon arriving to Colorado many single mothers were living off of limited savings or credit cards to provide food for their families. As these funds depleted, these women were in dire need of food assistance. Although there were churches, food banks, and government offices providing assistance, many women experienced difficulties accessing these resources.

The women who were not on government assistance prior to Hurricane Katrina had the hardest time accessing government assistance post-Katrina. This greatly imp aired their ability to get food stamps and TANF. For instance, Suzanne was unfamiliar with the application process to get food stamps. She realized that she was running out of food and was not going to be able to afford to feed her son. Upon arrival at the food stamp office she experienced a variety of complications and did not actually receive food stamps until four months later. She explained her disappointment with the process:

I was told there was not an appointment for anyone to see me that day and there was not any appointment for four weeks. I said, “I do not have any food in my house now and I have a child.” Could they give me an
emergency food voucher to hold me over or tell me to go to the food bank? No. They said come back in four weeks.

Even after returning four weeks later, she still did not receive food stamps. She explained that people were rude to her and treated her like she was asking for handouts. When she finally received the food stamps four months later it was only for a limited time. She found out about local food banks on her own and was able to get food to feed her son.

Tabatha and Veronica shared the experience of being turned down for food stamps as well as TANF because of the financial assistance they received from FEMA. Veronica remembered, “When we first got out here it took me a while to find a job. But because I had money from FEMA in my savings account that knocked me out for Medicaid and food stamps. I did not qualify for anything.” According to the case managers that I interviewed, this was not standard procedure and no person should have been denied access to resources because of FEMA payments.

Ruth faced another challenge while trying to access food stamps and TANF. She was told that in order to qualify for assistance she would have to put in volunteer hours. This was extremely difficult for her given that she had 5 children in her custody and no transportation. She was surprised to learn about this process:

I went to the social services office to apply for food stamps and at the time we had not gotten money from FEMA. The lady said, “Well, in order to receive TANF, you have to volunteer hours. I said, “You gotta be kidding me, right?” So she was like, “No.”

The social services office wanted her to volunteer her time in a soup kitchen to receive $300 per month in cash assistance, and she said, “No, I am better than that.” They finally settled on having her file paperwork as an alternative. However, after her van broke down
and she had to ride the bus, she decided to quit. She was issued a citation through social
services for not following through with her assignment. This made her ineligible for
assistance for six months.

Lastly, Denise and Christina were the only two mothers who relied on social
services prior to Hurricane Katrina. They both explained that the process of accessing
benefits in Colorado was simple and they had no trouble getting food stamps and TANF
once relocated. Christina explained, “They are giving me the maximum so we are blessed
every month. I’m not struggling. I have even gotten TANF with not workin’. Cash
assistance.” Although all of the single mothers I interviewed had the same basic needs
after relocation to Colorado, there was great disparity in the distribution of resources to
fulfill these needs.

**Childcare**

Upon arriving to Colorado, many families faced the challenge of trying to get
settled and take care of their children at the same time. For single mothers this was
particularly difficult. Although limited childcare was offered at the recovery centers for
parents who needed to fill out paperwork, no other affordable daycare was made
available for evacuees in Colorado. Single mothers faced the challenge of trying to
rebuild their lives, find employment, and access resources while taking care of small
children on their own.

Only two of the eight mothers I interviewed were receiving child support from the
children’s fathers. The other six women either did not have any contact with the fathers,
or the men were not financially stable enough to provide for their children. All of the
women were surviving off of very few monetary resources.
Finding stable employment was the only way these women could begin to rebuild their lives in Colorado. However, in order to do this they had to secure dependable, affordable childcare first. Even the women who found employment quickly and made a living wage struggled with the increased rates of childcare. For instance, Suzanne could not believe the amount of money people were charging for childcare in Denver. She noted the difficulty of paying such elevated rates:

I have no help and babysitters are so expensive in Denver. Even when you go on Craig’s List they are $10, when back in New Orleans I was used to paying $3. So, it’s like how do you make enough money after taxes to pay $10 an hour to a babysitter?

Suzanne also had the unique situation of having a child who was too old for daycare and too young to stay home alone. She explained, “There’s no childcare for a child over the age of ten. He’s 12… I mean he could be at home for an hour or two, but how could I go and work an eight hour job and leave him alone all day?”

Similarly, Veronica explained that Colorado does not have mandatory full-day kindergarten. This meant that in order for her to work a full-time job, she had to pay for a daycare facility to watch her son in the morning, provide transportation to and from the half-day of kindergarten, and watch him again in the afternoon. This was quite expensive, even when making $16 per hour, which is a relatively high wage for many low-income single mothers. In fact, she explained, “Even though it was very expensive, that’s the only way I could do it and still keep my job. Last year I filed my taxes and 41% of my gross income went to daycare. I paid $9,991 for 2006 daycare.”

Upon arrival to Colorado, Veronica was using her savings to pay for childcare and needed to apply for government-assisted daycare. This proved to be unsuccessful, given that there is a waiting list for the program in Denver. She pointed out:
I was using my savings to pay for daycare, I mean what else was I gonna do? There is a waiting line for government-assisted daycare for any low-income single moms. I was on it in Slidell [Louisiana]. It’s a national program. It’s a sliding scale. The wait list for that was like a year and a half and I was like, “that’s not gonna do me any good now.”

Many single mothers were accustomed to relying on friends and family to provide free childcare for their children. Once the social network of assistance was eliminated, mothers found that the added expense of daycare was almost unmanageable. One 23-year-old mother, Christina, found this to be particularly unbearable given that her son has Cerebral Palsy. She mentioned how helpful it was to have her mother around to assist with his therapy:

My kids have never been in daycare. Even with my son, my mom was a saint. I was going to school and working and she was at home with him all day long. Therapists were coming in and out all day, every day to do all of his therapy, and she was there to do that.

After relocation, Christina was unable to work given the fact that her mother was no longer there and her son needed a lot of attention at home. This problem hindered her ability to finish school and provide for her children on her own. She had to start relying on government assistance and her new boyfriend to survive.

Similarly, Tabatha described how devastating it was to have to do everything on her own. She relied on family and friends for emotional support as well as childcare before the storm. She noted that she felt very insecure in Colorado with no one to rely on for help:

If I needed a babysitter, I did not need to worry. I would just bring her around the corner at any given time. It is always knowing that somebody is right there… But here you do not have that. You do not have any support whatsoever.
Tabatha was responsible for taking care of her three children and her mother who is ill. After displacement, she became overwhelmed at the amount of responsibility that was placed on her and she was quickly running out of resources to provide for her family.

In addition, it was very stressful for the children to try and adjust to new babysitters and daycare providers in Colorado. As a result, single mothers were placed in the difficult situation of making sure their children felt safe while forcing them to be watched by strangers. In the absence of strong family and friend networks, there was not a reliable alternative to depending on strangers for childcare. This was especially difficult for the children. For example, Suzanne’s son Chris was so traumatized from the disaster; he was convinced that every time his mother left she was not going to come back.

Suzanne remembered how difficult this transition was for her son:

He was with Mama Jane his whole life, the same nanny. I mean when we first got here I tried. I got a babysitter off of Craig’s List and he would go over there and sleep on the couch. Every night they would call because he was crying and I had to come and get him. He was hysterical. He was like having panic attacks and freaking out over it.

Chris was 12 years old and acutely aware of how much he needed his mother after the disaster. This placed significant stress on Suzanne, making her not want to leave him alone until he felt completely comfortable in his new surroundings.

Two years after Hurricane Katrina, single mothers were still struggling with the elevated costs of daycare in Colorado. This served as a huge barrier to recovery, limiting the possibility of employment, resource acquisition, and chances to establish social networks. This issue was particularly salient for single mothers given that they had no one to watch their children, even momentarily. Any break they took from their children needed to be paid for in the form of daycare or babysitting. Although resource providers
acknowledged this need, none were able to organize childcare assistance for single mothers in Colorado.

**Employment**

As mentioned above, single mothers immediately needed stable employment upon arrival to Colorado. A living wage was necessary for these women to provide the basic life-sustaining resources to their children. In addition to a good paying job, single mothers need flexible employment. Juggling childcare, school, extracurricular activities, and employment can be difficult for any family. However, for single mothers, this is particularly complicated given that they need to make more money and work more hours in order to feed their families and cover childcare, housing, and other vital expenses. Long work hours often conflict with parental responsibilities making the need for flexible employment and extended childcare a necessity.

Six of the eight single mothers in this study were employed full time prior to Hurricane Katrina. The only mother who was unemployed was Denise. She was not able to work due to a disability. Unfortunately, only four of those who were employed full-time were able to find employment after being displaced to Colorado. The women who did find employment struggled with the need for flexible hours and comparable pay. For instance, prior to Katrina, Suzanne worked as a professional magazine editor during the day and managed bars on Bourbon Street at night. She had always worked two full time jobs in order to stay off government assistance and provide a good life for her son. She expressed how difficult it was to find nighttime childcare in Colorado:

I gotta find jobs where I can go pick him up, bring him back by myself, and spend time with him because I have no help and babysitters are so expensive in Denver… It is like right now I work Saturdays and Sundays and I am scrambling every week to see if a friend will take him.
Sometimes I have to take him with me. And I have not been able to take a
full time bar job because they are 5:00 until 2:00 in the morning and I can
not leave him from 5:00 after school to feed himself and take his own bath
and be in bed in time for school, not at 12 years old… So, now I have this
huge loss of income because I cannot work at night.

Like Suzanne, Ruth needed to find flexible employment after relocation to
Colorado. This was imperative, given that she had to work around the schedules of
five children. She explained how lucky she was to find an understanding employer:

The nursing home gave me the hours that I chose… They let me come in
after I dropped my children off for school and they let me leave before the
children got out so that was a blessing. Especially because when the kids
get out they are looking for you and you are not there and they are in a
new place. So they really, really worked with me as far as that goes… I
love it.

Although this job provided flexibility, it did not offer a lucrative wage. Without rental
assistance, which ended for her in June 2008, she would no longer be able to afford
housing for her family.

The types of jobs that are available in Colorado differ from the jobs that women
relied on in New Orleans. Given that Colorado has one of the most highly educated
workforces in the country (State of Colorado 2008), many positions require more than
experience in the field to get the job. Suzanne discussed this issue:

I have tried for two years to get a job in editing. I edited two major
motorcycle publications for nine years. I have more experience in editing
than most people here. I applied to *Westword* and the *Denver Post* and all I
kept hearing was, “You need a degree in Journalism.”… So, I just took
anything I could get on Craig’s List. And the job started out selling cat
litter… It is such a step down from what I was doing, it is so demeaning. I
feel like my son is a teenager, he is gonna be 13, and I am 40 something
years old and all of a sudden I feel like I am completely starting my life
over when I should be settling down and into a routine.
Tabatha experienced many barriers to finding employment. After the storm she went back to her mothers house and fell through the floor, shattering her arm and leg. This put her out of work for a year. Once she was rehabilitated, she found that the initial outpouring of jobs for Katrina evacuees in Colorado had disappeared. She remembered the attitude people in Colorado had about helping Katrina evacuees:

Everybody offered you a job right after Katrina… They were like, “Oh, well we can help you because of Katrina. We want to do our part.” But after a couple of months, what was said to me was, “Well, why are ya’ll still here? Everybody else has gone back home.”

In addition, she felt that being an African-American woman reduced her chances of finding employment. She had worked in an upscale hotel chain for 13 years prior to Hurricane Katrina. Unfortunately, this did not translate into dependable employment in Colorado. She was not even able to acquire a position at Wal-Mart. She explained that even though she saw many “Now Hiring” signs, once she went into the stores, people refused to give her an application. She felt strongly that this was based on skin color alone.

Similarly, another single mother had a friend that could not find employment because of her thick southern accent. She explained that this singe mother, who worked for an attorney for over two decades, was treated poorly at her new job because of her accent. She recounted:

She works as a legal secretary. She worked for an attorney for 26 years in New Orleans. Since she came here she is making half the money as a paralegal. And they talk down to her in the law office like she does not know anything. She is like, “I have done twice the work that any of the women there do, I have more experience than them, but because of my southern accent they automatically assume I am not as educated.” And she
has gotten no help and she is a single mom here with her daughter. She wants to go home.

All of these barriers limit the chances of single mothers to succeed in Colorado. Limited opportunities for employment combined with limited government assistance make it increasingly difficult for single mothers to recover from disaster. All of these women, with the exception of one disabled mother, expressed that any dependence they may have on welfare assistance was not due to a lack of motivation and effort to find employment. The constraints on single mothers are great, requiring them to work even harder and find creative alternatives to provide for their families.

**Health Care**

After Hurricane Katrina, many mothers and children were in need of medical attention, trauma counseling, and reliable health insurance. Given the magnitude of the disaster, many people lost their jobs and health care benefits. In addition, several of the children were experiencing disaster related trauma and physical health concerns. Upon arrival to Colorado, single mothers found the need for health insurance to be a top priority.

Medicaid was automatically offered to many evacuees for the four months following Hurricane Katrina. However, mothers were still struggling with affordable health care long after the immediate grace period. Natalia was extremely frustrated that every six months, service providers wanted her to update all of her paperwork and reapply for eligibility. She was employed full-time and did not have the time to fill out paperwork, sit in offices, and acquire numerous documents to prove eligibility. She remembered, “I was so pissed because I needed it. Ayesha [her youngest daughter] was
on Medicaid for six months and then to have to go back through the whole ordeal. I do not know how some people do it.”

Similarly, Veronica was struggling to prove her children’s eligibility. She was equally as frustrated and exclaimed:

When they sent me my renewal thing I had to send in all this paperwork to show how much I was paying in daycare and from my work showing how much money it would cost to add them [to her insurance], and I said, “I cannot do it!” Daycare comes first, if you do not give these children Medicaid they will have no insurance. Ya’ll are gonna push me into quitting my job and becoming a welfare mom. I am trying and I need some help. I am willing to work and I am busting my ass, I just need some help.

Unfortunately, the same women who were ineligible for food stamps because of FEMA payments were also ineligible for Medicaid. This was particularly difficult for Veronica given that both of her young boys became sick after arriving to Colorado. She expressed how concerned she was about her children’s health:

My kids started having Irritable Bowel Syndrome. It had to be psychosomatic because they did not have a problem with that before the storm. And then, you know, they have gone to how many schools in a matter of three months and lived in this relative’s house and that relative’s house, it was really stressful.

She was able to get her boys on a sliding scale medical plan. However, it was still difficult for her to pay the required co-pays associated with treatment.

Even the mothers who were eligible to receive Medicaid for their children experienced difficulties receiving medical treatment. Patients who are on Medicaid have to go to participating Medicaid doctors in order to receive care. Often, these facilities have waiting lists for Medicaid patients and refer them to the emergency room if they need care immediately. Suzanne had never had her son on Medicaid before and found this system to be completely unreliable.
What good is a Medicaid card when no one wants to take it? I have no
doctor for him. He had the flu about two months ago, horrible cold. They
gave me a book of all the doctors that accept it. I went down the list and
not one of them would take him… They said, “Well, just take him to the
emergency room.” I said, “Well, don’t you think that is kind of a waste, to
take every Medicaid patient with a runny nose when you could just take
him to a pediatrician?”

Despite her efforts, she ended up sitting in the waiting room of the hospital for six hours
waiting to receive care.

Often, single mothers cannot afford to spend long hours in waiting rooms with
their children, yet this unavoidable responsibility puts them at risk of losing employment
and wastes valuable hours that could be being spent earning income at a job. One mother
explained that the reason she did not continue seeing her mental health professional was
because of this time constraint. She remembered, “I was just thinking, you know the time
to take off work and drive over and talk to her for an hour once a week, I mean I could be
making money. So I just quit going.”

Single mothers were in particular need of mental health evaluations given that
they were the sole providers for their children and needed to maintain composure in order
to help their kids recover. Months after the storm, many of these women still had not had
the opportunity to grieve. In fact, Natalia communicated the difficulty of finding time to
deal with her emotions. She recalled how she coped in the months following the storm:

You cannot cry. You just got to get it together and push. I grieved when the
children were asleep. I would just get a bottle of vodka, get some Grey
Goose and suck it up. That was my sedation. I had to just push forward.

In addition, Denise, a disabled mother of one, found it increasingly difficult to
afford her medical care after displacement to Colorado. Once relocated, her disability
check stopped coming and she had to prove again that she was eligible. She has diabetes
and asthma and although she was very impressed with the medical care she was receiving, she was unable to afford prescription drugs. The social security and disability benefits were not enough to cover all of her medical costs.

Mothers face the responsibility of providing mental and physical health care for themselves and their children. After Hurricane Katrina this need was magnified. Inconsistent, unreliable Medicaid and other social services make the process of recovery increasingly difficult for single mothers. Many had to give up health insurance to be able to afford food and rent. These are choices that low-income single mothers everywhere have to face. However, in times of disaster, many women find that the networks they once relied on to compensate for these services are no longer available. This places them in an even more precarious situation with little chance for recovery.

Social Networks

Seven of the eight mothers agreed that building a new social network in Colorado was one of their top priorities. They wanted to have another adult to talk to about their experience and to rely on for emotional support. Even two years after relocation, many mothers still did not have one person they could call a friend. Kathryn wished she could find someone to talk with:

I think the main thing that I needed, coming from Louisiana to here not knowing a soul, was someone to talk with. A best friend type thing. Material things I knew would come, but if there were someone who could have been with me just to help me through, that to me would be the biggest help.

Although resource providers tried to organize social engagements for Hurricane Katrina evacuees, they were usually unsuccessful because of low attendance. Many evacuees may
have been hard to contact and may not have had transportation to the event. Also, the events were limited and usually held on holidays.

Mothers quickly felt the consequences of isolation upon arriving to Colorado. For instance, it is required on school and medical forms to have an emergency contact that officials can call if the mother is unavailable. Two displaced mothers, Suzanne and Veronica, explained that this void made them feel more alone than ever before. Luckily, they became friends and were able to provide a support network for one another. Suzanne recalled:

One time that really hit me hard is when I got here and I went to fill out paperwork for Chris to enter school and there was this line to fill out for the emergency contact. I had no one to put except my mom in Slidell [Louisiana] and I am like, “She can not pick him up from school.” There was no name to put there. So, I called Veronica and said, “When you fill out those papers for school, you put my name down in case something happens while you are at work and I will go pick them up and I will put your name down for Chris.” It is just things like that that make you feel like you have a new home.

Veronica and Suzanne were both proactive about finding other evacuees and located each other through the Internet. They both wished that there was a list or website where they could voluntarily communicate with other evacuees in the area. Unfortunately, this was not a service available in Colorado.

Two years after the storm, the single mothers in this study were still struggling to get back to their pre-Katrina lifestyles. After losing everything in the storm, expending all of their personal savings, and fighting for limited resources, these mothers were nowhere near recovered. Many of these women worked long hours and multiple jobs to keep their families out of poverty in New Orleans. This was no longer possible after displacement. The loss of affordable housing, access to food, reliable childcare, employment, health
care, and social networks placed these women into the lowest ranks of poverty with little hope for stability, much less upward mobility.
CHAPTER VI

DOWNWARD MOBILITY AND RESILIENCY

In-depth, qualitative interviews with fifteen disaster relief professionals and eight single mothers provided me the unique opportunity to evaluate the experiences of single mothers after displacement to Colorado and their ability to access life-sustaining resources. After a thorough analysis of the resources that were being offered and those that were obtained, it became clear that the single mothers who were living just above the poverty line pre-Katrina experienced a significant decrease in economic stability after displacement.

After disaster, people are living “near” poverty often find themselves unable to recover from the losses sustained. The “near poor” are individuals who live just above the poverty line, struggling to maintain their lifestyles and subsist without government assistance. The near poor may suffer from a lack of assets, long work hours, poor health, little to no health insurance, no means for retirement, poor quality housing, and often, bad credit (Newman and Chen 2007). Although these people live more comfortably than those living below the poverty line, their predicament places them in an especially vulnerable position. When they are not fortunate enough to have savings, loans to borrow against from home ownership, adequate earning opportunities, or welfare benefits one turn for the worse: a failed marriage, being fired or laid off from a job, or an illness in the family can push them over the edge of poverty (Newman and Chen 2007). Access to structural means directly enables or inhibits asset accumulation according to gender, race, class, ability, age, language, etc. This is particularly true in times of disaster (Fothergill 2004).
DOWNWARD MOBILITY

Six of the eight single mothers in my sample were living near poverty prior to Hurricane Katrina. The other two were already living below the poverty line. Without specific knowledge of their individual incomes, I classified them according to their subsistence levels. Two of the women relied heavily on government assistance to survive prior to Hurricane Katrina and were not able to work due to disability and childcare responsibilities. The other six women worked multiple, full-time jobs in order to provide for their families. These six women are not classified as the true poor because they were able to subsist without having to access government assistance prior to Hurricane Katrina.

Although they lived just above the poverty line, these six women were not financially stable. They had limited savings, did not own their homes, and struggled to survive pre-Katrina. For instance, Ruth explained how quickly her life changed, “My situation made a 365 degree turn. I mean I had a good paying job. I was not wanting for anything. I did not live in a big house on the hill, but I was not suffering either.” After Hurricane Katrina made landfall, those living near poverty quickly realized the vulnerability and fragility of their positions. The loss of housing, employment, savings, credit, and social safety nets pushed these women further into poverty with little to no means for recovery.

In addition, the unique culture of New Orleans provided an invisible social safety net and an economic cushion for single mothers living just above the poverty line. Although based on their finances these women would be considered “near poor,” their relative quality of life was enhanced by community support, extended family, ethnic
empowerment, and cultural vitality. These invisible buffers were non-transferable and may have masked their economic positions making the downward spiral even more severe after displacement.

**Finances**

Most of the mothers had few savings when the storm hit. This was just enough to get them out of danger and pay for a hotel, food, and gas. Veronica, a white, mother of two, explained that her one-time FEMA payment of $5,000 and her limited savings was only enough to get her and her two children to Colorado and to purchase reliable transportation. Exhausting her savings made it difficult to reestablish a safety net. She described how a minor setback depleted her savings:

When I was first getting started, I had to get a new car because that blue thing [old car] was not running. I had to get a new car and that wiped out my savings account. I am still flying low right now.

After the relocation, many mothers started running out of funds. For example, one mother was devastated that she had to spend the small amount of money that her family had put into a college fund for her son. She said:

I had educational IRA's for him and I cashed them all in. His college funds are gone. My family would put money in a bank account every holiday for him. What else was I gonna do? The worst part of Katrina was not Katrina. It was the financial stress put on you because of Katrina.

It often takes years for single mothers to build a stable lifestyle for their families. However, in times of disaster, it only takes moments to push them over the edge and jeopardize the security of the next generation making them more susceptible to poverty.

In addition, for those living near poverty, having available credit is an extremely important resource. With little to no savings, many women relied on their credit to get
them through the transition. However, this credit was not always accessible after Hurricane Katrina. Suzanne, a Cuban-American mother of one, remembered:

That’s another thing, the minute there is a disaster they cut off all your bank and credit cards. Once people find out that you are from a disaster area, they will only take cash from you. It does not matter if you have money in the bank or not. Your credit is ruined… I mean I had great credit before, now I have no credit. It is only because my boss lied for me that I was able to get a car.

Tabatha, a 37-year-old African-American mother, was living off of a small savings and unemployment after relocation to Colorado. She explained, “Although the cost of living is high, my thing is to have stability for the kids. I have been paying for it and we have been living off of my savings. Now I am getting unemployment, but that is little or nothing.” Two years after Katrina, she was still fighting to receive FEMA assistance, but had also started researching local shelters to prepare for the possibility of homelessness. In contrast, prior to Hurricane Katrina, Tabatha had stable employment and a good life. She remembered making long-term goals for her family that included leaving New Orleans. She recounted, “It is like you have this three year, five year plan. Oh, I am leaving this place. In five years, if I make such and such money and things go well, I will be debt free, and five years, I am outta here!” After the storm, those dreams were shattered and Tabatha was forced to start all over, struggling to find stable housing and employment in Colorado.

David and Pamela, two case managers with The Salvation Army, noticed that many single mothers were struggling with the elevated costs of living in Colorado. They described how this was more difficult for women who were living on the margins of poverty prior to Hurricane Katrina:
I have seen quite a few people who were not well off, but were making ends meet. They were managing. They were working full-time. Things were okay and now they struggle every month. That’s frustrating. When you shift from housing that was $300-$500 per month to housing that is now $600-$1000 per month… Rent has gone up, utilities have gone up, and your salary really has not improved… I would say there has been a lot of downward mobility in the change.

Government Assistance

Some of the women in my study arrived to Colorado with a modest savings which made them ineligible for many government assistance programs including FEMA aid, food stamps, Medicaid, TANF, childcare, etc. After their savings were expended these women were on their own. They all went through various, trying experiences to gain access to the above programs with little to no luck. This greatly affected their ability to recover and “bounce back” to a pre-Katrina lifestyle.

Suzanne explained how frustrated she felt about being denied for Medicaid and receiving little to no help after displacement. For Suzanne, falling into poverty was humiliating:

When I asked what there is for Katrina victims, no one offered me shit. This is when I really started getting pissed off, because you know, I never asked for anything. I always worked two jobs, never even got child support, put my son through Catholic school in New Orleans, paid tuition, paid babysitters and always had a good life. Better than what I would consider low class… I did not even find out about Lutheran Family Services until this past January [2007].

Women who were able to attain some FEMA money found themselves living in housing that was far above their means. After the payments expired, three months in two cases, less in others, they were stuck with leases that they could not afford without government assistance. Single mothers were left to fend for themselves, with no permanent employment, childcare, or familial support to help them get back on their feet.
This, combined with the lack of food and healthcare, placed these women in the lowest ranks of poverty.

After displacement, many people were falling quickly from being able to manage their life and finances to being close to homelessness. For instance, Tabatha had worked for a five star hotel in New Orleans for 13 years. Despite all of her motivation, she was not able to find work in Lafayette, Colorado or the surrounding area. FEMA had been promising to pay her rent from November 2006 to June 2007 with no actualization of payment. If they did not come through by the end of June she, her sick mother, and her three children would be in a homeless shelter. She was obviously devastated and was relying on her faith to keep going.

The limited government assistance in Colorado made recovering from Hurricane Katrina challenging for single mothers. Although only two mothers were on welfare before Katrina, many quickly found that welfare assistance in Colorado was far different than they expected. For example, Tabatha felt that she could not rely on the social services for any of her needs:

The government support, the local government and city support, they say they have it, but really it is little or none. Whereas back home, if you fell behind, you had agencies that would help you. I do not find that here. I find it really hard to get back on your feet here.

Similarly, Angela, a Colorado Springs disaster relief provider, was shocked at the organization of the distribution of resources. She explained how quickly professional people fell into the depths of poverty:

And these people were coming in and saying they had no food. These were professional people. They had no food; they had no this and that. The food stamp organization had these people go pick up paper on the highway. How degrading is that? I don’t know the law for food stamps,
but that’s what they did. And that’s why the churches opened up their pantries.

The network of community and government assistance can be confusing and time consuming. A substantial number of hours need to be spent gathering documentation and paperwork, finding transportation to and from offices around the city, and waiting in long lines to receive assistance. Many single mothers were unfamiliar with the process of applying for food stamps and unable to balance the time requirements of welfare related services with daycare, employment, and other responsibilities.

In contrast to Tabatha’s story, a 22-year-old Latino woman named Christina had two children with another one on the way. She had always been on welfare and government assistance. She was very pleased with the amount of help that she received. FEMA was still paying her rent two years later and they agreed to pay it for at least eight months longer. She relied on Medicaid, food stamps, cash assistance, and other forms of government assistance to survive. She was not working at the time of the interview in August 2007.

As mentioned earlier, mothers who relied on government assistance prior to Hurricane Katrina proved to have an easier time accessing help after relocation. Also, if a person was eligible for Section 8 housing in New Orleans, they were moved to the top of the list to receive it once they arrived to Colorado. However, those who had never been in the system found the transition to be much more complicated. In many cases, welfare services used pre-Katrina financial records to qualify someone for assistance. For instance, Natalia, an African-American mother of two, described her frustration with this process:
It is because they were already in the system. You already have their client ID number. They got Section 8 and all of these free benefits. And here you have someone who has always worked. I worked two jobs to maintain… They expected us to bounce back, because if you are a single mother, you are making a decent salary, and you have a nice car and home, you can manage. But I am 38 and starting all over and that was hard.

Resource providers also reported that it was easier for evacuees who had relied on government assistance prior to Hurricane Katrina to recover once relocated to Colorado. Jeff, a Lutheran Family Services case manager, explained how this process ultimately hurt those people living above the poverty line:

If you were on Section 8, you got a big beautiful home in Colorado Springs, some of them. You got a break and the middle class suffered. I really believe that those who were lower class really made out okay. They were able to get back on food stamps and welfare. Whereby someone who never was in the system and never had prior Section 8 housing was totally stuck. Everything was pre-Katrina [incomes]. I think there was no other gauge. It is almost like we are assessing their economic status, and at this point, everyone was on the same plane. There was no lower, middle, or upper class when they came out of Katrina.

While it may be a misnomer that the “lower class really made out okay,” as Jeff stated, his point that they knew how to navigate the system and therefore received benefits more quickly was an accurate representation of the experiences of the eight women in this study.

**Stigma**

Before disaster strikes, single mothers are commonly in a struggle to survive. Most of the mothers in this study spoke about the empowerment and pride of being able to survive, on their own, without being on welfare prior to the storm. They worked two to three jobs to take care of their children and put a roof over their heads. After relocation, these mothers had to ask for help and rely on government assistance and community services to get by. For example, Suzanne felt proud that she had maintained a good
lifestyle for her and her son without child support or government assistance. She explained, “Until Katrina, I never got food stamps. I never got welfare. I always had two really high paying jobs. And now…”

Similarly, Natalia explained that it hurt her pride to have to apply for government assistance. She grew up in a household that relied on welfare and worked hard so she would not have to follow in her mother’s footsteps. She expressed:

I tried to go through state assistance and I appealed it for a year, food stamps and welfare office, because I have never been on any assistance. Of course it was a hurting thing to your pride, but after a year I just got tired of it. I did not want to be on the benefits because that was my mom’s life and I did not want to repeat that cycle. You know, you are living on the first and fifteenth and looking for your food stamps, your welfare check. I hated that, so I worked two jobs to maintain [pre-Katrina].

Quickly, women began to feel the stigma associated with receiving government assistance. They had to wait in long lines and fill out lengthy application forms. The single mothers explained that they were treated poorly by social workers and did not feel that people were there to help them. For instance, Ruth, a 47-year-old African-American mother, felt that she was entitled to emergency funds as a tax-paying citizen:

They really failed for us as people who want to work, regardless of race, color, or creed. I am a person that has been working since I was 17 years old. If an emergency comes-that’s due to me, I worked for that. The taxes you took out of my paycheck, that’s mine. So, do not sit here like your giving me something. That just blew me away.

Similarly, Natalia explained how humiliating her experience was applying for Medicaid and Food Stamps:

Basically, they treated me like a criminal. The welfare workers, they were like, “do you have this, do you have that?” I am like, “Hurricane Katrina ring a bell?” You have to swallow your pride, especially if you have never been on it, and then to be treated like a criminal. It was either walk out of here and not get it [resources], or choke her. I was pissed because I needed it… I do not know how some people do it.
She experienced a double burden of being a single mother and Katrina evacuee. It was commonly expressed that Coloradans treated these single mothers like they were trying to “mooch” off of the system.

Kathryn, a Caucasian mother of one, had worked for many years to keep her daughter out of bad neighborhoods and in good schools. She went back to school herself and worked hard so she could provide a better life for her family. After an unfortunate turn of events, she found herself in the position she had worked so hard to stay out of and just wanted to get her life back to normal. She remembered:

Before the hurricane, I was poor, putting myself through school and working and taking care of her. Being the soccer mom I had a full schedule. I loved it. It was my life… That is all I want, to get back to a normal life again.

After displacement, Kathryn was diagnosed with cancer. She was unable to work given her medical condition and was ineligible for FEMA assistance and social security because she was a victim of Hurricane Rita, not Katrina. She and her daughter were living off of donations and limited child support at the time of the interview in July 2007. Kathryn felt guilty for having to take donations from strangers. She explained:

I do not want to take advantage. As long as I am making it, I am not going to try and get more. A lot of people are greedy when it comes to things. You know, they feel like they have it coming to them. In the situation I am in, I am just thankful. I just want my health. I do not want to be greedy. I just feel like God will help me and whatever He provides is what I need.

**Employment**

Stable employment can be a significant determinate of one’s ability to recover from a disaster. For single mothers, this is magnified, given that they have children to feed, shelter, and clothe all on their own. For those living just above the poverty line, the
slightest gap or decrease in income can put them over the edge, making it difficult to survive without assistance.

The single mothers in this study found it difficult to find employment upon arriving to Colorado. The stress of the transition paired with extreme loss made searching for employment a daunting task. Natalia described the difficulties she faced finding permanent employment:

I had some [interviewers] who wanted to talk about Hurricane Katrina and I did not want to talk about it because it was still emotional for me and it still is. I had a couple that would say, “Well, there is nothing in New Orleans, how can I check your references?” That was an insult. That was a slap in the face. I probably did not put as much effort in because I was just frustrated with the whole relocation. I had an awesome job and a great house. Everything was pretty much perfect. I had a good life and to start over, it is frustrating.

Another problem that women faced was a decrease in salary. Without the same networks to rely on for childcare and employment, women found themselves working low-paying jobs that could provide flexibility. Suzanne worked as a bar manager on Bourbon Street for many years, leaving her son with a nanny. Once relocated to Colorado, she was not able to find an affordable sitter for him, and therefore was unable to work nights. She explained how this decreased her income potential, “So, now I have this huge loss of income because I cannot work nights.” She now had to rely on only one income from a day job and was struggling to pay her bills.

Social Networks

Of the eight single mothers, Natalia was the only one who received child support for both of her children before and after Hurricane Katrina. Kathryn started receiving child support, for the first time, after she moved to Colorado, was diagnosed with cancer, and could no longer live without the father’s financial support. Veronica was still in
contact the father of her children, but he was not in a position to provide financial support, and Suzanne, Denise, Christina, Ruth, and Tabatha had no contact with the fathers of their children before or after Hurricane Katrina.

For Natalia, losing the physical and emotional support of her ex-husband was more damaging than if she were to simply stop receiving his financial support. Her children had a great relationship with their father and he spent lots of time with them before the storm. She explained:

Yeah, I went through my divorce with my ex-husband, but even through our marriage did not sustain, he is still an awesome father. It is very different [in Colorado]. Every weekend [before Katrina] he would get the girls, every holiday. But for some women, when daddy is gone, he is not even paying child support or seeing the kids. Sometimes, it is not even about the child support check, it is about seeing your child. And that plays a big part. But you have to be momma, daddy, grandmamma, granddaddy, friend, teacher, doctor, regardless.

The absence of a contributing partner forces single mothers to rely on extended family members for the majority of their childcare needs and emotional support. Prior to Katrina, many of these mothers were able to make it because of the help their families could provide. For instance, Kathryn remembered how much she relied on her mother for assistance. She said, “Even though I did not want to take from them, … after school we would go over there and she would have something cooked.” What seemed to be minimal family assistance was enough to keep them afloat through any rough periods in their lives. Once relocated to Colorado, these networks were shattered and single mothers and their children were completely on their own for the first time, experiencing what it means to be truly poor.

Craig, a Denver mental health provider, noticed that the greatest mental health impact from Hurricane Katrina was the disruption of social networks. He explained how
this was unique to Hurricane Katrina given the permanent mass displacement of individuals:

Well, the thing that highlights Hurricane Katrina is the shattering of social networks. Even as evacuees have come together and created a new community within Colorado, it is not what they had. The shattering of the social network is so devastating, so stressful, and so traumatic that it directly impacts at multiple levels.

This loss is especially salient for single mothers who rely heavily on family for emotional support, childcare, and material resources.

Although local agencies tried to form support groups and provide places for evacuees to network, the attempts were limited. Tracie, a Lutheran Family Services case manager, recalled the response clients had to these events:

Some of the evacuees were like, ‘Well, why don’t you guys do this more often?’ It is a lot of work for us to do. Really, we just give you a few chances to network. The idea is that then you can do it on your own.

This quote illustrates the desire of evacuees to connect with one another. However, this was especially limiting for single mothers who self-evacuated and were not connected to the Colorado assistance network from the start. Many of them were unaware of the events and relied on the Internet to connect with other evacuees.

A lack of networking opportunities made living in Colorado difficult for many single mothers. Suzanne described how imperative making new friends was to her recovery and to all Katrina evacuees:

Networking, putting people together, because you know what? Things are just things, but when you ask someone what is the biggest thing they lost, the biggest thing they lost was their friends and family. Because friends and family are scattered all over, so you have to make new friends. You have to make new friends because that is what makes you home. They are not gonna feel like a normal person again until they have roots and friends.
Self-Evacuation

The method of evacuation out of New Orleans was a determining factor of one’s ability to access immediate and longer-term life-sustaining resources. All of the remaining residents of New Orleans received a mandatory order of evacuation. Those people who were unable to evacuate on their own, who were more likely to be low-income African-Americans, got flown and bused out of the city in the days following the storm. These individuals reportedly stayed in many shelters before relocating permanently. The people who ended up at the Lowry Air Force Base in Denver and the Colorado Springs Recovery Center were among this population. Due to the convenience of location, all of the participating Colorado disaster relief agencies such as FEMA, Colorado Coalition of Faith, Salvation Army, Lutheran Family Services, Catholic Charities, etc. were able to set up shop at these locations. Also, any independent donators of services were directed to the base to offer their help. These services included: food, clothing, furniture, housing, mental health resources, and medical care. This put the people at the base in an immediately advantaged position to receive resources. All of the mothers that I interviewed self-evacuated and therefore were not educated regarding the resources being offered at the Colorado shelters until it was too late.

The organization of the distribution of resources is what left one mother, Suzanne, extremely frustrated. She viewed this situation as the government helping people who were “criminals” and hurting people who followed all of the rules and evacuated on their own. For her, the delay of getting resources, because of the bureaucracy, left her and her son alone and without food to eat for some time. When she finally learned about disaster
relief organizations, such as Lutheran Family Services, much of the once present funding was already spent:

I got to Lutheran Family Services so late. If I would have had them in the beginning, if I would have known more about the resources in the beginning… Not everyone went through the base. There were lots of people who moved here on their own. Those people who were taken to the bases got assistance faster than those people who were following the law.

Relying on “word of mouth” was not an effective way to gain access to services for a single mother in an unfamiliar place with no family or friends.

The slow response and unorganized distribution of resources made it difficult for single mothers to utilize all of the help that was being offered in Colorado. As these mothers began to apply for assistance, much of what was once available was gone.

Unfortunately, those women who had a limited savings either did not seek out assistance immediately or were ineligible for services until their savings were completely exhausted. This placed them in a precarious situation months after the storm.

In addition, disaster professionals viewed the above scenarios as successful, because those who had the resources to evacuate were already better equipped to survive and recover. In their view, these women’s’ mental capacity and motivation was already better than those that depend solely on the system to survive. Therefore, they were not on the top of the priority list when it came to reestablishing life for Gulf Coast citizens in Colorado. Andrew, a member of the Colorado Coalition of Faith, mentioned:

I think that those that self-evacuated, in some ways, they are actually better off because they had enough resources to self evacuate anyway… So then they are better equipped. They also come here by themselves and are able to find work a little bit easier and things of that nature because they are already self-driven. They are not relying on any kind of subsidy.
This rationale made it even more difficult for self-evacuated single mothers to acquire disaster assistance.

RESILIENCY

Many of the resource providers that I interviewed mentioned the resiliency of single mothers as compared to other groups. For instance, contrary to the stories above, disaster relief professionals reported that single mothers were actually having a relatively easier time adjusting to Colorado than most of their other clients. Tracie, a case manager from Lutheran Family services recalled, “I do not know if it is just the women I have worked with, but I have had some amazing, successful single mothers. A lot of them were doing better than they did before the hurricane.” When a person was assigned a case manager from Volunteers of America, Lutheran Family Services, Catholic Charities, or The Salvation Army, they created a recovery plan that both the disaster survivor\textsuperscript{12} and the case manager would sign. The role of the case manager was to help survivors navigate the system and get their lives back on track. Case managers reported that single mothers tended to do this in a much more timely fashion than other evacuees. Resource providers explained the resiliency factor in the following three ways.

First, the resource providers stated that women are often “less egotistical” about the types of jobs they are willing to occupy. Single mothers do not have the luxury of being picky. They often will take the first job they are offered, for any amount of pay, because the need for consistent work is crucial to their survival. Tracie, a case manager for Lutheran Family Services, pointed out:

Single mothers are like, “I have to find something that is going to bring in a paycheck every two weeks. I have to be able to bring in the money. I

\textsuperscript{12}This is the terminology used by the case managers to create a space for recovery and motivation rather than “victim” which perpetuates need and hinders progress.
have to be able to support my kids.” I feel like they got jobs a lot faster than the men.

Pamela, a Salvation Army case manager, also added, “And if they have always been single moms, they just tend to have that mentality, ‘I will do whatever it takes’.”

Second, single mothers were more likely to follow the recovery plan thoroughly, fulfilling all of the required steps in a timely manner. Case managers attributed this to their need to be self-sufficient and to have a means to take care of their families. It is possible that for many of the mothers, having children and the absence of preexisting extended social networks makes them more stringent in following any plan that will help them to survive. They place their children’s needs above their own, motivating them to create progress in their lives. Tracie emphasized this point:

They were a little quicker too. They got down to the social services office pretty quickly, filled out paperwork, got registered, and did the recertification process fairly quickly because they had no leeway. They could not afford groceries without food stamps.

David, a case manager for the Salvation Army, observed that single mothers often did not need their help as much because they were so resilient. According to him, they already knew how to navigate the system:

As far as the single mother households, they are pretty resilient, they were pretty resourceful, but I think they have always had to be. So they have just taken that skill and applied it to this situation… I would say my single cases are better at resourcing. There would not be much I could tell them that they did not already know about. “Oh, I have already done that. Oh, I have already been there.”

In addition, families that were headed by two parents may have had a living arrangement where the mother stayed home with the children and depended entirely on the father, spouse, or partner to control the finances. This can be very isolating. Relief professionals found that often their coupled clients were less likely to form social
networks. This hindered them from finding out about resources in their new towns. From their perspective, single mothers were usually more willing to reach out for help, connecting with other members of their communities. Steve, a case manager from the Volunteers of America, explained: “The single women tend to have a better ability to connect and utilize resources. They have better networking skills.”

Third, disaster professionals found that single mothers were often experiencing crisis before the disaster struck. This seemed to make them less vulnerable to the challenges they faced after relocation to Colorado. Maria, a Colorado Springs community member and relief provider, noticed that single moms had a “sense of resiliency” that was stronger than that of her other clients. She recalled:

I felt that there was maybe even a stronger sense of resiliency in them that they knew they had to keep it together. One woman in particular, she had six kids. She was tough and she was like, “I had been through everything. This is the least of what I…” She just took this attitude of “It is just another one of those things in life and I am gonna face it and deal with it,” you know?

The organizational response was the same for everyone regardless of family structure. Therefore there were no resources offered specifically for single-mothers. Case managers would attempt to identify individuals’ unique needs and find them resources accordingly. For instance, single-mothers needed childcare and flexible employment. Tracie explained: “It was more the type of job they were looking for. They were needing one that was during the day, couldn’t work nights because you needed to be home.”

In addition, case managers were under the assumption that single women with children had an easier time accessing government and local resources than single males or married couples. Steve, a case manager who had been a social worker in Denver for over 20 years, pointed out:
Except that in Colorado, single parents, when you have kids you have far more access to services than single adults do. Whether its TANF or other services through the counties, or even when you look for emergency shelter. There are far more programs, transition housing programs for kids. And even when you try to develop resources, like through churches.

They would immediately try to get single mothers to fill out paperwork for social services including government assisted daycare, Medicaid, and food stamps.

Case managers observed single mothers to be more resilient than other clients. They often attributed this resiliency to the “character” and work ethic associated with being a single mother. The stories of the eight women I interviewed showed that they indeed had enormous strength and an ability to keep their families together after Hurricane Katrina. However, this strength and resilient behavior did not translate into the ability to “bounce back” to their pre-Katrina lifestyles.

Rising out of poverty can be a life long struggle. It is well established that 37 million Americans subsist off of incomes below the poverty line (Newman and Chen 2007). There is a vast body of literature that documents the lives of the poor, dependence on welfare, and success at upward mobility and escape from poverty. On the other hand, little has been written on downward mobility and the experiences of people joining the ranks of the poor after disaster strikes (Fothergill 2004).

In times of disaster, many people are faced with losing everything. The mass displacement of Hurricane Katrina exposed the sad reality of extreme poverty that exists throughout our nation. For those people living just above the poverty line, disaster and relocation can easily begin a downward spiral into poverty. This was certainly the case for the single mothers interviewed in this study. The loss of housing, employment,
savings, credit, and social safety nets pushed these women further into poverty with little to no means for recovery.
CONCLUSION

CHAPTER VII

This thesis has examined the needs and experiences of single mothers who were displaced to Colorado after Hurricane Katrina. I drew from in-depth, qualitative interviews with 15 disaster relief professionals and 8 single mothers living in Colorado. I began by detailing the resources that were made available to evacuees upon relocation to Denver and Colorado Springs. Next, I addressed the specific needs of single mothers after displacement and explored how these mothers navigated (or not) the disaster relief network in order to access life-sustaining resources. Finally, I discussed the recurring trends of downward mobility and resiliency that were expressed through the narratives of
single mothers and disaster relief providers. Given that most disaster recovery models focus on the impact phase and short-term recovery, I decided to explore the institutional participation in the long-term recovery process. I used the following three questions to guide this research:

1.) What resources were made available to relocated single-mother families living in Colorado, and what resources were single mothers most likely to access?

2.) What challenges have single-mother families faced in the pursuit of social and economic resources?

3.) How have gender, class, race, and cultural differences shaped the overall experience of displacement for single-mother families?

In this conclusion I address the theoretical implications of this study, focusing on the importance of understanding the specific experiences of single mothers after displacement from Hurricane Katrina. I also provide policy recommendations that highlight the inconsistencies in understanding resiliency and how these misinterpretations may affect the experiences of vulnerable populations, especially single mothers. Last, I offer specific recommendations to assist governmental and non-profit agencies that deal most directly with vulnerable populations before and after a disaster strikes.

**THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

All disaster victims have needs, however, not all needs are the same. To date, no research has been done that focuses specifically on single mothers in disasters and the emotional and socioeconomic challenges that they faced post Hurricane Katrina. In
Colorado, there were no resources offered to address the specific needs of single mothers, making it extremely difficult for them to recover after displacement. My research focuses on how the organization of disaster relief can greatly determine the outcome of all marginalized individuals, especially single mothers.

Social vulnerability theory has established the importance of understanding the effects of gender, class, race, culture, nationality, age, and other power relationships in the disaster context (Cutter, Boruff, and Shirley 2003; Enarson, Fothergill, and Peek 2006). My research shows how structural relationships and institutional inequities before disaster will directly affect the outcomes for single mothers after a disaster. In addition to understanding the challenges that these women face before and after disaster strikes, I add that it is equally important to look at how these challenges affect women’s ability to recover after long-term displacement.

This study is particularly important because it looks at the immediate and long-term needs of single mothers and highlights a gap in the existing disaster preparedness and recovery literature. There was an obvious disconnect between what resources were made available to mothers and what was actually needed to recover from Hurricane Katrina. These interviews revealed that single mothers were unusually vulnerable in times of disaster and especially after displacement. Their specific needs include dependable and affordable childcare, permanent employment, affordable housing, and easily accessible government assistance. Although these needs are similar to other evacuees, it is important to understand that for single mothers these needs are magnified, making it even more difficult to recover.
Prior to Hurricane Katrina, many single mothers in my sample were struggling to stay out of poverty. Little savings and few alternative resources made single mothers particularly vulnerable to this disaster. The magnitude of Hurricane Katrina caused Gulf Coast residents to be displaced thousands of miles from home. Upon arriving to Colorado, the women in this study were truly alone. They no longer had a network of family, friends, and community to rely on for financial, physical, and emotional support. After expending the little savings that they may have had, these mothers were in dire need of government support and disaster relief. Unfortunately, this relief did not come as easily as they had hoped.

Stigmas associated with accessing government assistance have long impacted the identities of single mothers (Moller 1999). Adding to the theoretical literature on gender and disasters, we need to look more closely at the social underpinnings that may disempower single mothers after displacement from disasters. These stigmas disproportionately affect single mothers and are equally present when accessing disaster relief. The differences between disaster relief and welfare need to be addressed in order for our society to move in a direction that assuages the dilemmas associated with the continuing trend of single motherhood.

In addition, the single mothers in my study who were living just above the poverty line before Hurricane Katrina experienced significant downward mobility after the storm. It is imperative that disaster professionals pay closer attention to the rate at which extreme crisis forces vulnerable populations into poverty. This finding is significant because it provides a better understanding of the specific needs of single
mothers that can be addressed to mitigate their downward spiral into poverty after future disasters.

Fothergill (2004: 54) was the first to bring attention to the “severe and sudden” downward mobility that women may experience after a disaster. Her contributions highlight the dramatic plunge into poverty that women experience because of gendered domestic roles and childcare duties. She found that after disaster, many middle-class women experience what it means to be poor for the first time in their lives. My research adds to this contribution by establishing that downward mobility is even more extreme for women who are living just above the poverty line pre-disaster. Their fragile social and economic situation before disaster strikes makes it increasingly difficult for them to recover from the loss.

**Resiliency and Vulnerability**

The study of disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery is diverse and interdisciplinary. This has resulted in confusion, particularly with the use of common language to define major concepts of disaster processes (Perry 2006). For example, there are dozens of definitions that have been applied to the concept of resilience (Manyena 2006). Each disciplinary approach has contextualized the meaning of resilience, leaving a fragmented understanding of the definition in disaster literature (Cordona 2004). Resilience is most generally defined as the ability to “bounce back” from extreme events (Paton and Johnston 2001, Vickers and Kouzmin 2001), recover with little to no outside assistance (Manyena 2006), and to have the ability to survive future natural disasters (Berke and Campenalla 2006). Furthermore, this becomes additionally complicated when
the definition is applied to communities, infrastructure, institutional systems, and individuals.

Manyena (2006) provides a detailed account of the multiple definitions of resilience in disaster discourse and posits that they are categorized broadly in two ways: processes or outcomes. Most disaster scholars argue for the importance of using a broad definition to highlight the interrelationships and linkages between systems. I argue that it is even more imperative to categorize definitions of resilience according to the context of community, infrastructure, institutions, or individuals. Far too often, individuals’ experiences are overlooked in the process of disaster management, which can lead to a misframing of events (Vickers and Kouzmin 2001).

In my study, single mothers were labeled “resilient” by disaster relief professionals based on characteristics of perceived self-sufficiency, resourcefulness, and coping skills. This, in no way, indicated that these women had “bounced back”, recovered with little to no outside assistance, or were capable of surviving future natural disasters. Manyena (2006) states, “Resiliency is arguably about people’s capacity far beyond one’s ability to cope” (p. 438). Disaster professionals in Colorado were not equipped with any agreed upon measure of resiliency and therefore were making assumptions purely based on observation and personal opinion. Arguably, these assumptions may have had negative consequences for single mothers in the form of lack of attention, loss of resources, and unmet needs. Vickers and Kouzmin (2001) posit that superiors assume individual actors are resilient in order to avoid “unpleasure” and alleviate responsibility.

In addition, resiliency literature focuses primarily on contained disasters that utilize community support to recover (Paton and Johnston 2001). Little to no research has
focused on the resiliency of individuals after long-term displacement. This is essential in understanding how the affects of displacement may increasingly make vulnerable populations cast into unfamiliar settings less likely to recover. In fact, Paton and Johnston (2001) report:

Individuals who perceive themselves as having no investment in their community may develop a level of detachment which, following a natural disaster, may trigger feelings of isolation, encourage learned helplessness, and heighten vulnerability (p. 273).

Displaced individuals are less likely to be able to participate in the rebuilding process due to geographic location, lack of finances, and extreme loss, leaving them isolated without community support to assist in their recovery.

Manyena (2006) also details the relationship between resiliency and vulnerability. Similar to resiliency, the term vulnerability has many definitions and is fragmented across many disciplines. This term can be applied to human, social, physical, ecological, and environmental fragility. Disaster scholars either view the two terms-vulnerability and resiliency- as factors of each other or entirely separate. For instance, Mallak believes that “the absence of vulnerability does not make one resilient” (p. 443). Therefore it is important to study these concepts independently from one another in order to accurately address one’s capability of preparing for and recovering from a disaster.

It is common in disaster literature to define vulnerable groups based on age, ethnic status, poor education, economic resource limitations, marginalized political status, and social network access (Paton and Johnston 2001). However, this is not how resiliency is usually discussed. I recommend that a similar approach be taken to understand how groups are differentially resilient to disasters despite, or because of, their respective vulnerabilities. For example, some researchers have found that older adults are less vulnerable than
younger adults and that there is an element of empowerment that reduces vulnerability for ethnic minorities with poor education (Paton and Johnston 2001). Although the single mothers in my study had not “bounced back,” there is a possibility that as a group they may be more resistant to certain levels of crisis. These findings warrant the need for an in-depth sociological exploration of the terms resiliency and vulnerability as they apply to single mothers after displacement in order to mitigate the effects of future disasters and alleviate downward mobility.

**Intersecting Vulnerabilities**

Vulnerabilities do not exist in isolation and are, in fact, interactive and multiplicative. The women in this study were not only suffering from the disadvantages associated with being a single mother, they also experienced the double or triple burdens of being female, poor, and in some cases, African-American. Since the 1980's, these intersecting social positions have been gaining much needed attention in feminist literature (Acker 2003; Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill 2003; Glenn 2002). In this section, I detail the theoretical implications of gender, class, and race more broadly to contextualize the experiences of single mothers post Hurricane Katrina.

**Gender.** Many feminist scholars use the term “gender” to refer to “socially created meanings, relationships, and identities organized around reproductive differences” (Glenn 2002: 8). Historically, gender has been discussed in very essentialist ways with women being closer to nature and reproduction, while men have been associated with public life and business (Beneria 2003). Most commonly, the discussion of gender inequity is rooted in the sexual division of labor (Hartsock 2003). Although women work more hours than men, as explained by the “second shift” or “double day,”
they are still underpaid, undervalued, and overworked (Hartsock 2003). For years, these ideologies have strengthened male domination, forcing women to perform much of the unpaid labor.

Some feminist scholars believe that gender is a unifying concept, while others insist that using “women” as a category of analysis assumes that they are a homogenous group defined by the similar experiences of powerlessness (Mohanty 2003). This belief masks the vast social, economic, educational, cultural, racial, and political differences that directly affect the individual experiences of women across the globe. In times of disaster, these differences are magnified.

For instance, the experience of being a single mother in a male dominated world, directly limits a woman’s ability to succeed. As head-of-household, these women are responsible for bringing in income to support the entire family. However, they are still only making 2/3 per hour what a man makes (Albelda and Tilly 2003). This places them at an immediate disadvantage to two-parent or male-headed households. When disaster strikes, these women have fewer resources to rely for recovery and less chance of finding stable employment after displacement.

**Class.** Acker (2003) posits that class “has not been retheorized in a way that facilitates its use in a combined analysis” (p. 13). The study of sex segregation, the gendered wage gap, practices of discrimination, and women’s work experience in the labor force and at home were not enough to wholly understand class in terms of a woman’s reality. Instead, she proposes that we need to rethink class as being interrelated to gender and race through processes, active practices, and through the viewpoints of different participants within organizations.
Along with the disadvantage of being female, many single mothers suffer from negative class experiences. Hartmann (2003) argues, “patriarchy is not only psychic, but also a social and economic structure” (p. 206). Women raising children on their own have always been poor (Albelda and Tilly 2003). Making less money than men, having more mouths to feed, and the time and energy required to take care of children has created a “triple whammy” for single mothers (Albelda and Tilly 2003). Low wages and increased responsibilities make it difficult for single mothers to stay out of poverty and subsist without outside help. My research adds to the limited discourse on class by offering an in-depth examination of the experience of downward mobility faced by single mothers in times of crisis.

**Race.** Since the 1960’s, women of color have been challenging the dominant epistemologies of feminist theory (Baca Zinn and Thorton Dill 2003). Even within the feminist movement, there exists a hegemony, made up of predominately white women, that excludes the experiences of women of color (Collins 2003). Therefore, a new approach of “multiracial feminism” was introduced to address the multiple systems of domination within and beyond traditional feminism (Baca Zinn and Thorton Dill 2003).

Glenn (2002) uses a social constructionist framework to identify the mutually constitutive concepts of race and gender. Her analysis of intersectionality focuses on, “the processes by which racialization and engendering occur, rather than on characteristics of fixed race or gender categories” (p. 12). This approach paves the way for understanding how race, class, and gender simultaneously disadvantage individuals in specific historical contexts and how they transform over time due to various changes in society, geographic locations, and institutional domains. As we saw in Hurricane Katrina, women of color
were the most likely to be living in poverty, have no transportation, and experience the most loss. This warrants the need for a closer look at the experiences of women of color to effectively prepare for, resist, and recover from future disasters.

All of the women in my study experienced significant struggle, however, the African-American women had the added vulnerability of color. Each of the African-American women had added difficulties securing housing and employment that were not experienced by the Caucasian women. These added challenges were reportedly based on skin color alone and made it increasingly difficult for the African-American single mothers to recover after displacement to Colorado.

The experiences of women of color have long been ignored. Although my sample was not representative of all the African-American women affected by Hurricane Katrina, it does contribute to the intersectional approach of understanding race, class, and gender by providing a detailed account of the multiple disadvantages that single mothers of color faced after Hurricane Katrina.

Keeping in mind the historical transformation of the “woman’s role,” we need to create a more contemporary understanding of how these roles are disadvantaging different groups of women. The structural oppression needs to be reanalyzed and attacked from a “standpoint” that is sensitive to and inclusive of all of the variations that exist between women, especially in times of disaster. It is the pre-existing structural discriminations based on gender, race, class, age, ability, etc. that inhibit one’s ability to prepare for, resist, and recover from a disaster.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
Hurricane Katrina exposed a fragile disaster relief system, a culture of extreme poverty, and the consequences of mass displacement. There is much to be learned from the mitigation, preparedness, and short and long-term recovery processes of this disaster. This study provides an in-depth look at the specific needs of single mothers before and after a disaster and will help to prepare future disaster professionals to meet the unique needs of single women with children after displacement.

**Address Preexisting Structural Inequalities**

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, many of the single mothers in this study were working multiple jobs in order to provide for their children. They often relied on creative alternatives to financial and social support through a network of family and friends. After displacement to Colorado, these women had minimal outside support and were instantly responsible for all of the financial and emotional needs of their family. This quickly pushed them into poverty, making it next to impossible to survive without government assistance. I recommend that disaster professionals be aware of the multiple, un-paid resources that single mothers rely on prior to a disaster and better prepare to fill those needs after victims are displaced far from pre-existing social networks.

In addition, it would be useful to develop programs to specifically address the concrete needs of single mothers and other vulnerable groups in times of disaster. It is important to acknowledge who is readily given aid and enabled to “survive” a disaster. Programs and/or informational workshops could include information on structural inequities, employment opportunities, childcare needs, language translation, language barriers, better communication, and cultural competency. Training of volunteers and
disaster relief professionals would help to mitigate the downward spiral of vulnerable populations after disaster.

**Reorganize the Distribution of Resources**

Upon arrival to Colorado, many of the single mothers in this study were unaware of the resources that were available throughout the state. Given that none of them went through Lowry Air Force Base or the Pikes Peak Recovery Center, they had to seek out resources on their own. Aside from the 2-1-1 hotline, there was no systematic, comprehensive way for self-evacuated single mothers to learn about resources in Colorado. Disaster providers reported that they relied heavily on word of mouth to distribute information to displaced individuals. This approach was ineffective because displaced people, especially single mothers, were isolated in this new, unfamiliar context and did not have contact with other evacuees. I recommend that disaster relief professionals create a clear statewide and nationwide plan to find displaced evacuees and educate them about disaster relief services. In order to do this, there must be a better way for tracking evacuees from the start. For example, a pre-established phone number that evacuees could call and report their whereabouts would provide not only institutional organization, but also the ability for evacuees to locate lost family members.

In Colorado, there were many resources that were made available to evacuees in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. However, for individuals who came to the state after the first few months or were delayed in their attempts to access disaster relief, little to no resources were left. Many single mothers needed additional resources long after Hurricane Katrina. Cutter et al. (2006) has established that, at minimum, recovery could take up to 11 years. Not providing adequate recovery funds for individuals could
prove to be very costly for taxpayers and assistance programs in the years to come. If disaster relief is absent, people are more likely to fall into poverty creating a perpetual dependence on the welfare system that few people are able to escape. Therefore, I recommend that in a disaster the magnitude of Hurricane Katrina, resources need to be evenly distributed and made available for the long-term.

**Restructure FEMA Assistance Policies**

FEMA was inconsistent and unreliable for most of the single mothers in this study. First, offering to pay rent for a displaced household and then taking it away month by month created instability, confusion, and unnecessary fear in these women’s lives. This hindered their ability to find stable employment and build a community because they were always in fear of having to move. Trying to come up with rent each month made it more difficult for them to pay for the other needs of their families. Second, FEMA gave some women a lump sum of money, offered others rental assistance for over two years, and left other women without any assistance. This was inconsistent and did not work to meet the long-term needs of displaced single mothers. Finally, when FEMA money was made available, it made some mothers ineligible to receive other government services such as Food Stamps and Medicaid. This put these low-income women in a vulnerable situation with no healthcare for their children. I recommend that FEMA create a plan to distribute disaster relief in a systematic and definite way.

In addition, many extended families in New Orleans were accustomed to living in one household and sharing economic and family responsibilities. However, upon displacement, many quickly realized that there was a disincentive to resume living together. FEMA would only provide assistance on a per household basis, which is based
on a blanket model of a hetero-normative family with two parents and two children. This made it difficult for family members to care for one another and pool resources to maximize efficiency. I recommend that FEMA be more sensitive to cultural differences in living arrangements and provide adequate funds based on the number of family members, not a standardized household size.

Make Resource Navigation Easier for Evacuees and Disaster Relief Professionals

Single mothers cannot afford to spend time in long lines waiting for resources. They are already experiencing many time constraints juggling the responsibilities of childcare and employment. This, paired with limited social networking abilities, makes their need for quick, easily accessible food and cash assistance a top priority. This is especially important for those women who were unfamiliar with the process of accessing government assistance. Additional attention is needed to properly facilitate food distribution to single mothers after displacement.

In addition, case managers had a difficult time accessing disaster relief for their clients. They were offered a limited amount of money from random grants that would come and go over time. A Lutheran Family Services case manager explained that often times they would apply for the money for a client and it would already be gone. This was frustrating and made it difficult for them to meet the needs of evacuees.

Also, case managers were paid to help people create and follow a recovery plan after being displaced. They were not providers of financial disaster relief. The Salvation Army in Colorado Springs was the only location that had their own funds to help meet the needs of their clients. The availability of funds made case management much more
effective and reduced the bureaucratic chain of disaster relief. I recommend that in future disasters, all case managers be given funds to address the specific needs of their clients.

**Long-Term Relief Aid**

Single mothers need affordable (or free), easily accessible childcare long after displacement. The absence of a partner’s income or child support payments greatly reduces their ability to pay for childcare on their own. The social networks that single mothers usually rely on for assistance are no longer available after displacement. This warrants the need for the implementation of a childcare program that can be made available specifically to low-income single mothers after displacement. In order to keep these children fed and in a safe home, single mothers need to be provided with the opportunity to find employment and provide for their families. This can only be achieved once consistent daycare is established.

Housing and housing assistance is a common need among many displaced people. However, for single mothers this need is magnified and assistance, or lack thereof, can directly determine their ability to survive. The competing challenges of finding childcare, securing permanent employment, and accessing safe, affordable housing places single mothers in a precarious situation after displacement. Diminished social networks make these challenges increasingly difficult, forcing single mothers to face the struggle of recovery on their own.

In order to recover from disaster and displacement, single mothers have many needs that have to be addressed. As mentioned above, these needs do not exist in isolation and are in fact interactive and multiplicative. Housing, food, childcare, employment, and health care are just some of the competing demands that evacuees faced upon relocation.
to Colorado. For all single mothers, these demands are immense, however, this proves to
be even more difficult when the mother is economically disenfranchised, lacks a social
network, and is not eligible for government assistance. Therefore, resources need to be
offered specifically to address the needs of single mothers post disaster. This research
adds to gender and disaster literature, providing a unique look at the lives of single
mothers and their children after displacement from Hurricane Katrina.
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APPENDIX A

Hurricane Katrina: Displaced Single-Mothers and Natural Disasters
Jennifer Tobin-Gurley, Graduate Student, Colorado State University

Participant Informed Consent Form: Professionals

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Jennifer Tobin-Gurley from Colorado State University. Jennifer can be reached at 970-491-3837 or via email at jtopin@simla.colostate.edu. You may also contact her advisor, Dr. Lori Peek regarding any information pertaining to this research study. Professor Peek can be contacted at 970-491-6777 or via email at Lori.Peek@colostate.edu.

You are invited to participate in a research study about the impacts of relocation on single-mother families that have been displaced in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to Colorado. I would like to talk with you because you work with single-mother families that have been displaced to Colorado. Approximately 40 individuals will be invited to participate in this research study. You will be asked to answer questions about your experiences in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, particularly regarding the availability of resources and the needs of single-mother headed households. The interview will take about 60-90 minutes of your time. There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but I have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential risks. The potential risks associated with this study are difficult emotions such as anger and sadness. There is no known benefit in participating, but I hope this will provide a forum for reflection and an opportunity to make a difference for others by sharing your knowledge.

If you have decided to participate in this project, you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time. You have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason. You also have the right to refuse to be audio recorded.

The interview will be held in a mutually agreeable, private location. Anything that you share during our interview will be kept confidential. In addition, your individual privacy will be maintained in all written and published data resulting from this study. However, if any abuse or illegal activity is discussed, I will have to report that information to the authorities. I will use fake names in place of real names and will change things about your life. Audio files will be stored in a secure location and will be marked with an interview number separate from your name. At the end of the study, all audio files will be erased and all other research materials will be permanently stored in a secure location.

If you have questions about this study, you should ask the researcher before you sign this consent form. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, any concerns regarding this project, or any dissatisfaction with any aspect of this study, you may contact Janell Meldrem, the Human Research Administrator at Colorado State University at 970-491-1655. A signed copy of this two-page consent form will be provided to you at the time of the interview. I have asked for your address below so that I may contact you again. If you are willing, I may want to conduct another interview with you in the future.

Participant’s Initials _____ Date _____
I agree to be audio taped for this study:

☐ Yes  Please Initial __________  ☐ No  Please Initial __________

I am willing to be contacted again to participate in similar studies related to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

☐ Yes  Please Initial __________  ☐ No  Please Initial __________

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I know the possible risks and benefits. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study. I know that I can withdraw at any time. I know that it is my choice to be audio taped. I know that any contact information I provide is optional and will only be used to follow up on the recovery process of Hurricane Katrina Victims. I have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing two pages.

Signed:________________________________________  Date:____________________

__________________

Name:________________________________________  Phone (Optional):______

__________________

Address (Optional):________________________________Email (Optional):______

__________________

__________________

__________________

Name of person providing information to participant  Date

Signature of Research Staff

Jennifer Tobin-Gurley, Department of Sociology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523, 970-491-3837
**Hurricane Katrina: Displaced Single-Mothers and Natural Disasters**

*Jennifer Tobin-Gurley, Graduate Student, Colorado State University*

**Participant Informed Consent Form: Mothers**

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Jennifer Tobin-Gurley from Colorado State University. Jennifer can be reached at 970-491-3837 or via email at jtobin@simla.colosate.edu. You may also contact her advisor, Dr. Lori Peek regarding any information pertaining to this research study. Professor Peek can be contacted at 970-491-6777 or via email at Lori.Peek@colostate.edu.

You are invited to participate in a research study about the impacts of relocation on single-mother families that have been displaced in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to Colorado. I would like to talk with you because you are a single mother who is facing issues associated with relocation to Colorado. Approximately 40 individuals will be invited to participate in this research study. You will be asked to answer questions about your experiences in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, particularly regarding the availability of resources and your needs as a single-mother head of household. The interview will take about 60-90 minutes of your time. There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but I have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential risks. The potential risks associated with this study are difficult emotions such as anger and sadness. There is no known benefit in participating, but I hope this will provide a forum for reflection and an opportunity to make a difference for others by sharing your knowledge.

If you have decided to participate in this project, you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time. You have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason. You also have the right to refuse to be audio recorded.

The interview will be held in a mutually agreeable, private location. Anything that you share during our interview will be kept confidential. In addition, your individual privacy will be maintained in all written and published data resulting from this study. However, if any abuse or illegal activity is discussed, I will have to report that information to the authorities. I will use fake names in place of real names and will change things about your life. Audio files will be stored in a secure location and will be marked with an interview number separate from your name. At the end of the study, all audio files will be erased and all other research materials will be permanently stored in a secure location.

If you have questions about this study, you should ask the researcher before you sign this consent form. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, any concerns regarding this project, or any dissatisfaction with any aspect of this study, you may contact Janell Meldrem, the Human Research Administrator at Colorado State University at 970-491-1655. A signed copy of this two-page consent form will be provided to you at the time of the interview. I have asked for your address below so that I may contact you again. If you are willing, I may want to conduct another interview with you in the future.

**Support Services**
If you would like to talk with someone about what you are going through or have questions about someone close to you, please try contacting one of the mental health agencies that are listed on the attached form. They want to help Hurricane Katrina survivors and are aware of support services for hurricane evacuees living in Colorado. If you are in crisis and need immediate care please dial 911 or visit an emergency room at your local hospital. For outpatient care the attached form will provide you with a list of providers of available resources.

Participant’s Initials ______ Date ______

I agree to be audio taped for this study:

☐ Yes
   Please Initial __________

☐ No
   Please Initial __________

I am willing to be contacted again to participate in similar studies related to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

☐ Yes
   Please Initial __________

☐ No
   Please Initial __________

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I know the possible risks and benefits. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study. I know that I can withdraw at any time. I know that it is my choice to be audio taped. I know that any contact information I provide is optional and will only be used so the researcher can follow up on occasion to check and see how things are progressing with the recovery. I have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing two pages.

Signed: ___________________________________________ Date: _______________

Name: ___________________________________________ Phone (Optional): ______

Address (Optional): ________________________________ Email (Optional): ______

__________________________________________________

Name of person providing information to participant ______ Date ______

Signature of Research Staff

Jennifer Tobin-Gurley, Department of Sociology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523, 970-491-3837

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APPENDIX B

Interview Guide – Disaster Professionals

Demographic Information
• Name
• Age
• Occupation
• Organizational Affiliation

The Disaster Professionals Experience
• How long have you been working in disaster recovery?
• What was your role in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina?
• When did you become involved in the recovery process?
• What were your specific responsibilities following the hurricane?
• If you have had other disaster experiences, what distinguishes Hurricane Katrina?

Resources Available to Hurricane Katrina Victims
• What resources did you and your organization provide to hurricane evacuees?
• How were the victims informed about these resources?
• What organizations did you work most closely with in aiding the evacuees?
• What resources were immediately available?
• What resources are you still offering the evacuees?
• Which resources were the hardest to make available?
• Were there any resources offered specifically for single-mothers?
• In your opinion, is there anything that could have been handled more effectively in this process?
Resources Accessed by Hurricane Katrina Single-Mothers

- How would you determine what constitutes a single-parent family?
- How many single-mothers has your organization been in contact with?
- Roughly, what proportion of your clients were single-mothers?
- Which resources did the single-mothers access most often?
- How did this compare to the resources accessed by the rest of the population?
- Which resources were requested by single-mothers most often?
- How did this compare to the request from other evacuees?
- Which of the most commonly requested resources was not available to the evacuees?
- Were the single-mothers satisfied with what was being offered to help them?
- Do you believe that the single-mothers utilized all of the help being offered?
- Do you think that there was a disconnect between those knowing about resources and those receiving them?
- What do you believe was the most important resource offered that was not utilized by single-mothers?
- What was the major concern of single-mother families in regards to accessing resources?
- Were the resources offered effective, why or why not?
- What would you recommend to improve this process?

Demographics

- Did you have many fathers that came to speak with you?
- Was there one race or ethnic group that was disproportionately represented in those groups accessing resources?
- Were most of the single-mothers African-American?
- How many white people have accessed these resources since Hurricane Katrina?
- Could you draw a conclusion about the economic strata of those accessing resources?
• How would you describe the influence of race on the recovery process?
• Do the evacuees commonly discuss race as a barrier to recovery, given that this a predominately white state?
• Were their any racial tension that existed between the victims and the disaster relief professional?
• What did you do to alleviate these problems?

Outcome of the Victims
• How successful have single-mothers been at reestablishing their lives?
• What were the major contributing factors to those who have had the most success in Colorado?
• Do most single-mothers want to return home or stay in Colorado?
• What has been the biggest struggle for those still living in Colorado?
• How would you rate the success of single-mother families compared to other families?

What is Being Done to Continue to Aid The Victims?
• What resources are being provided to these evacuees for the long-term?
• What resources have been terminated and when?
• Has the termination of these resources greatly affected their ability to survive?
• Who needs the most help still and why?

Future Preparedness Plans
• What is your organization doing to prepare for any future displacement from disasters?
• What does your organization hope to do differently if another disaster strikes?
• Who funds the programs that the evacuees have accessed?
• If you had the power to change government policy, what would you change?
• What could individuals do to create this change?
Is there anything you would like to add about your personal experiences working with Hurricane Katrina survivors?
Is there anything that you would like to add that you think is important in understanding the experiences of displaced Hurricane Katrina survivors? Is there anything you would like to add specifically regarding single-mother families and their needs before and after Katrina?
Anyone else you could recommend that I interview?
APPENDIX C

Interview Guide – Mothers

Demographic Information

• Name
  • Age
  • Occupation Pre- and Post-Disaster
  • Education
  • Names and Ages of those in the Immediate Family

The Mothers Experience in the Disaster

• How did you end up in Colorado?
  • Who did you arrive here with? Do you rely on any of these people for help?
  • What/who was left behind?
  • Has anyone come to stay with you since you’ve been here?
  • Would you consider this the most extreme/hard event of your life?

What Resources Have You Been Offered?

• What kind of help did your family rely on for resources (ex: childcare, food, schooling, etc) before the storm? Since the storm?
  • Who has been the primary caretaker for the child/children since the disaster?
  • How have parents, teachers, and other adults been able to help your family?
  • What resources did you understand were available for you here?
  • Of those resources, which ones have been the most helpful to you?
  • What have you needed most from other people?
  • Do you trust the resources that people have offered to you? Did you go back to them, or did you just rely on them for immediate care?
• Did you feel comfortable with the process of getting the resources you needed?
• Which resources do you think were not effective in helping you reestablish your life?
• Was it difficult to get the resources that were available? (time, paperwork, travel expenses, etc?)
• What resources do you need the most right now?
• What resources do you think you’ll need the most in the long run?
• What do wish would have been handled differently in regards to resources?

**The Mother’s Experience with Relocation**

• What has been the biggest obstacle you have had to face during this process? Was it the change in racial makeup of your community, housing, cultural ignorance, childcare, etc. I thought that would be the hardest, was it?
• What has been the most frustrating part of this experience for you?
• Would you consider yourself a single-mother, if so how do you view that position?
• How do you think being a single-mother has affected your ability to recover from the disaster?
• I have heard a lot about a Caribbean influence in the culture of New Orleans. How has that affected the organization of the family back home?
• Did you have the same experiences being a single-mother in New Orleans as you do here?
• Have you ever felt stigmatized for being a single mother or for being (black)? Did this ever happen back home?
• Have the children lost contact with anyone who was a major part of their life before the storm?
• What role does their father play in their lives?
• How has your race affected your transition to living in Colorado?
• Do you find the difference in culture to be a struggle in the recovery process?
• Did you find the providers of resources to be sensitive to the cultural and/or racial differences?
• What has been your experience looking for work in Colorado?
• Do you think that process was affected by your race?
• How has your relationship with your children changed through this process?
• How has this experience affected your family financially?
• How has your daily routine changed since you moved to Colorado?
• Are you planning on moving back to New Orleans or staying here?
• I really want to write something great about what women need during and after a major disaster. What should I know about this process that could help people in the future?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about you or your children’s experiences since Hurricane Katrina?

Is there anything else you think I should know about being a single-mother?

Is there anything else you think I should know about cultural and racial differences between New Orleans and Colorado?

Is there anyone else you think I should interview?
I invite you to participate!

I am a graduate student doing a study to learn more about the experiences of single mother families who have moved to Colorado since Hurricane Katrina.

I would love to hear your story. If you are a mother and would like to talk to someone about your family’s transition from the Gulf Coast to Colorado, please contact me!

Interviews will usually last about 60 - 90 minutes depending on how much information you want to share. I will come to you. We can meet anywhere you feel comfortable: a coffee shop, the library, your home or anywhere else you decide. Everything you share will be completely confidential.

If you are willing to share your experiences, please contact me.

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