THESIS

KATRINA’S DISPLACEMENT: THE UNTOLD CONSEQUENCES OF DISASTER
RESETTLEMENT IN COLORADO

Submitted by
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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This thesis explores the relationship of the social, economic and cultural capital of New Orleans residents before and after Katrina in an effort to demonstrate how the presence or absence of such resources differentially impacts the recovery experiences of Katrina evacuees in Colorado.

Hundreds of thousands of individuals were displaced after Hurricane Katrina, leading to what many have heralded as one the largest mass-migrations in United States history. Though most Americans have some idea as to the trials and tribulations that Gulf Coast residents faced immediately after the storm, much less is known about the evacuee experience months or years after the event. Similarly, little attention has been paid to the experiences of evacuees who resettled in cities or states with smaller evacuee populations than could be found in places such as Houston, Texas or Atlanta, Georgia. Fourteen thousand of those displaced by Hurricane Katrina ended up resettling in Colorado after the disaster – a state that was both geographically distant and culturally dissimilar to the one they called “home.” How they ended up in the Rocky Mountain state depended a great deal upon the economic and social resources they had at their disposal pre-Katrina.
During the 15-month period that followed Katrina, I interviewed 30 Katrina evacuees who resettled in Colorado after the disaster. My primary research objective was relatively straightforward – I wanted to learn how people’s lives had changed since Hurricane Katrina and their subsequent resettlement. I was particularly interested in discovering whether or not people would be able to draw upon their pre-Katrina capital resources to aid them in their recovery. Which capital resources, including economic, social, and cultural capital would evacuees rely most heavily upon after their disaster resettlement? Similarly, would displaced Gulf Coast residents be able to attain an equivalent value for their capital resources in their new state of residence and what would the consequences be for those individuals who could not? Finally, how would a person’s class, race, and gender impact their disaster resettlement experience? Would it impede or prohibit their ability to accumulate or convert a said capital resource in Colorado?

To pursue these questions, I used a variety of ethnographic methods including: participant observation, informal interviews, semi-structured interviews, and structured interviews with a sample of 30 African-American and white evacuees who relocated to Colorado following Katrina. I also drew upon the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu and his “general theory of the economy of practices” to help me construct my research questions and analyze my data.

After a couple of months of involved research, two specific themes began to emerge among the 30 displaced Gulf Coast residents I interviewed. The first theme revolved around issues of individual and group identity. Namely, I became aware that the majority of people in my research study seemed to identify themselves in one of two ways – either as a person who engaged in “interdependent” behavior with a large group
of family or friends or as someone who prided themselves on their own “self
sufficiency.”

Secondly, I observed marked differences in how people were positioned to adapt
to recover from their disaster resettlement in Colorado. Countless interviews and months
of research helped me realize that an individual’s “vulnerability” or “resiliency” in a
disaster or resettlement context was determined by a great many things that included but
was not limited to their possession of economic capital. I came to the conclusion that I
would not be able to fully understand the disparate recovery experience of evacuees
unless I broadened the scope of my analysis to include resources that were not commonly
understood to have economic value - resources like social and cultural capital.

All of the evacuees in Colorado experienced economic loss from Katrina and their
subsequent resettlement. However, it was the lower-income “interdependent” evacuees in
this study who had the most difficult time recovering their pre-Katrina economic and
social status. Predominantly African-American, these “interdependent” individuals were
deeply embedded within the local culture and economy of New Orleans and they
possessed a wealth of “place-bound” capital resources such as social and embodied
cultural capital that they drew upon to help them “get by.” Despite their modest earnings,
interdependent individuals were able to live comfortably in New Orleans, thanks in large
part to the regular assistance they received from their family and friends. Uprooted from
their communities of origin and resettled in a new state, these individuals quickly
discovered that their “place-bound” capital resources could not be transferred to Colorado
intact. Unlike the other group of evacuees in this study, interdependent participants did
not have savings or other types of financial investments they could draw upon to help
them rebuild their lives in Colorado. What is more, few possessed any type of academic qualification or technical skill that would have rendered them a more competitive applicant than other job seekers. In short, disaster resettlement in Colorado led to the sure and sudden downward-mobility of interdependent participants.

In contrast, predominantly white, “self-sufficient” evacuees were able to achieve a faster and more resolute recovery than lower-income, interdependent evacuees. Armed with financial and educational resources, these economically “self sufficient” individuals described their disaster resettlement in Colorado as an “inconvenience” rather than a financially devastating event. Most proudly proclaimed they would be able to regain their pre-disaster economic status without having to avail themselves of governmental assistance or solicit help from family or friends. Their “go it alone” attitude was inspired in part by their higher annual incomes and their small family and friend networks whom they relied upon for little if any economic assistance. In addition, their advanced academic qualifications, specialized training, and excellent communication skills made them feel confident they could secure a well paid employment position anywhere in the world they should choose to reside, including Colorado. Interestingly, most self-sufficient participants failed to acknowledge the important monetary, temporal, and educational investments their families had made in the cultivation of their own individual skills and talents – investments that most certainly contributed towards their economic security and made it possible to transfer these advantages to an entirely new environment.
The disaster resettlement experience of Katrina evacuees in this study clearly illustrates that economic recovery is not equally likely or possible for all groups of people. As such, it is important to situate our discussion of disaster resettlement within a social inequality framework in which we investigate why certain individuals are able to achieve more “valuable” forms of capital than others. In order to understand the complexity of a person’s resettlement experience, we must all broaden the scope of our analysis and include resources such as social and cultural capital in addition to economic capital.

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Introduction: The Katrina Displacement

Americans will never forget the hot summer day in 2005 when the strength of Hurricane Katrina’s winds and floodwaters wreaked havoc to over 90,000 square miles of Gulf Coast homes, businesses, and communities (Cutter et al 2006). In the days following the storm, area residents sat in their hotel rooms or the homes of family and friends, glued to the television in horror, as images of a region drowned and destroyed flit across their screens. The reality of Hurricane Katrina was experienced in a much more intimate and terrifying way for those individuals who could not or did not evacuate to safety before disaster struck on August 29, 2005. The wide scale destruction that ensued from Katrina was worse than anyone could have imagined and many area residents had to come to terms with the possibility that they would not be able to return home until the debris was cleared, utilities turned on, businesses reopened, and their residence repaired. Unfortunately, few individuals knew how long it would take to complete these efforts and many grew concerned when it looked as if they would not be able to immediately return to their homes, families, and jobs. During this period of uncertainty, many displaced Gulf Coast residents were forced to consider how they would financially support themselves in the interim.

Stories and reports abound regarding the federal government’s gross mishandling of the disaster relief effort and it’s inability to adequately evacuate or assist the region’s most vulnerable residents. However, what has drawn far less attention or public scrutiny is the issue of the wide-scale displacement and resettlement of hundreds of thousands of
Gulf Coast residents following Hurricane Katrina. Few historical precedents exist with which to compare or understand the magnitude of the Katrina displacement; however, some have likened the event to mass migrations that followed the Dust Bowl or the Civil War (Egan 2005, Grier 2005). Although the approximate number of those displaced by the hurricane remains unclear, recent FEMA statistics indicate that more than 650,000 households participated in their housing assistance program (FEMA 2006). Displaced people found refuge in cities and states throughout the South; however, a significant number of people were flung farther a field to regions of the country that bore little resemblance culturally or geographically to the places they called home.

By September 2005, more than 14,000 Gulf Coast residents had found themselves in Colorado after the disaster. How they ended up in the Rocky Mountain state depended a great deal upon the economic and social resources they had at their disposal. Some evacuees with economic and/or social resources came to Colorado of their own initiative in order to join family members or begin a new job. Another group of evacuees moved to the state when they learned of the better aid and living conditions that Colorado offered compared to places like Louisiana or Texas. Others appeared in the state having had no role in the decision that brought them here. These “resource poor” individuals were often evacuated by the U.S. government and were sometimes housed for a month or more at an abandoned Air Force Base in Aurora, Colorado or in a number of hotels scattered throughout the state. Initially, most evacuees assumed their residence in Colorado would be temporary; however, as the days turned months, a great many were faced with the startling realization that their sojourn in Colorado might be indefinite or permanent.
That I became acquainted with any of the evacuees in this study seemed at times to be nothing short of a miracle. Dispersed throughout the state and protected by one of the area’s many “gatekeepers” it was very difficult for me to locate any evacuees, let alone any who wanted to share their story with me, a young white woman who was studying Anthropology (Anthropology what?) at a university in Northern Colorado. From the outset, my research project was extremely difficult to conduct. In contrast to many of the research projects I had heard discussed in my graduate classes, mine felt endlessly chaotic and structure-less. As a result of the sudden onset of the disaster, I did not have the opportunity to research who a Katrina evacuee might be, how I was to find them, or what I might ask upon making their acquaintance. Like many other young disaster researchers I was unaware of the factors that make studying a disaster unique (Stallings 2002). In addition, I was fairly ignorant of the history and culture of New Orleans and I had little to no experience interacting with people who had been uprooted from their communities after having witnessed the sudden, and oftentimes complete, destruction of their material possessions and homes.

In short, I walked into people’s lives at a time of intense drama and hoped (upon hope) that people would want to share their stories with me, a very green, nervous, young researcher. My research questions were intentionally broad at the beginning of this study. In general, I knew I wanted to ask people questions about how their lives had changed since their disaster resettlement in Colorado. In addition, I wanted to discover whether or not people’s pre-existing social and economic resources had been of aid to them during their resettlement. How or how not? In order to get at this type of information, I asked people detailed questions about the nature of their lives in New Orleans and Colorado.
What were their financial and social support systems in either place? What type of occupation did they have in New Orleans and later in Colorado? Did people have supplementary forms of income such as a second job, an informal business, or revenue from property or stocks? What kinds of things did people rely upon their local family and friends for? Finally, as the diversity of my sample increased and my reading deepened, I grew interested in learning whether or not people would be able to convert their pre-Katrina capital resources into financial security in Colorado? How or how not? And beyond this, how would an individual’s gender, class status, or racial background impact their ability to accumulate or convert their capital resources?

After a couple of months of involved research, two specific themes began to emerge among the displaced Gulf Coast residents I interviewed. The first revolved around issues of individual and group identity – issues that were in large part impacted by an individual’s material circumstances. I became aware that the majority of people in my research study seemed to identify themselves in one of two ways – either as a person who engaged in “interdependent” behavior with a large group of family or friends or as someone who prided themselves on their own “self sufficiency” and viewed assistance from network members as sign of personal weakness or ineptitude. Both social categories arose naturally from my interviews with Katrina evacuees and were based on a number of factors in addition to their own identification as either an “interdependent” or “self sufficient” person. Interdependent and self sufficient people differed from one another in terms of their personal ideologies, social practices, and capital resources; however, race and area of origin were additional factors that seemed to distinguish one group from another. Naturally, not all of the evacuees I interviewed fit neatly into one of the two
social categories. Seven of the 30 research participants in this study, exhibited characteristics that were more consistent with one group than another but their capital resources and racial background placed them at odds with the majority of either interdependent or self-sufficient people. These seven “research anomalies” helped me to understand that there was some continuity between both of these social categories as will be discussed in greater detail at the end of each data chapter.

Secondly, I observed marked differences in how people were positioned to adapt to and recover from their disaster resettlement in Colorado. I came to understand that the type and quality of resources a person possessed before and after the hurricane impacted their ability or likelihood to recover. I also realized that I would not be able to fully understand the disparate recovery experience of evacuees unless I broadened the scope of my analysis to include resources that were not commonly understood to have economic value resources like social and cultural capital. Countless interviews and months of research helped me realize that an individual’s “vulnerability” or “resiliency” in a disaster or resettlement context was determined by a great many things that included but was not limited to their possession of economic capital.

This study hopes to provide the reader with a “deeper” and more contextual understanding of the disaster resettlement experience of Katrina evacuees than is commonly offered by the media, narrowly focused scholars, or the public at large. In addition, I seek to contribute to a body of literature that focuses on the embeddedness of social and economic life. All of the evacuees in Colorado experienced economic loss from Katrina and their subsequent resettlement. However, the severity of their loss depended upon both the economic and social resources people possessed before and after
the disaster. Using Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of the “general science of the economy of practices,” this paper will examine the consequences of disaster resettlement among Katrina evacuees in Colorado, focusing explicitly on the divergent recovery experiences of two different groups of evacuees (Bourdieu 1977 & 2001). Following Bourdieu, I will use an expanded definition of capital in which “all goods, material or symbolic…that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after” are recognized as a type of capital individuals have the ability to invest in and profit from. (1977:178). From Bourdieu and other social scientists we learn that both social and cultural capital function as a type of “disguised” economic capital that people may use to access a variety of resources or opportunities that may not be accessible with economic capital (Bourdieu 1977:183, Coleman 1988, Fernandez-Kelly 1995, Field 2003, Granovetter 1973, Portes 1998, Putnam 1995). Under the right circumstances, these capital resources are “mutually convertible” and may present people with tangible economic rewards (Bourdieu 2001, Ong 1999).

In an attempt to consider the fullest possible understanding that Bourdieu’s work can bring to this study, I will spend a significant amount of time in this paper discussing how social inequality is produced and reproduced throughout society. The disaster resettlement experience of Katrina evacuees in Colorado clearly illustrates that economic recovery is not equally likely or possible for all groups of people. As such, it is important we situate our discussion of disaster resettlement within a social inequality framework. In contrast to what the American dream heralds, not all individuals are equally likely to rise out of the ranks of poverty or earn a decent wage. Therefore, we must investigate why such investments are not equally likely or possible for all people to attain and we must
explore why certain individuals are able to achieve more “valuable” forms of capital than others. Rather than seek the answer to this question in the efforts or merits of an individual, however, we must study how social structural forces influence the number and type of options available to an individual. Throughout this paper, I will examine the different types of economic logic that guided the investment strategies of “interdependent” and “self sufficient” evacuees before and after the disaster in the hope that such a discussion will provide the reader with an alternative means with which to understand the economic consequences of disaster resettlement. Both groups of people adhered to markedly different forms of economic logic. However, the differences in what they thought constituted “good economic sense” were in large part dictated by the type and quality of resources they had available to them before the disaster.

In the following chapter, I will examine the literature I reviewed while conducting this research. In the first section, I will provide the reader with a short discussion of findings from a variety of disaster and resettlement studies. Then I will outline Bourdieu’s “general science of the economy of practices” to call attention to the importance of examining non-material and “social” forms of wealth when investigating the consequences of a disaster or resettlement event. In the last section of the chapter, I will also investigate findings from several other social capital and network scholars whose research offers key improvements to Bourdieu’s original theory.

In Chapter Two, I will outline the data gathering methods I used throughout this thesis and I will explain how it was that I came to conduct a disaster resettlement study. In later sections of the methods chapter, I will discuss who I interviewed, how I recruited them, and ultimately what it was I was interested in discovering. I will also detail the
methodological difficulties I encountered in an effort to show how these “challenges” influenced who I interviewed, what I asked of them, and how this impacted my data analysis.

Chapter Three addresses the experiences of “interdependent” evacuees before and after their disaster resettlement in Colorado. These “network rich” but “resource poor” evacuees had the most difficult time recovering from their disaster resettlement in Colorado due to a variety of factors that included their lack of financial capital, specialized training, and advanced academic qualifications. Relative to family and friends back home, these “interdependent” residents were able to get by and live comfortably; however, they did not possess the financial means to spend their money on ventures that would have helped them to increase and safeguard their wealth including savings accounts or insurance policies. Instead, the group of people I am calling “interdependent,” spent their time and energy trying to develop the most abundant and accessible resource they had at their disposal, namely their social connections. Unfortunately, the large scale resettlement that followed Katrina ruptured highly interdependent social networks and made it difficult if not impossible for many individuals to continue to practice an interdependent lifestyle. In the end, the adaptive economic system that had characterized their lives in New Orleans could not be transferred to Colorado intact. Predominantly African American, these individuals arrived in Colorado without a job or the promise of one. Quickly, they learned they would have to start their lives anew in a state where the cost of living was almost twice as high as the home they had been forced to leave. In effect, whatever high degree of social capital they had managed to accumulate in one context could not work for them in their
new environment. One of the aims of this thesis will be to explain how these factors contributed to the “downward mobility” of interdependent evacuees in Colorado. In addition to the goals outlined above, I will also examine the experiences of interdependent whites, who differed from their African American counterparts in a variety of ways, including: the extent to which they engaged in interdependent behavior, their capital resources and, most notably, their racial background.

Meanwhile, Chapter Four examines the experiences of the evacuees who prided themselves on their “self sufficiency.” I will discuss this group of survivors by focusing explicitly on the experiences of white participants who comprised the greatest number of participants. Armed with financial and educational resources, these economically “self sufficient” individuals described their disaster resettlement in Colorado as an “inconvenience” rather than a financially devastating event. In contrast to interdependent residents, most proudly proclaimed they would be able to regain their pre-disaster economic status without having to avail themselves of governmental assistance or solicit help from family or friends. Their “go it alone” attitude was inspired in part by their higher annual incomes and their small family and friend networks whom they relied upon for little if any economic assistance. In addition, their advanced academic qualifications, specialized training, and excellent communication skills made them feel confident they could secure a well paid employment position anywhere in the world they should choose to reside, including Colorado. Interestingly, most self sufficient participants failed to acknowledge the important monetary, temporal, and educational investments their families had made in the cultivation of their own individual skills and talents – investments that most certainly contributed towards their economic security and made it
possible to transfer these advantages to an entirely new environment. Towards the end of this chapter, I will also examine the experiences of two self-sufficient African Americans in an effort to demonstrate how their racial background impacted their ability to accumulate and profit from different capital resources.

Finally, in the Conclusion Chapter, I will provide the reader with a summary of my major research findings and I will attempt show how Bourdieu’s theory and the work of other social scientists helped me to analyze and interpret my data. I will also discuss how my research might be used to advance or refute some of the theoretical ideas set forth by Bourdieu and others.

Now let us turn our attention to Chapter One, wherein we will examine the various types of literatures that informed the development and analysis of this study.
Chapter 1: Literature Review

My primary research question asks about the social and economic consequences of a disaster resettlement event. To approach this set of concerns, I drew upon studies from a variety of research concentrations in the social sciences. In the first section of this chapter, I will provide the reader with a brief discussion of some of the major findings in the disaster and resettlement literature, specifically focusing on the ways in which a person’s class, gender, and racial background contribute to an individual’s overall vulnerability. In order to situate my findings within a broader theoretical framework, and to answer my second two research questions: How pre-existing economic and social resources impact a person’s ability to reconstitute their life in Colorado, and whether people would be able to convert their pre-Katrina resources into economic security in Colorado, I drew upon the theoretical insights of Pierre Bourdieu and his “general science of the economy of practices.” With the help of Bourdieu’s framework of analysis, I hope to illustrate the importance of examining “social” forms of capital when trying to understand the consequences of a disaster resettlement event.

Finally, in the last sections of this chapter, I will provide the reader with a short discussion of “alternate” view’s of social capital and network theory from scholars such as James Coleman, Robert Putnam, and Mark Granovetter, among others.
Disaster & Resettlement Research

In the disaster literature, research has shown that disasters negatively impact the economic situation of the affected population, causing many to experience economic loss (Bolin 1986, Elliot & Pais 2006, Erikson 1976, Fothergill 2004, Fothergill & Peek 2004, Morrow 1997, Petterson et al 2006). Following a disaster, it is common for people to incur significant debt in an effort to fix salvageable items or replace those that have been destroyed (Fothergill 2004, Morrow 1997). Mounting disaster expenses may exacerbate an already vulnerable economic situation by making it difficult for some to keep up with pre-existing bills and newly emergent expenses. In a research study conducted after the 1997 Grand Forks Flood, Fothergill notes that disaster-associated expenses increased the financial burden of most and caused many area residents to experience “severe and sudden” downward mobility (2004:54).

The relationship between a person’s class and their ability to economically reconstitute their lives after a disaster or resettlement has been well documented (Elliot & Pais 2006, Fothergill 2004, Fothergill & Peek 2004, Morrow 1993, Scudder & Colson 1982, Phillips 1993). Not surprisingly, disaster researchers note that people of higher socioeconomic status fare better after a disaster than lower income people (Bolin 1986, Fothergill 2004, Morrow 1993, Petterson et al 2006). Individuals of higher SES are less likely to encounter job loss and experience fewer fluctuations in their income following a disaster (Fothergill 2004, Petterson et al 2006). Indeed, many have salaried positions that provide them with regular and steady paychecks in the harried days and weeks following the event (Fothergill 2004). In addition, individuals of higher SES are more likely to possess savings, investments, or lines of credit they can draw on to finance a variety of
disaster associated expenses (Fothergill 2004, Fothergill & Peek 2004, Petterson et al 2006). As a result of these factors, people of higher socioeconomic status are able to achieve their pre-impact economic status more rapidly than are similarly affected impoverished residents (Fothergill 2004). In the case of Hurricane Katrina, middle class residents evacuated closer to home and were among the first residents to return to their communities and begin rebuilding their residences (Petterson et al 2006: 650).

Individuals of lower SES experience the worst economic loss after a disaster and have the most difficult time recovering their pre-impact economic status (Fothergill & Peek 2004). Many individuals experience job loss while others lose weeks of critical wages when they are unable to attend their hourly paid jobs for days or weeks after the event (Elliot & Pais 2006, Fothergill 2004) People of lower SES are also more reliant upon disaster assistance programs to help them regain their pre-impact economic status. Unfortunately, many lower income people have a difficult time qualifying for, accessing, or negotiating disaster assistance programs. Indeed, after Hurricane Andrew many individuals were prohibited from seeking government assistance due to the fact that aid offices were located in distant areas of the city that were inaccessible via public transportation. (Morrow 1997:153) In addition, researchers have documented instances in which need-based individuals were denied recovery assistance by institutions whose eligibility requirements were based on a nuclear family model such as FEMA’s head of household rule (Fothergill 2004, Scudder & Colson 1982, Morrow 1997, Phillips 1993).\(^1\)

In addition to issues of class, many scholars argue that a person’s racial identity similarly impacts their ability to economically recover from a disaster event (Bolin 1986, ...

\(^1\) Many members of “non-traditional” households do not have adequate evidence to verify their household residence. Inability to provide officials with “proof” of residency effectively prohibited people from accessing disaster assistance.
Cutter et al 2006, Dyson 2006, Elliot et al 2006, Fothergill et al 2000, Morrow 1997, Petterson et al 2006, Phillips 1993). Not surprisingly, scholars observed that individuals of minority racial groups had a more difficult time recovering their pre-disaster economic status than similarly affected white residents (Bolin 1986, Dyson 2006, Elliot et al 2006, Fothergill et al 2000, Morrow 1997, Petterson et al 2006, Phillips 1993). Researchers cite a variety of reasons why economic recovery is more difficult for minority groups. Some scholars argue that ethnic minorities are more “vulnerable” because they have a greater tendency to live in poorly constructed homes or in hazardous areas of a city, such as along a flood plain or within close proximity of a chemically toxic locale (Cutter et al 2006, Dyson 2006). These “vulnerable” locales often bear the brunt of a disaster’s wrath and area residents are likely to incur more damage to their homes and material possessions than individual who live in less hazardous areas (Cutter et al 2006, Dyson 2006, Elliot et al 2006, Petterson et al 2006).

Disaster research also illustrates that minority groups face a greater number of financial, social, and transportation constraints that may prohibit their ability to evacuate before a disaster, causing many to become recipients of institutional evacuations after a disaster event (Barnshaw 2006, Petterson et al 2006). In contrast to individuals who possessed the financial means to evacuate before a disaster, institutionally evacuated individuals were often housed, or resettled in, communities that were not of their choosing and that were geographically farther away from their homes (Petterson et al 2006). Distance from one’s home proved to be an important variable in determining who was likely or able to return home and begin rebuilding. In the case of Hurricane Katrina, Petterson et al (2006) argues that institutionalized evacuations will likely result in the
“permanent dislocation” of African Americans from their communities of origin causing cities like New Orleans to undergo a possible demographic transition.

Moreover, disaster research indicates that ethnic minorities frequently draw upon a different pool of resources to help them financially reconstitute their lives than do similarly affected white residents. Research shows that ethnic minorities are more likely to rely upon government assistance programs to help them with their immediate housing and financial needs (Bolin 1986, Phillips 1993). In a research study conducted in a tornado ravaged community in Texas, sociologist Robert Bolin discovered that a greater proportion of black residents relied upon government assistance programs than whites, who ensured their economic recovery through SBA loans for which few black residents qualified. Likewise, other scholars report that government sponsored housing assistance is one of the best sources of aid available to disaster-affected minorities who may be unable to afford sudden and steep increases in rent due to the destruction or elimination of an area’s affordable housing stock (Fothergill et al 2000, Morrow 1997, Phillips 1993). In addition, a number of researchers argue that family members play an instrumental role in helping ethnic minorities achieve financial recovery after a disaster (Morrow 1997, Fothergill et al 2000). Research conducted after Hurricane Andrew showed that African American and Hispanic households received twice as much help from kin members as did their white counterparts, leading the author to conclude that minority households are more likely to rely upon kin assistance to help ensure their disaster recovery than are similarly affected whites (Morrow 1997: 147).

In addition to issues of race and class, many scholars are beginning to examine the ways in which an individual’s gender impacts how they understand, respond to, and
recover from a disaster or resettlement event (Alway et al 1998, Colson 2003, Cupples 2007, Enarson 1998, Fothergill 2004, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, McMichael et al 2004, Morrow 1997, Ollenburger & Tobin 1998). Historically, few researchers have included a systematic discussion of gender in their analysis of disaster or resettlement events despite widespread recognition that men and women's life experiences differ (Alway et al 1998, Cupples 2007, Enarson 1998, Hochschild 1989, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Those who have examined gender related issues in their research have come to a number of interesting conclusions. For individuals of either sex, the aftermath of a disaster is usually associated with a sharp increase in the number of hours people work at their job and upon returning home from work (Alway et al 1998, Morrow 1997). For instance, in the case Hurricane Andrew, area residents attempted to offset their disaster-related expenses by increasing their work hours and devoting more of their free time to the onerous and time consuming task of home repairs (Fothergill 2004, Alway et al 1998, Morrow 1997).

Research suggests that the burden of work fell more heavily upon the shoulders of women than their male counterparts (Alway et al 1998, Cupples 2007, Morrow 1997). Alway et al (1998) and Morrow (1997) learned that women dramatically increased the number of hours they devoted to their families and the “second shift” after Hurricane Andrew. This discovery is significant, in light of the fact that few of the household or childcare duties associated with the “second shift” are distributed equitably between men and women under normal circumstances. From the research of sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1989), we now know that women are responsible for the lion’s share of

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2 From researchers like Arlie Hochschild (1989) we have learned that the vast majority of women in the United States return from their jobs each day to begin working an unpaid and often ignored “second shift” inside the home.
unpaid labor in the home and work on average fifteen hours a week longer than their male partners (1989:4).³

Research shows that women are significantly more vulnerable than men after a disaster or resettlement event due to a “complex web of factors” that include, but are not limited to, their role as the primary caretakers of their families and their lower socio-economic status. In general, women possess fewer economic resources than men and are more likely to be living in poverty. Their financial woes are often compounded by their need to find affordable and reliable childcare assistance (Alway et al 1998, Fothergill 2004, Ollenburger & Tobin 1998). An inability to do such ultimately delays a women’s return to work and increases her family’s financial vulnerability (Fothergill 2004, Ollenburger & Tobin 1998) Single mothers, as the sole caretakers of their children, are especially hurt after a disaster or resettlement event (Fothergill 2004, Morrow 1998, Ollenburger & Tobin 1998). Often they do not have anyone to help them negotiate or take care of the emotional or financial needs of their family – needs that have only intensified since the disaster or resettlement event. In the end, research findings powerfully demonstrate that fewer of those who successfully recover from a disaster or resettlement event are women (Fothergill 2004, Morrow 1997, Ollenburger & Tobin 1998).

**Bourdieu and the Forms of Capitals**

The disaster and resettlement literature can tell us a great deal about issues related to social vulnerability and why certain people may have a more difficult time reconstituting their lives than others. However, what neither research concentration

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³ At the end of the year, Hochschild discovered that women actually worked a month of twenty-four hour days more than their male partners (1989:4).
adequately details is the way in which the economy is embedded in social institutions such as the family or the educational system. In order to understand the complexities of the social world we must recognize that other forms of wealth exist in addition to economic capital. To truly understand the consequences of a disaster or resettlement event we must also examine “disguised” forms of capital such as social and cultural capital.

In contemporary U.S. society the dominant mode of production is capitalism and the most visible and recognizable form of capital is money or economic capital. Although capitalism may be the dominant mode of production today, it is not, and has not been the only economic system within which humans operate. Indeed, from the works of early anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski and sociologists such as Marcel Mauss, we learn of the existence of alternative economic systems that are governed by an economic logic different from that which capitalism purports. In the book *The Gift*, originally published in 1925, Mauss analyzes the economic institutions of the Kula and Potlatch in order to demonstrate the different ways in which “archaic” non-western people conceptualized and participated in their local economic system. According to Mauss, the economic systems of ancient societies were best characterized as “gift economies” in which people engaged in relationships of generalized reciprocity whereby material and non-material goods and services were exchanged with the knowledge that counter gifts and services would not be immediately forthcoming. Within a gift economy, exchange was not limited to a contract between two individuals. Nor was it limited to the procurement of “property and wealth, moveable and immovable goods and things economically useful” (1990:5).
Mauss consistently refutes utilitarian economic ideas that presuppose all people to be “rational” economic actors motivated by self interest alone. Instead, Mauss argues that economic activity in gift economies is often motivated by the desire to acquire social forms of wealth such as honor, prestige, or status. Mauss argues that the gift economy is best understood as a “total social system” in which the economy is deeply embedded within the social, cultural, religious, and political institutions that comprise a society (1990:38). In contrast to these societies Mauss says, capitalist societies are understood to separate social from economic life. Mauss contends that this way of thinking about the economy has the effect of “hiding” or rendering “invisible” all forms of economic exchange that are not immediately convertible into money or economic capital. Although capitalism may have become the dominant economic institution in a large number of societies, it has by no means replaced or eliminated the gift economy from societies around the world. Instead, Mauss seems to argue that the influence of the gift economy has simply become harder for people to recognize.

Like Marcel Mauss, Pierre Bourdieu seeks to challenge the relevance of applying capitalist economic logic to other societies (2001). Bourdieu maintains that contemporary models of the economy adhere to a very narrow definition of capital in which economic capital is thought to exist exclusively as a material entity best represented by money. For Bourdieu, this conceptualization of exchange and capital are problematic because they divorce the social from the economic and create a false dichotomy within which only one type of exchange and one form of capital are defined as being interested and economic.

Similarly, Bourdieu disproves the assumption that all people are equally likely or able to accumulate and profit from a said capital provided they work hard and exhibit a
requisite level of skill (2001). In general, he contests the idea that capital is distributed equally throughout society and he situates his theory of capital within an inequality framework. Bourdieu encourages people to overcome the “ethnocentric naiveties of economism” and to embrace a more expansive definition of capital in which anything of value is considered to be a type of capital from which individuals can profit (1977:178). By expanding the definitions of economy and capital, he argued, it would become easier to understand how inequality was systematically produced and reproduced throughout society. Furthermore, he thought it would help to make visible the unequal distribution of capital throughout society. In addition, Bourdieu hoped his revisions would illuminate the reasons why certain individuals or groups of people found it easier to accumulate capital or transcend their current class position. Bourdieu advocated for the development of a “general science of the economy of practices” in which capitalist exchange and economic capital were recognized as one of a number of different types of exchange and capital available to people.

The three types of capital Bourdieu discusses in his general theory include: economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital. Each of these capitals posses its own unique characteristics and set of benefits, however; no capital exists in isolation of another. Under the right circumstances, all capitals are meant to be “mutually convertible,” however; research has shown that some individuals may have a more difficult time converting one of their capital resources into another, especially if the said individual is a cultural, racial, or ethnic minority (Fernandez-Kelly 1995, McMichael & Manderson 2004, Ong 1999) Despite Bourdieu’s claim that each capital is fungible, he acknowledges the pre-eminent status of economic capital within his theoretical
framework (2001: 105). Research conducted among Hong Kong immigrants to the United States also supports this finding (Ong 1999). In her ethnography *Flexible Citizenship*, Ong argues that under “current conditions of time space compression…it is primarily economic capital that is being converted into all other forms of capital, not the other way around” (1999: 91). In the following sections of this chapter we will examine the concept of “capital” in general before turning our attention to the specific capital resources outlined in Bourdieu’s “general science of the economy of practices.”

**Types of Capital**

Bourdieu defines capital as “accumulated labor” (2001), and he advocates for the development of a more inclusive definition of capital whereby “all goods, material or symbolic…that present themselves as rare and being worthy of being sought after” are recognized as a type of capital that people strive to accumulate and profit from (1977:178). According to Bourdieu, all capitals, regardless of type, are investments that require significant expenditures of time and energy in order to develop. Few people immediately profit from their investments but they continue to devote their time and energy to these ventures in the hope that their work will yield future profits. Unfortunately, the possession of capital is not wholly determined by the efforts or willpower of an individual or group. Indeed, Bourdieu emphasizes that capital is unevenly distributed throughout society. By thus framing his ideas around the problem of social inequality, Bourdieu argues that it is not equally likely or possible for all people to acquire different types or amounts of capital. He acknowledges that an individual’s ability to develop or accumulate capital is in many ways influenced by that person’s social structural position in society and the class standing of their natal families. For
Bourdieu, the class status of an individual’s family serves as a powerful predictor for the type and quality of capital an individual is likely to inherit from their families. Following this line of reasoning, it is much more likely that individuals of higher class backgrounds will inherit and accumulate different forms of capital than poorer, lower class individuals.

**Economic Capital**

According to Bourdieu, contemporary economic theory popularized current conceptions of economic capital as a material good that is “directly convertible into money” or “institutionalized in the form of property rights” (2001:98). Bourdieu criticizes commonly accepted definitions of economic capital which he argues are too narrow and reductionistic to adequately account for the complexities of the social world. He reminds readers of the existence of other types of capitals but he also acknowledges that economic capital is the most influential and important of all the capitals available to people. Indeed, Bourdieu concedes that economic capital is the “root of all other forms of capital,” (2001: 105). The implications inherent in this bold pronouncement are twofold. First, Bourdieu asserts that it is possible to convert all forms of capital into economic capital. However, he also acknowledges the impossibility of fully reducing social or cultural capital into economic capital (2001: 105). Despite the distinctive nature of each practice, Bourdieu suggests that all forms of capital be they social, cultural, or symbolic, exist as “disguised” forms of economic capital (1977:183). Yet, Bourdieu is quick to warn that not all opportunities or benefits can be acquired with economic capital alone. Indeed, he writes that some opportunities or benefits can only be accessed through the possession of specific social connections, academic qualifications, or social savoir-faire (Portes 1998:4, Svendsen et al 2003: 617).
Cultural Capital

Bourdieu first developed the idea of cultural capital while he was conducting a research project on the uneven academic success of school children from different class backgrounds in the French educational system. During his research, Bourdieu hypothesized that academic success could in large part be measured by the “specific profits that children of different classes and class fractions can obtain in the market” and the “distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions” (2001: 98). Boudieu rejected “commonsense” ideas that purported there to be a causal relationship between an individual’s academic success and their innate mental skills or abilities. He also criticized economists for limiting their measurements of academic success to those most directly convertible into economic capital, such as the amount of money a family invested in a child’s schooling or the total number of hours they spent on homework, lessons, or other types of tutelage (2001: 99). According to Bourdieu, families make diverse investments in the education of their children, and often, he says, the endowments of cultural capital that families invest in their youth are the “best hidden and most socially determinate educational investment” that children receive from their parents (2001: 98-9).

Bourdieu defined cultural capital as a set of skills, tastes, and behaviors that people unconsciously adopt throughout their lifetime. These inherited dispositions, he argued, arm people with a distinctive set of skills or behaviors that may facilitate or hinder an individual’s interactions with dominant institutions and society at large. Cultural capital is not a homogenous resource. Nor is the value of cultural capital easy to quantify. There are three distinct varieties of cultural capital that Bourdieu identified
within a given society: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized cultural capital (2001: 98). For the purpose of this paper, I will limit my discussion of cultural capital to a brief examination of embodied and institutionalized cultural capital, the two forms of cultural capital that have the greatest potential to explain the disparate resettlement experiences of Katrina evacuees in Colorado.4

Throughout his writing, Bourdieu allocates the most attention to his concept of embodied cultural capital which he describes as “external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into habitus” (2001: 99). Embodied cultural capital manifests itself in the “natural” dispositions, opinions, movements, and mannerisms a person unconsciously absorbs and learns throughout their lifetime. People spend an inordinate amount of time, energy and labor trying to cultivate these taken-for-granted dispositions, yet rarely do they perceive their efforts as being linked to any type of capital investment. Instead, people generally suppose that an individual’s skills or talents are the result of innate aptitude or biological genes that predispose certain individuals to excel at activities that many others may fail (2001: 100).

While not explicitly stated by Bourdieu, it is also important to note the role place plays in the creation of embodied cultural capital. Place informs the type and variety of embodied cultural capital a person develops. Writing on Bourdieu’s theory of Habitus, Waterson argues that ‘the worlds of meaning that cultures create grow out of time and space. In their interactions with local environments humans shape the landscape around

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4 I will not elaborate upon the concept of objectified cultural capital because I do not find this part of Bourdieu’s theory to be particularly helpful in understanding or explaining the differential resettlement experience of evacuees in Colorado. Stated briefly, objectified cultural capital is the “cultural capital objectified in material objects and media, such as writing, paintings, monuments, instruments” (Bourdieu 2001: 101). For a greater elaboration of the concept of objectified cultural capital please see Bourdieu’s book Distinction (1984) or his chapter “The Forms of Capital” (2001).
them…over time, as meaning becomes sedimented into landscape, so people themselves become embedded or implicated in the landscape (2005: 334). Place-bound capitals such as embodied cultural capital or social capital have a difficult time being transferred to a new locale because their “value” has not been determined by an institution such as the U.S. government, world financial markets, or an accredited university. As such, it is infinitely more challenging, if not impossible, for an individual to attain an equivalent value for their embodied cultural capital upon moving to a different area of the country or world.

Unfortunately, not all embodied cultural capital is valued equally by society. According to Bourdieu, that which ranks the highest among people is that which is also considered to be the most rare. Not all individuals possess the time or money to afford the luxury of extending their children’s education or helping them to develop certain skills or behaviors. Hence the individuals who cultivate the most valued forms of cultural capital are also those whose families possess the greatest amount of economic or cultural capital. Bourdieu elaborates upon this point as follows:

It can immediately be seen the link between economic and cultural capital is established through the mediation of time needed for acquisition…the length of time for which a given individual can prolong the acquisition process depends on the length of time for which his family can provide with free time from economic necessity (2001: 101).

Conversely, individuals who hail from capital-poor families are unlikely to develop an embodied cultural capital that will prove particularly profitable amidst wider society. For Bourdieu, the capacity to acquire capital is thus often, a direct consequence of an individual’s class position in society. Bourdieu argues that it is not uncommon for individuals to become entrenched in the class positions of their natal families and he
suggests that it may be difficult or unlikely for an individual to rise out of the class position into which they were born.

An individual’s class status is not the only social variable that impacts whether or not someone is able to accumulate a “valuable” form of embodied cultural capital. In a research study conducted among highly educated, upper class Hong Kong migrants to the United States, Ong (1999) found that one’s status as a minority might serve as an impediment to the accumulation or fungibility of a capital resource if an individual’s racial, linguistic, or cultural “embodiment” was perceived of as lesser by members of the host society (1999: 91). Ong writes that “Chinese students and professionals entering the United States lack the appropriate racial and cultural origins that are stereotypical markers of racial prestige in Western democracies…the dissonance between these racialized immigrants and the cultural skills they wish to acquire produces structural limits to the conversion of economic wealth into social prestige” (1999: 96).

In contrast, institutionalized cultural capital is conferred upon an individual by a centralized organization that possesses the power and authority to award individuals with certificates or degrees that indicate the level of knowledge, skill, or competence an individual has achieved within a particular institution. Although there are any number of organizations that exist in society, Bourdieu primarily restricts his analysis of institutionalized cultural capital to an examination of the educational system and the academic qualifications they award. He argues that academic qualifications are the most basic manifestation of institutionalized cultural capital and he writes that “academic qualifications are to cultural capital what money is to economic capital” (1977: 187). In contrast to embodied cultural capital in which the value of a certain set of dispositions is
difficult to perceive or calculate, institutionalized cultural capital has a “fixed” and determined value that makes it easy to observe, measure, and market. Bourdieu asserts that the institutional recognition of an individual’s cultural capital helps to establish a standard measure of evaluation through which biologically unique individuals can be compared, assessed, and in some circumstances exchanged (2001).

In addition, Bourdieu notes that it is easier to convert institutionalized cultural capital into economic capital than it is to do so for embodied cultural capital. In part this is because the educational system “gives the same value to all holders of the same certificate” thereby making it possible to “relate all qualification holders to a single standard…and guaranteeing the convertibility of cultural capital into money” (1977: 187). Institutionally recognized academic qualifications bestow upon an individual the guarantee that their cultural capital has a definitive and agreed upon economic value they can access in a variety of environments. In contrast to embodied cultural capital which is heavily influenced and dependant upon local contexts or circumstances, the value of institutionalized cultural capital is not determined by specific spatial or temporal variables (2001). Institutionalized accreditation enables an individual to market and sell their skills in a national or global marketplace for an agreed upon or institutionally sanctioned price.

The “objective” validation of educational qualifications provides people with the assurance that they will be able to obtain a similar income or employment position wherever in the world they go. On the surface this single market of educational qualifications appears to be beneficial for all. In reality, Bourdieu argues that such a system benefits only those who are in control of the system; namely the elites. In contrast
to popular belief, Bourdieu refutes the idea that institutional assessments of value are inherently objective or fair. Instead, he argues that institutional appraisals of ‘worth’ are subjective decrees made by the powerful in society in order to secure and advance their class interest.

Bourdieu dismisses the idea that academic success is necessarily the result of innate skill, hard work, or individual merit. Instead, he argues that academic success is best determined by the amount of economic and cultural capital a family possesses. Unsurprisingly, individuals who hail from families of a higher socio-economic status are more likely to possess advanced academic qualifications because their families can afford to delay their child’s entry into the workforce. This purchase of time frees an individual from “economic necessity” and allows them to extend their education beyond the minimum number of years required by the state (2001: 107). Naturally, it is assumed that those with advanced academic degrees will earn more than those without. This example illustrates relationship between economic and institutionalized cultural capital - and shows how monetary inputs in education impact an individual’s future income earning ability.

Social Capital

In recent years, scholars and practitioners have enthusiastically employed Bourdieu’s ideas about social capital in order to explain a diverse array of social phenomenon. The premise of social capital demonstrates that “social networks are a valuable asset” that can be used in order to gain access to important information or resources (Field 2003: 12) Scholars debate what combination of relationships are most effective for cultivating social capital; however, most scholars agree that social capital is
likely to form amongst network members who share similar values and norms, engage in relationships of reciprocity, and trust one another.

**Bourdieu’s Concept of Social Capital**

A number of scholars have cited Bourdieu as one of the first social scientists to embark upon a complete and full rendering of the concept of social capital (Field 2003, Portes 1998). In contrast to other social capital scholars, Bourdieu situated his insights about social capital within a framework of structured inequalities. Bourdieu defined social capital as “the aggregate of actual or potential resources that are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance” (Bourdieu, 2001: 103). Bourdieu understood social capital to provide an individual with potentially important benefits and opportunities depending upon the type and quality of resources the members of a person’s network possessed. Bourdieu was quick to remind readers that the development of social relationships was no easy feat. Social relationships do not materialize overnight nor do they develop of their own accord. Instead, the creation of social relationships requires people to develop “investment strategies” aimed at cultivating new relationships and maintaining old ones (2001: 103).

In particular, Bourdieu identified two specific strategies people adopted when attempting to create or maintain social relationships. The first type of investment strategy discussed by Bourdieu was the ability to socialize. Bourdieu writes that the “reproduction of social capital requires an unceasing effort of sociability” wherein people expend a significant amount of time and energy visiting acquaintances, attending social events, and meeting new people (2001: 104). Reciprocity between and among network members was the second type of investment strategy Bourdieu elaborated upon. Perhaps inspired by the
work of scholars like Marcel Mauss (1990), Bourdieu writes that regular acts of exchange and reciprocity help to strengthen and cement relationships among people who may or may not be well acquainted. Like Mauss (1990), Bourdieu asserts that acts of delayed reciprocity help to create relationships of indebtedness among network members. Contrary to popular belief, the presence of debt among network members may be one of the main factors that help people to establish trusting relationships with one another. Individuals may or may not trust one another at the outset of an exchange but it is through the process of waiting for a return gift that trust is fostered between individuals, groups, or parties. Over time, feelings of trust continue to deepen among network members who regularly exchange goods and services. Hence, the development of trust may be understood as a direct consequence of the amount of indebtedness that exists among network members. Bourdieu acknowledges that both investment strategies are costly; however, he posits that people willingly accept the costs in the hope that their efforts will yield future profits or rewards (2001: 103).

Bourdieu argues further that it is possible to calculate the economic value of an individual’s social connections. According to Bourdieu, one can measure the social capital of an individual by looking at three interrelated factors: the number of social connections a person possesses, the time it took to create and maintain those relationships, and the relative “worth” of those connections based upon the quality of resources a particular association generates. Bourdieu argues that well connected and economically prosperous individuals are more valuable network members than individuals who possess few social connections or economic resources. In contrast to later social capital theorists, Bourdieu contends that social capital is an elite resource
cultivated and maintained by powerful and affluent society members in order to advance their interests and exclude non-elites from accessing privileged economic or social resources (Field 2003).

Like embodied cultural capital, social capital is another “place-bound” resource that most often develops in a very specific social and spatial environment. In an effort to elaborate upon this idea, Dovey argues that “buildings and neighborhoods both ground and structure social networks, enabling and constraining the development of social capital whether in housing enclaves, shopping precincts, sporting venues, community centers or university departments” (2005: 287). As a “place-bound” resource it is important to remember that it is not always possible to transfer an individual’s social capital to a new place.

**James Coleman: Alternate Views of Social Capital**

Following Bourdieu, a number of scholars have elaborated upon these concepts and developed their own ideas about of social capital. Among these, American sociologist James Coleman stands out as being one of the most influential and frequently cited social capital theorists of the twentieth century. Like Bourdieu, James Coleman was interested in developing a theory that would help to account for the different rates of academic success that occurred among students from distinctive racial or class backgrounds who attended a variety of educational institutions including public, private, or religious schools (Field 2003). However, Coleman’s theory of social capital differs from Bourdieu’s in a number of ways. Unlike Bourdieu, Coleman’s believes that middle and lower class people are just as likely to use and benefit from social capital as are their elite counterparts. In addition, Coleman does not situate his rendition of social capital
within a larger theoretical framework. Instead, Coleman developed the theory of social capital in an effort to unite and ameliorate the theoretical differences and shortcomings of sociological and economic theory. Coleman was particularly interested in integrating aspects of rational choice theory within his explanation of social capital in the hope that such an effort would help to illuminate why self interested people decided to cooperate with others (Field 2003: 21). Rational choice theory assumes all people to be individual actors intent on pursuing their own interests and goals without care or concern for how their actions might impact others around them. Based upon this premise, rational choice theorists argue that all forms of social interaction can be viewed “as a type of exchange” wherein individuals choose to cooperate with others because of the individual benefits they derive from such efforts. Coleman did not think that people were naturally inclined or predisposed to cooperate or collaborate with others. Instead, he argued that relationships of cooperation manifested among people when, and only when, such cooperation personally benefited the interests of the individuals involved (Field 2003: 21-22).

Like Bourdieu, Coleman acknowledges the uneven distribution of social capital throughout society and he recognizes that some individuals possess more valuable types of social capital than others (Coleman 1994: 300). Despite his acknowledgement that social capital may help to perpetuate relationships of inequality within society, Coleman primarily writes about social capital as a positive and beneficial social good (Field 2003, Portes 1998).

According to Coleman, social capital facilitates action and makes it possible for individuals or groups to accomplish particular deeds that might otherwise be difficult to
achieve. Coleman argues that social capital is a productive resource that “inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors” and is used by actors to create a system of reciprocity and obligation (Coleman 1988: S98). For Coleman, the strongest and most resilient type of social capital is that which is created within the “primordial” social organization of the family (Field 2003: 26). Coleman believes families to be the primary social institution in which social capital is likely to develop and he assumed that people were more likely to trust individuals with whom they were biologically related than those individuals whose acquaintance they made within the confines of a “constructed” social organization (Field 2003: 26).

The role of trust is particularly important for Coleman and plays a significant role in the development of his version of social capital theory. He writes that social capital functions best within a “closed” social network in which trust has been established, behavioral norms created, and a system of sanctions implemented (1988). Unlike Bourdieu, Coleman does not explain how trust develops among people. He discusses the concept of trust as something that is intrinsic to closely related people but he fails to explain the mechanisms by which these relationships of trust form among non-kin. In contrast to Bourdieu, who views acts of exchange and reciprocity as the primary means through which trust is formed, Coleman argues the inverse: that it is the presence of trust, and trust alone, which enables people to embark upon reciprocal relationships. In turn, he argues these reciprocal relationships are maintained among people who regularly trade goods and services among one another and who become indebted to other network members (Coleman 1988).
Robert Putnam

John Field (2003) writes that Putnam has become “the dominant voice” within social capital theory, in part because his work has breached the high and often inaccessible walls of academia and found a wider audience within the realms of government and policy as well as among the general public (p. 39). Putnam defines social capital as “the features of social life- networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (Putnam 1995: 664-665). Like Coleman, Putnam argues that social relationships can become a source of capital if people establish relationships in which social norms are shared and trust is present. Unlike Bourdieu and Coleman, Putnam is most concerned with determining the social capital of a population rather than that of an individual and he seeks to understand how social capital is created and sustained through civic engagement and participation in political organizations, clubs, or recreational associations. Motivated in great part by the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville, Putnam similarly stresses the importance of associational participation within communities. Putnam endorses a Tocquevillian-inspired ideal that high levels of community involvement teach “people how to cooperate across civic life” and encourage the development of democratic ideals within a community (Field 2003: 30). Findings from Putnam’s research show evidence of a direct association between an individual’s class background, race, or employment status, and a community’s level of civic engagement (1995: 672).

Interestingly, Putnam found that communities with the highest level of civic engagement were characterized by high levels of employment, middle to lower class residents, and a greater proportion of African Americans (1995). He argues that “racial
differences in associational membership are not large,” however, it was determined that blacks had higher rates of group membership than whites, due primarily to their involvement in churches and ethnic clubs (1995: 672). The subject of trust was the one area in which racial differences were the most pronounced. In response to the question, “can most people be trusted,” Putnam found that “about 17% of blacks endorsed the view that most people can be trusted as compared to about 45% of whites, and about 27% of respondents of other races” (1995: 672). In later research, Putnam (2007) argues that residents of racially, culturally, and financially homogeneous communities “trust” their neighbors more than individuals who live in more diverse communities. Similarly, he argues that these communities also exhibit higher levels of social capital as expressed in higher rates of civic participation, group membership, and feelings of trust than “diverse” communities which encourage people to “hunker down” and isolate themselves from the social world around them (Putnam 2007: 149). Compounding the matter further, Putnam writes that his research found there to be a “strong positive relationship between inter-racial trust and ethnic homogeneity” but that inter-racial or in-group trust diminished with a rise in diversity (2007: 147).

Putnam posits that it is also possible to measure the social capital of a population by analyzing a number of different variables including the time one spends socializing, attending club meetings, or participating in community events. In addition, Putnam asserts that network members use different types of social capital (bonding or bridging) in order to “get by” or “get ahead” (Field 2003: 65). Bonding social capital occurs among friends or family and is used in order to reinforce solidarity and reciprocity and to “get by.” In contrast, bridging social capital occurs among people whose relationships to one
another are not as intimate or close. Putnam maintains that ties to more distant social acquaintances may prove particularly beneficial for individuals who are interested in accessing resources different from their own and could help them to “get ahead.” In contrast to Coleman, Putnam asserts that kinship members play a lesser role in assuring social solidarity than connections among friends or weaker network members (Field 2003: 33).

**Weak and Strong Ties**

Discussions of the unique benefits that are likely to arise from the possession of “strong” or “weak” ties predates Putnam’s concepts of bonding or bridging social capital (Coleman 1988, Granovetter 1973, Liu et al 1972, Portes 1998). The phrases “strong” and “weak” ties were first employed by social network scholars and were later adopted by social capital theorists in an effort to distinguish among different types and varieties of social relationships. According to Granovetter (1973: 1361) it is possible to measure the “strength” or “weakness” of a network tie by looking at the following four factors: “the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding) and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie.” Today, the study of weak and strong ties has become a popular research focus for an abundance of social scientists whose research topics are as varied as they are diverse.

**Strong Ties**

Social scientists may not have used the terms “strong” or “dense” ties within the body of their research findings; however, the role of kin assistance has received ample attention within a variety of anthropological and sociological writings. The majority of such research has focused on the advantages that kin assistance affords to different
people around the world, many of whom are both politically and financially

Anthropological research on kin assistance in the United States has primarily
detailed the ways in which impoverished ethnic or cultural minorities routinely rely upon
their kin ties for instrumental services and help with their day to day survival (Halperin
1994, Stack 1970). In the ethnography *All Our Kin*, Carol Stack found that lower income
African Americans regularly exchanged goods and services with other network members
in order to secure daily necessities such as food, clothing, childcare and transportation.
Stack suggests that economic scarcity compelled network members to engage in
relationships of reciprocity whereby people exchanged goods and services in an effort to
obligate or indebt other network members. She argues that network-provisioned
assistance functioned as a “profoundly creative adaptation to poverty” and helped to
foster relationships of obligation and trust among network members (Stack 1970: 43).

Halperin (1994) found that similar relationships of reciprocity and exchange
operated among poor, white extended families in an Appalachian region of Kentucky.
Among impoverished Appalachian residents, it was the family rather than the individual
that was of the utmost importance and concern. The habitual acts of reciprocity that
occurred among kin members helped families to stay financially afloat; however they did
not help them to get ahead. Halperin observes that in poor and highly interdependent kin
groups, “the priority is not profit or even upward mobility, but rather the maintenance of
the extended family” (Halperin 1994: 32).
Research from a variety of disaster contexts supports many of the aforementioned findings and provides evidence of the ways in which kin networks provide people with direct benefits during disaster recovery. (Fothergill 2004, Hulbert et al 2000, Morrow 1997, Oliver-Smith 1986). Morrow argues that disaster recovery is easier for close knit families and she warns against instituting recovery efforts that might jeopardize or weaken kin assistance (1997: 169). In an extensive review of the disaster and resettlement literature, Oliver-Smith concludes that resettlement projects are likely to fail if individuals are separated from their social networks and removed from their communities of origin (1991: 13). Other researcher’s have also remarked upon the indirect and often invisible forms of assistance kin networks can yield after a disaster or resettlement event. After Hurricane Andrew, Hulbert et al found that family members played a critical role in linking their disaster-affected relatives to social service providers involved in the relief effort (2000: 615).

Similarly, resettlement scholars discuss the ways in which displaced immigrants rely upon their kin ties to help them negotiate their new place of residence (Colic-Peisker et al 2003, Lamba 2003, McMichael et al 2004). In particular, these researchers note the frequency with which resettled people rely upon their relatives for employment assistance (Colic-Peisker et al 2003, Lamba 2003). Colic-Peisker et al and Lamba found that refugees in Australia and Canada frequently relied upon friends, family, or ethnic group members to attain employment information and assistance. Both authors recognized the power of dense strong kin networks to help refugees find employment; however, they also warned that jobs attained through such networks were often part-time, poorly paid, and physically taxing. In the words of Navjot Lamba, “co-ethnic networks may be used
as strategies for survival; however; they may function little beyond that” (Lamba, 2003: 48).

Sociologist Alejandro Portes echoes many of the concerns expressed by researchers Halperin (1994) and Lamba (2003). Namely, he refutes the idea that assistance among kin or closely connected network members necessarily promotes positive social ends (1998). Indeed, Portes identifies four instances in which dense social networks may promote maladaptive behavior among network members. Specifically, Portes writes that dense social networks may encourage the following types of behavior: “exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward leveling norms” (1998: 15). A number of social capital scholars have made similar observations, causing many to conclude that social capital is just as likely to foster inequality within society as it is to provide individuals with critical services or novel opportunities (Bourdieu 2001, Fernandez-Kelly 1995, Field 2003, Lareau 2003, McMichael et al. 2004, Stack 1970).

**Weak Ties**

Conversely, weak tie proponents stress the importance of being connected to people who lie outside of one’s immediate circle of family and close friends and who possess information and resources different from the majority of people within an individual’s social network. Sociologist Mark Granovetter, developed the initial work distinguishing strong from weak ties (1973) He argues that weak ties offer an individual the promise of upward mobility in contrast to the stability that dense ties and interdependent kin networks foster. According to Granovetter, “weak ties,” or socially distant acquaintances, require smaller investments of time and energy and have the
potential to yield a greater assortment of information or opportunities than that which can be accessed from stronger social connections. Weak ties broaden both the number and diversity of a person’s social network thus enabling an individual to access information from both their weak ties and those individuals with whom a weak tie is directly or indirectly acquainted. In particular, Granovetter demonstrates the ways in which weak ties may function as a valuable asset to individuals in search of employment opportunities (1973: 1371). Referencing previous research, Granovetter writes that many people within his research population learned of their current employment position from individuals whom they saw on an infrequent basis. Interestingly, Granovetter also documented instances in which individuals derived employment information from individuals with whom their network member was connected but with whom they had little or no relationship (1973: 1372).

A number of other scholars also cite the importance of weak ties; however, they argue that the formation of weak ties may be difficult for some people to achieve, especially if an individual is of a different ethnic, racial, or national background (Glaeser et al 2000, McMichael et al 2004, Putnam 2007). Trust experiments conducted by Glaeser et al demonstrated that the lowest levels of trust existed among people who were of different racial or national backgrounds. Glaeser et al concluded that heterogeneous social relationships “may decrease trustworthiness in social groups” and may inhibit an individual’s ability to create “bridging” social capital (2000: 836). Similarly, McMichael et al discovered that Somalian refugees had a difficult time establishing new relationships with people in Australia because of the trauma they and their families suffered during Somalia’s civil war. The authors contend that civil war, family separation, and
displacement “diminished social solidarity and trust…and made it difficult for women to establish new relationships” in their resettled communities (McMichael et al 2004: 93).

In the following chapter, I will discuss how it is that I came to conduct a disaster resettlement research project among Katrina evacuees in Colorado. I will also outline the methods I used in this study including how I gained entry to the evacuee community, the types of questions I asked evacuees, and some of the methodological difficulties I encountered. My goal is to illustrate how my research methods influenced both the types of questions I asked people as well as who I was ultimately able to interview and why.
Chapter 2: Research Methods

In this chapter I will examine the data collection methods I used throughout my thesis. I will explain how I became involved in this research project and what I hoped to learn from an examination of the resettlement experience of Katrina evacuees in Colorado. In addition, I will outline where I conducted the interviews, when, and among whom. Later in the chapter, I will describe the techniques I used to help me analyze my data focusing explicitly on the ways in which a “grounded theory” approach provided me with a lens with which to understand and interpret my data. Finally, I will outline the methodological challenges I encountered during the course of this research project and I will show how these challenges impacted who I was able to interview and the types of questions I was able to ask.

August 29, 2005

Initially, there was nothing extraordinary that marked August 29, 2005 as a day different from any other day in my life. In fact that Monday was lovely in its predictability and I was able to partake in all of the small weekend routines that I relished. I woke up around 9 A.M. to yet another perpetually sunny day in Fort Collins, Colorado. I then ate, showered, and left my house to begin a day of reading and drinking strong, aromatic coffee at one of my favorite coffee shops in town. After most of the daylight hours passed and I felt satisfied with the reading I had accomplished, I packed my things and headed home. Later in the evening I would meet up with some of my friends for dinner and from there we would frequent a few of the bars in Fort Collins. All
in all August 29, 2005 was a very normal and pleasurable day for me. It was not until Monday that I became aware of how different, frightening, and tragic August 29, 2005 was for people who resided on the Gulf Coast.

**Research Design**

I decided to do research on the Katrina evacuee population in Denver, Colorado after I received a message from my advisor, Dr. Browne the Saturday after Katrina had made landfall. She urged me to call her in regard to a possible thesis topic. On September 3, 2005 and I was in Ohio for the weekend visiting my parents. I returned her phone call immediately and we began to discuss the possibility of conducting a research project detailing the life experiences of Gulf Coast residents after the disaster. We quickly agreed that it would not be feasible for me to conduct research in New Orleans because I was in the middle of my graduate studies and would be unable to make frequent trips to the disaster struck area. After further reflection, Dr. Browne informed me that people were being evacuated to Colorado and that it might be best to conduct my research project among those individuals whom the hurricane had displaced. Like most Americans at the time, I felt a deep desire to better understand the enormity of the disaster, and if possible, to offer a measure of assistance to one or many of the individuals whose lives profoundly changed because of this storm. In addition, I was aware that my close proximity to Denver offered me the distinct advantage of being able to regularly meet, observe, and interview people who lived within a few hours drive of my home in Fort Collins. I hoped my “convenience of proximity” would afford me the opportunity to better observe how people’s resettlement experience unfolded and changed over time.
Prior to Katrina, I had never considered embarking on a research project that would examine people’s experiences in the aftermath of a natural catastrophe. I assumed I would conduct research on the lives of the working poor or examine the resettlement experience of recent Mexican immigrants to the United States. I was primarily interested in examining how financially “vulnerable” people negotiated institutions, jobs, and family in order to assure their day to day survival and make “ends meet.” When Dr. Browne called to see if I would be interested in conducting research among Katrina evacuees in Colorado, she reminded me that this research project would allow me to explore the issues I cared about most. In this case though, the vulnerabilities imposed by the disaster would exceed all imagining.

With encouragement from Dr. Browne, I began to think about central issues or questions I wanted to address in a qualitative study on Katrina evacuees in Colorado. At that point in time, I knew very little about the demography of the evacuee population or the types of issues this group of people would likely confront. In addition, I was unaware of the circumstances that make studying a disaster population unique. After becoming better acquainted with the disaster literature, I learned that many disaster scholars begin their research projects with only a limited understanding of the particularities of the affected population or the research questions they would like to ask. Indeed, one researcher contends that one of the greatest difficulties posed by disaster research is the “lack of time between the occurrence of disaster and the fielding of research: lack of time to develop theory and hypotheses….lack of time decide which events are even worthy of study” (Stallings 2002: 23). I, too, had very few ideas about the types of questions I
wanted to ask Katrina evacuees and I did not develop a better sense of the issues evacuees faced until weeks after I began my research project.

Before any more specific research plan could be developed, I tried to determine how to gain access to the evacuee population in Denver. In general, meeting evacuees in Colorado proved to be a very challenging feat (as will be discussed in greater detail in the Gaining Entry section of the paper) and it was not until after I began working as a Salvation Army volunteer at the Lowry Air Force Base that I learned more about the demography of the evacuee population. The majority of the people who evacuated from Louisiana to the Lowry AFB were lower-income African Americans who were residents of New Orleans. With this information, I decided to initially focus my research on the ways in which African-American Katrina evacuees were adapting to their lives in a place that was as distant as it was foreign to the city and homes they had been forced to abandon.5

However, after Christmas it became increasingly difficult for me to find African American evacuees who wanted to participate in my research project. Due to these difficulties, I decided to expand the scope of my research project and interview white evacuees as well. The inclusion of white research participants proved exceedingly beneficial and allowed me to more objectively assess the influence of race and class on an individual’s resettlement experience.

The primary objective of my research was to discover how Katrina evacuees would respond to the massive familial, social, and economic changes that occurred as a

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5 I was very fortunate to have the dedicated guidance and invested mentorship of Dr. Browne, an Afro-Caribbean scholar, and Dr. Peek, a disaster scholar. Both Dr. Browne and Dr. Peek helped me to formulate my research questions. In addition, I was lucky to meet with them on a weekly basis to discuss my research and receive their input and advice.
result of the hurricane and their subsequent resettlement in Colorado. I wanted to learn what factors or variables would make their settlement in Colorado difficult and I was curious to see if the disaster and the events that ensued might yield any positive opportunities for the Katrina survivors. In addition, I was interested in exploring an idea put forth by Charles Fritz, about how disasters afford the researcher and the public the rare opportunity to acknowledge and explore the root causes and consequences of societal inequalities. Fritz contends that disasters can reveal the “isolated character of human suffering” and make public the personal struggles that individuals daily endure but which are rarely acknowledged as anything other than a normal or likely life experience (Fritz 1961: 658).

I became interested in understanding how disaster resettlement had affected evacuees financial well being as I conducted more interviews and learned about the hardships that were unevenly distributed across this evacuee population. However, I wanted to understand the economic consequences of resettlement in a holistic context that was not frequently available from the reports I saw on TV or read about in the newspaper. My interest in these issues deepened when I discovered the work of Pierre Bourdieu in Dr. Browne’s contemporary theory class. I realized that Bourdieu’s “general theory of the economy of practices” would provide me with a critical lens to evaluate the many economic consequences that followed an individual’s disaster resettlement. In particular, I was attracted to the breadth of Bourdieu’s definition of capital and his reasoning that many varieties of capital exist in addition to economic capital. As I elaborated in the previous chapter, Bourdieu argued that although economic capital may be at the “root” of a variety of different capitals people could possess and profit from,

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6 Such as the loss of a family member, job, or home.
there were other vitally important sources of capital that influenced individual trajectories as well. Each type of capital carries its own distinctive characteristics and set of benefits; however, he argued it was possible, under certain circumstances, to convert one type of capital into another. By relying on Bourdieu’s theory of how different types of capital interact with one’s ability to achieve upward mobility, I hoped to situate an individual’s loss within a larger context in which “social” variables such as social connections, education, or native status were counted as factors that helped to improve or impair an individual’s recovery.

**Research Settings**

Starting in September 2005, I began conducting research in Denver, Aurora, and Fort Collins in Colorado. I interviewed a total of 30 people in their homes and in other meeting places such as restaurants. I also collected observational data at churches, festivals, holiday parties, and for five weeks, as a volunteer at the Lowry Air Force Base. My close proximity to the Denver and Fort Collins area made it possible for me to volunteer, attend evacuee related events, and interview evacuees on a weekly or a bi-weekly basis. It also afforded me the opportunity to attend local events that were frequented by evacuees I knew and those with whom I had not yet become acquainted. I stayed in contact with many of the evacuees I interviewed and would periodically contact them to see how they were doing.

**Gaining Entry**

My ability to gain entry to the evacuee community required deliberate methodological attention and varied kinds of efforts. For one thing, the evacuee community was highly protected from outsiders. A number of “gatekeepers” such as the
Red Cross and the Salvation Army claimed that Hurricane Katrina was an emotionally traumatic experience for Gulf Coast residents and they doubted that anyone but a mental health expert could assist evacuees with their emotional woes. Many gatekeepers tried to guard evacuees from the gaze of the media, researchers, and the public and they discouraged evacuees from speaking with untrained health professionals. These individuals did not believe an evacuee could derive therapeutic benefits from telling their stories. In fact, they warned that too much discussion of an upsetting event could actually hinder an individual’s emotional recovery, making it difficult for a person to overcome their past or embrace their future.⁷

I did not become aware of the presence of “gatekeepers” until later in my research project. Before that point, I naively assumed I would have little difficulty meeting or interviewing Katrina evacuees, especially if I could gain admittance to the Lowry Air Force Base where close to 500 Katrina evacuees were initially housed. I searched the web for countless hours looking for information about how to gain access to the Lowry Air Force Base. Finally, I ran across a small article in a Denver newspaper that listed a number of organizations where Colorado residents could volunteer their services. With this information in hand, I spent the next couple of days calling these organizations and explaining who I was, what my intentions were, and what I hoped to accomplish with such an investigation. Regrettably, all of the individuals I talked to were vehemently opposed to the idea of me coming to the base and interviewing evacuees. Similarly, none of the individuals I left messages with ever returned my call.

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⁷ Other researchers have remarked upon the difficulties of accessing the affected population and have noted how local authorities and organizations routinely shield disaster survivors from the public inspection for fear that too much scrutiny will inhibit an individual’s recovery (Stallings 2002, Tierney 2002).
Upon learning how difficult it would be for me to gain access the base as a researcher, I quickly concluded that I was most likely to gain admittance to the base if I became a volunteer with one of the numerous non-profit organizations that were assisting evacuees at the base. I was personally interested in offering my services as a volunteer; however, my resolve to volunteer deepened once I discovered that access to the Lowry Air Force Base was severely restricted by police officers who patrolled the area and ensured that unsanctioned parties were denied access. Much to my frustration, it was not easy to become a volunteer at Lowry. Although many organizations advertised for volunteers, few seemed to need people to volunteer their labor. Most of the volunteer organizations claimed their positions had been filled or that they were only interested in financial assistance, namely in the form of cash donations.

Just when I began to despair that I would never gain access to the base, I made contact with the Salvation Army and learned they were still in need of people to help them with food service at Lowry. I was relieved but then I learned that I could not start volunteering until after I attended a mandatory training session scheduled for mid-September. Dr. Browne advised me go to the Salvation Army headquarters and speak to someone in person about registering for an earlier training session so I could begin my research project sooner rather than later. Her advice proved particularly fruitful, and I was able to attend a training session full two weeks sooner than I had been told. After the training session, Salvation Army employees assigned each of the volunteers a “start date” to begin volunteering. My food service assignment at Lowry began September 18, 2005.

After that day of volunteer work, I worked 8-hour shifts on five other occasions until the base closed October 7, 2005. As a Salvation Army volunteer I was busy during
my shift and was not in direct contact with any of the evacuees. I tried nonetheless to position myself as close as possible to evacuees so I could observe their interactions and attempt to strike up a conversation. Working as a volunteer allowed me to witness how people reacted to their first few weeks of residence in Colorado. I was able to observe where evacuees slept, what they ate, and what resources were made available to them by the community. In addition, I was able to develop a sense of who the evacuees were, where they came from, and how they were feeling about the disaster and their relocation to Colorado. Volunteering at Lowry did not afford me the opportunity to recruit research participants but it did provide me with important contextual information about the individuals who evacuated to Colorado and their particular type of resettlement experience.

Part of my inability to meet evacuees stemmed from my discomfort with approaching people and asking if they would like to participate in my research study while I was wearing the uniform of a volunteer. I feared that such actions would make me look like a duplicitous or disingenuous volunteer. I was not initially concerned about meeting people because I assumed I would have months to volunteer and get to know people whom would later feel comfortable allowing me to interview them. Unfortunately, it was not long after I began working as a volunteer that I learned the base would be closing in October and that evacuees would have to decide whether to return home or stay in Colorado. After I learned this news, I continued to volunteer but I began to think about alternative strategies to meet and recruit research participants.

8 My concern with being “duplicitous” materialized after a social work professor at Colorado State University chastised me for attempting to gain contacts from performing volunteer work. She assured me that to do such exhibited “shameless,” “unethical,” and “exploitative” values and behavior.
Once the Lowry AFB closed in October of 2005, it became even more difficult for me to meet or interact with Katrina evacuees in Colorado in large part because evacuees were moved to individual residences that were dispersed throughout Denver, Aurora, and surrounding areas. In addition, there was no method available to me for accessing the names and phone numbers of interested research participants. I did not know where to begin to look for this “hidden research population” once the base closed and I grew increasingly concerned that I might have to abandon my project if it became too difficult for me to recruit research participants. In an effort to address this problem, I attended a number of city-sponsored festivals for the evacuees and other evacuee oriented events where I distributed fliers in the hope of finding research participants. I felt slightly uncomfortable with this recruitment method because it was not immediately apparent who was or was not a Katrina evacuee. My inability to clearly identify Katrina evacuees caused some people to become upset when I mistook them for a Katrina evacuee. Despite my best efforts at distributing research invitations, not a single person responded to this recruiting technique.

Shortly thereafter, I contacted my mentors Dr. Browne and Dr. Peek and expressed my growing concern that I would be unable to recruit research participants before the base closed. Fortunately, both of my professors were extremely supportive and helped me to overcome this hurdle. In particular, it was through the use of Dr. Browne’s “weak ties” that I became acquainted with the leaders of the Coalition of Faith, which was a consortium of Black ministers and professionals with the mission of providing Katrina evacuees with long term recovery assistance once Lowry closed.9 It was not

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9 Dr. Browne did not know the Coalition of Faith directly: she had become linked to these black ministers, educators, and therapists through a contact at a Denver newspaper.
immediately clear whether or not the Coalition of Faith would assist Dr. Browne, Dr. Peek, or me; however, after the head of the Coalition, Dean Pingree, met with us and heard our research proposal, he agreed to help us access the evacuee community. Pastor Pingree did not put us in direct contact with many evacuees but he did acquaint us with individuals who would later provide us with many of our future research participants. Mainly, he introduced me to other black pastors who graciously invited me to their churches and introduced me to church congregants who were also Katrina evacuees. My attendance at church services made it possible for me to gather a few research contacts; however, the majority of my early contacts came from a former Lowry AFB volunteer named Margie.¹⁰

Margie became the primary means through which I gained access to Katrina evacuees in Colorado. She was very invested in the evacuee community and was one of the most enthusiastic volunteers I met during my research project. While Lowry was open, Margie volunteered at the base eight hours every day despite being employed full time at a retirement home. Margie made herself available to evacuees at every opportunity. She provided individuals with a variety of services and helped evacuees find homes, negotiate social services, run errands, or assist them with transportation. After the base closed she remained in contact with many evacuees, several of whom she had befriended due to her volunteer experience. Upon making her acquaintance, Margie agreed to aid me in my research endeavor and she introduced me to many African-American evacuees who lived in the Denver or Aurora area. She provided me with the

¹⁰ I learned of Marge from a female state representative whose acquaintance I made through Dean Pingree. This state representative told me that Marge was deeply embedded within the evacuee community and would likely be of great assistance.
names and numbers, and in some instances, she even contacted evacuees for me and told them about me and my research. Many of the evacuees held Margie in high esteem and her personal introduction made people more inclined to speak with me. Being associated with Margie initially opened many doors to me; however, that association was not enough to sustain the recruitment of research participants indefinitely.

I gained later research participants through the help of other evacuees who alerted me to friends or family members who would be interested in participating. In addition to personal referrals, I also gained contact information at a Christmas party held for Katrina evacuees in December, 2005. Dr. Browne, Dr. Peek, and I attended the party and distributed contact sheets to anyone interested in receiving an evacuee newsletter or who expressed interest in being interviewed at some point in the future. I was not acquainted with many of the evacuees at the party and I gathered the contact information of nearly fifty evacuees who seemed enthusiastic about sharing their story with me. Unfortunately, only a few of these individuals were still interested in talking to me when I contacted them a few weeks later.

It became increasingly difficult for me to secure interviews with evacuees after Christmas. Before Christmas I was rarely turned down or stood up by an evacuee whom I contacted. Most people invited me into their temporary new residences and asked me to call or visit sometime in the future. These feelings of goodwill and trust dramatically dissipated after Christmas when evacuees began to see public attention wane and the first of their evacuee benefits disappear. As public support and assistance diminished, so too did evacuees inclination to talk to a researcher, a person many evacuees felt would be “taking” their time and offering them little in return. I would call people and give them
the same type of information about myself and the benefits of participating in a research project as I had before Christmas; however, after Christmas the same type of requests were met with disinterest, suspicion, or hostility. Evacuees began to express a deep concern about my motivations for wanting to speak with them. Individuals whom I contacted after Christmas were no longer content telling their stories for the sake of providing the world with a testimony. Instead, they began to ask what I was going to do for them if they told me their stories. How was I going to help them with the multitude of problems that seemed to define their lives in Colorado and which they needed assistance negotiating?

In addition, evacuees whom I scheduled interviews with began to stand me up with alarming frequency. Several people I contacted on the phone agreed to a date, time, and place in which to be interviewed; however, such an agreement did not mean they would honor their appointment. I was surprised by the open hostility and passive-aggressive behavior I encountered from research participants who did not show up for interviews, especially because other disaster scholars have remarked that “disaster victims usually want to talk, to tell their stories,” and “interviewers are seldom refused” (Killian, 2002). While this may have been the case at the outset of research study it was not true months later.

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11 In fact, I was verbally accosted by two different African American men when I contacted them in regard to being interviewed. One man told me that he did not trust “me or mine” to interview him because all white people are “oppressors” who try and exploit black people. Another man whom I contacted had an even more aggressive response and told me to “go to hell” and “to go fuck myself” after I asked if I could interview him.

12 I was stood up on five separate occasions by individuals who lived in Aurora - an hour and a half to two hour drive from where I lived.
In an attempt to counter the frequency with which I was being stood up by interviewees, I decided to try a number of different strategies. First, I become more aggressive in my attempts to remind people about our engagements. I began to write evacuees letters stating the date, time, and place of our interview. I also called each interviewee twice to make sure they were still interested in meeting at the agreed upon date, time, and location. Secondly, I tried to counter peoples’ concerns by helping evacuees with any of the few resources I had at my disposal. Unfortunately, the help I could offer in most instances was small in light of the mountain of worries evacuees daily faced. I tried to assist people in a variety of ways, including: giving people small sums of money, helping them to find computers or reasonable cars, calling social service agencies or other assistance based organizations, and connecting them with caseworkers who were knowledgeable about the local resources available to evacuees. I also tried to be more attentive to the evacuees whom I already interviewed. I tried to call more regularly, write letters, and generally let people know I had not forgotten about them and would try to assist them to the best of my abilities. Finally, I also decided to interview people who lived closer to Fort Collins, regardless of their racial background.\textsuperscript{13} I was first introduced to evacuees in Fort Collins by a classmate who happened to live next door to an evacuee family. My classmate was kind enough to tell her neighbors about my research project and to give them my contact information. The mother of the family contacted me immediately and gave me names and numbers of people who lived in Fort Collins and who might be amenable to being interviewed. The individuals I contacted in Fort Collins

\textsuperscript{13} The original goal of my research project was to examine how African Americans were experiencing resettlement in Colorado. During the first months of my research project, I had no real intentions of interviewing Caucasians, however; after I had been stood up a few times I decided to try and interview people locally. All of the evacuees who lived in close proximity to Fort Collins were Caucasian.
and surrounding areas were middle to upper middle class whites who were eager and interested to be interviewed unlike many of the individuals from the Denver or Aurora area.

In conclusion, my research sample of evacuees community came about only after a series of varied efforts including: volunteering at the Lowery AFB, handing out research fliers at festivals, community gatherings, and churches, becoming acquainted with a volunteer who was deeply involved in with the evacuee community, and lastly by network referral. It was much more difficult to secure interviews with people after Christmas and I had to become aggressive in my efforts to remind people of our interviews. In addition, I also began to interview people who lived in the same town as me, most of whom had not resided at Lowry AFB.

Demographic Information

I began interviewing Katrina evacuees in October, 2005 and I conducted my final interview in November of 2006. I conducted 30 interviews with 17 females and 13 males. The research participants were between the ages of 19 and 83; however, the majority of the research participants were in their late forties or early fifties. Eighteen of the 30 participants identified as African American and the other 12 participants identified as Caucasian. 29 of the 30 research participants were from the New Orleans area including: the Ninth Ward, New Orleans East, the Seventh Ward, the Garden District, Metairie, & Slidell. One male research participant was from Mobile, Alabama.

In New Orleans, the research participants were from a mixture of middle class, working class, and lower class backgrounds. Nine of the participants worked two or more jobs in the formal or informal sector in Louisiana and four of the participants were
retirees who received monthly Social Security benefits before Katrina occurred. Evacuees held various types of jobs prior to Katrina. In my sample, there was an EMT, a former business owner, a stay at home mom, a teacher, a launderer, a housecleaner, an Avon sales representative, a mechanic, a medical sales representative, a janitor, and a sales clerk at Wal-Mart. At the time of interview, 13 of the 30 participants were employed in Colorado.\textsuperscript{14} The rest of the evacuees were receiving some sort of social service, trying to stretch a meager income, or living off of their savings. Since relocating to Colorado the majority of the research participants lived in or near Denver or Fort Collins, including the surrounding areas such as Aurora, Westminster, Golden, Erie, and Green Valley Ranch. Twenty five of the individuals I interviewed had rented homes in Colorado and 20 of those individuals were having their rent paid by Catholic Charities and FEMA until May, 2006, if not later.\textsuperscript{15} Four of the evacuees I interviewed bought homes in Erie, Golden, and Fort Collins and one female evacuee was later awarded a new home in Colorado by Fannie Mae.\textsuperscript{16}

Of the 30 people I interviewed, only five asserted that they planned on returning to New Orleans. Since the initial interviews, a total of six evacuees and their respective

\textsuperscript{14} 11 of the 13 individuals who were employed at the time of the interview were still employed when I spoke to them four to eight months after our initial interview.

\textsuperscript{15} In May 2006, individuals and families were notified that Catholic Charities would no longer be responsible for making monthly rent payments. After May, all rental payments were to be distributed by FEMA who would direct deposit three months of rent into evacuee bank accounts. FEMA reevaluated evacuee accounts every three months to determine if evacuees were eligible for an additional three months of rent.

\textsuperscript{16} Two of the four people were married to one another. In total, only three homes were bought by Katrina evacuees in Colorado.
families have left Colorado and returned home.\textsuperscript{17} However, the number of returnees is likely to be higher than I have noted.\textsuperscript{18} To the best of my knowledge, 24 evacuees currently reside within the state and have decided to stay in Colorado for an unspecified amount of time. Fifteen of the 24 people who have decided to stay in Colorado have family members (children, cousins, siblings, or partners) who also reside within the state.

**Qualitative Methods**

Qualitative methods were especially well suited to study the resettlement experience of Katrina evacuees in Colorado. Methods like participant observation and unstructured interviewing provided me with a flexible framework with which to learn about my research population, develop research questions, and investigate emergent themes. Using open-ended questions offered evacuees an opportunity to freely discuss and elaborate upon their experiences as disaster survivors, Katrina evacuees, and Colorado relocates. In addition, the use of qualitative methods helped me to embed my “interpretations within a deep contextual foundation” that stressed the importance of the “time, place, and circumstances within which a disaster event occurred” and acknowledged the unique circumstances that distinguished one evacuee’s resettlement experience from another’s (Phillips 2003:199). I used a variety of methods throughout my research project including: participant observation, unstructured, semi-structured, and structured interviews. Each of these methods provided me with key insights that helped

\textsuperscript{17} Two of the six people who returned home had no intention of doing so when the interview was conducted.

\textsuperscript{18} By the summer of 2006, many evacuees’ phones were disconnected or their contact numbers changed. My inability to get in touch with many evacuees has led me to assume that there may have been additional returnees.
deepen my understanding of the economic consequences of disaster resettlement in Colorado.

**Data Collection: Participant Observation**

Anthropologist Russell Bernard heralds participant observation as the “foundation of cultural anthropology” and he writes that the essence of participant observation involves acclimating people to your presence so they feel comfortable allowing you to observe the daily happenings of their lives (2006: 342). Participant observation was the one method I used throughout my research project and it proved to be a particularly valuable at the beginning when I possessed little to no knowledge about who the evacuees were, what their lives were like before the hurricane, or how their lives had changed since the event.

My experience as a participant observer began during my stint as a Salvation Army volunteer at the Lowry Air Force Base in Aurora, Colorado. The AFB had been closed for more than a year, but was retro-fitted immediately following Katrina in order to accommodate evacuees. The majority of evacuees housed at the former base were working class or lower income families from the city of New Orleans. Predominantly African American, these residents were institutionally evacuated by the state and possessed few financial or social resources they could draw upon in Colorado. There, I was able to observe people’s verbal and non verbal communication and record my observations in a journal upon returning home. The volunteer experience thus allowed me to catch glimpses of the disaster, and the experience of those early weeks in Colorado at the Lowry AFB.
Bustling with activity, the AFB provided evacuees with a great deal more than living quarters and served as a site where they could: seek mental health counseling, discover information about local employment or church activities, meet with FEMA representatives, socialize, and engage in discussions about the benefits or obstacles of staying in Colorado or returning home. At the base I had the opportunity to witness “town meetings,” talent shows, and daily gatherings where evacuees expressed their concerns and formulated plans of action. The observations I made at the AFB helped me to develop a better understanding of who the Katrina evacuees at Lowry were and the types of issues they were likely to encounter. Weeks later, these observations helped me to construct my interview guide and served as the inspiration for many of the research questions I asked evacuees in subsequent interviews. My experience as a participant observer did not end once the base closed and I continued to actively observe evacuees behavior at church events, evacuee functions, and throughout the duration of our interviews.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Sociologist Brenda Phillips writes that personal interviews have traditionally been the most popular and widespread method used by researchers to study a disaster event (Phillips 2003). In October of 2005, I too began to conduct semi structured interviews with evacuees. With the help of Dr. Browne and Dr. Peek I constructed an interview guide that was designed to elicit information about various aspects of people’s lives before and after the hurricane. All of the questions within the interview guide were open ended and exploratory. I did not ask people for specific information in regard to the financial losses or gains they may have incurred since their disaster resettlement;
however, I did ask people questions about many of the “material” and “non-material” aspects of their lives before and after Katrina. In particular, I queried people about their employment situation, social networks, sources of assistance, and the difficulties or benefits they may or may not have derived from the places they lived. Initially, the overall goal of my questions was to determine the extent to which people’s lives changed as a result of their disaster resettlement. What was different about living in Colorado? Additionally, what type of resources did evacuees possess or lack that would impact their disaster recovery and resettlement?

The interviews usually lasted one to three hours and were primarily conducted within the comfort of people’s homes. I used the interview guide in every interview I conducted; however, I tried to remain flexible on the order in which I asked my questions in the hope that such an effort would create an environment in which the evacuees felt comfortable discussing and elaborating upon their experiences. Most of the time, I believe that my flexible interviewing style helped me to elicit unexpected information from evacuees. In a few instances, however, my flexibility proved costly such as when evacuees spent thirty minutes to an hour elaborating upon one question that left little time for me to ask other questions and establish the fuller context that would have made such a response meaningful.

After an initial interview, I tried to maintain contact with research participants via mail, email, phone calls, or personal visits. I contacted research participants every couple of months in order to see how they were feeling and if anything new had transpired in their lives. These follow up discussions helped me to foster a stronger rapport with the interviewees and allowed me to observe how evacuees were coping with the myriad of
changes that defined their lives since the hurricane. Unfortunately, I was not able to maintain contact with all of the evacuees whom I had interviewed as will be discussed in greater detail in the Methodological Problems section of the paper. By the time my research project concluded in December of 2006, 16 months after beginning it, I had interviewed a total of thirty Katrina evacuees in Colorado.

Structured Interviews

Throughout the course of my research project I was relatively averse to the idea of using structured interviews to gather information. I did not possess the skills or knowledge to adequately design a survey nor did I think a survey could yield information that would be as useful or interesting as that which I had gathered from semi-structured interviews. Bereft of detail, I could not imagine why I would want to ask people an array of closed ended questions. My perspective on this matter did not change until I took Dr. Browne’s Research Methods class in the fall of 2006 in which she required all of her students to conduct a survey among their research participants. In her class, I learned that structured interviews are best used by researchers who wish to “confirm” or validate certain research findings. Scholars Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) refer to this strategy as “theoretical sampling” wherein a researcher goes back to field in order to “gather specific data, to fill the gaps within categories, to elaborate the analysis of these categories, and to discover variation within and between them” (Charmaz & Mitchell 2001: 168). From my interviews, I had learned there were distinct differences in the size and function of the social networks of black and white residents in both Louisiana and Colorado. I was not entirely clear why there might be such distinct differences between the two groups and I
saw the class assignment as the perfect opportunity to see if another type of data would confirm and thus, enhance my findings from the semi-structured interviews.

The survey I constructed was designed to understand how relocation to Colorado had impacted the social networks of former Louisiana residents. I asked a number of questions that were intended to elicit information in regard to the size, composition, and function of an individual’s social network in both Louisiana and in Colorado. In particular, I wanted to develop a better understanding of the scale and scope of services that network members regularly provided one another. I wondered if people activated different network ties (dense or weak) in order to access particular kinds of services. Additionally I wanted to examine how people would use their preexisting or newly created social networks to aid them in their resettlement in Colorado. How would the size or composition of an individual’s social network affect their resettlement experience in Colorado?

There was no central meeting place in Colorado where evacuees regularly congregated. As a result, I administered my surveys to evacuees over the phone rather than in person. I found the process of surveying evacuees to be extremely difficult, in part because I had a sampling frame that was limited to 25 individuals.19 I called 22 of the 25 individuals whose phone numbers I possessed. Eight of those I called had phone numbers that were disconnected or belonged to a new person who did not know the evacuee I was trying to contact. Another four individuals, all women, told me they were too busy to take the survey now or ever, and one woman hung up on me before I could ask if she would

19 The original plan for my sample size was 29 individuals, however, four individuals were married to one another and an additional eight individuals were related to one or more people in the sample. I reduced my sample to 22 individuals in order to ensure that all of the people whom I surveyed were unrelated. Dr. Peek also gave me the names and phone numbers of three evacuees which brought the total number of people I could contact to 25.
be willing to take the survey at a later date. Of the remaining 13 individuals in my sampling frame, I contacted ten individuals who agreed to participate. In total, I was only able to get ten individuals to commit to taking the survey.

One of the shortcomings of my survey projects was my small sample size. The ten individuals who participated in my survey reflect some of the demographic diversity that exists within the evacuee population in Colorado; however, by no means was my sample representative. I found it extremely difficult to locate participants because people had disconnected their phones, gotten new phone numbers I did not know how to locate, were busy, or were generally uninterested in participating in a phone survey. The biases in my survey sample resulted in a shortage of female respondents and a possible oversampling of evacuees whose living conditions were more stable and secure than evacuees whose phones had been disconnected and who had changed their residence changed. Despite the many difficulties I encountered trying to administer the survey, I did learn that there were important, qualitative differences in the size, composition, and function of the networks of African Americans and whites in Louisiana and Colorado, differences I will discuss further in later chapters.

Data Analysis

My earliest attempts at data analysis began shortly after I started to interview people. In part this was because I began to meet with my mentors Dr. Browne and Dr. Peek on a weekly basis to discuss our respective research findings including the

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20 All three of the individuals I did not contact were women. I did not contact one woman because I knew she disliked me. The other two women were individuals Dr. Peek had interviewed but whom I had never met. I decided not to contact one of the women because Dr. Peek told me she had just been diagnosed with cancer and was feeling particularly vulnerable.

21 I surveyed five African American evacuees and five Caucasian evacuees. Of the individuals I interviewed, six had been employed full time in New Orleans, two were retired, one disabled, and one was a high school student. The median age of the research participants was fifty-three, however, the ages of participants ranged from seventeen to eighty.
recruitment and interviewing of research participants. These weekly meetings lasted for a full academic year and provided me with the opportunity to discuss my research observations and receive valuable feedback and advice from both Dr. Browne and Dr. Peek. One of the most important consequences of these meetings was that I established a weekly routine of critically evaluating both the interviews and my own assumptions. In addition, they introduced me to new analytical concepts and techniques which I used throughout the entirety of my research project particularly during the later phases of data collection and analysis.

Of the analytical concepts I was exposed to by my advisors, I drew the greatest inspiration from many of the ideas originally set forth by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their construction of grounded theory research. Like Glaser and Strauss, I tried to transcribe my interviews immediately after they were conducted in the hope that such an endeavor would allow me to observe new themes that may or may not have emerged in other interviews. Unfortunately, my busy school schedule often prohibited me from strictly adhering to the analytical tenets originally prescribed by Glaser and Strauss. Indeed, it was not uncommon for weeks to pass before I could transcribe one or more interviews. During these opportunities to reflect on my interviews, I read my field notes, transcribed interviews and took extensive notes on different aspects of each interview that I considered to be important or illuminating. Similarly, I tried to pinpoint the ways in which one person’s discussion of their experience mirrored or contrasted with another’s.

In contrast to Glaser and Strauss’ advice to begin coding one’s data immediately following an interview, I did not earnestly begin coding my interviews until after I finished my research project and the coursework for my Master’s degree. At that point, in
January of 2007, I imported all of my interviews into the ATLAS ti software program and began the painstaking process of coding, organizing, and interpreting all of my research data. Initially, all of the codes I created within ATLAS were “master” codes that encompassed huge swaths of text and discussed the main themes of the interviews. As time wore on and I became more familiar with both my interviews and the process of coding, I broke these master codes down into smaller codes that better addressed important sub-themes within the text. While coding, I took extensive notes on why I created a certain code and the relationship between sections of texts that had the same, interrelated, or contrasting codes. This process of “memo making” helped me to elaborate upon the meaning of the code and its specific relationship to a certain section of text. In addition to creating codes and memos, I also used the ATLAS software program to help me find “negative cases” within my data set, in the hope that this information would help me to “disconfirm parts of the model or suggest new connections that need to be made” (Ryan & Bernard 2003).

Concurrent to my efforts to collect and analyze research data, I was also reading a great deal of literature on the topics of disasters, social capital, economic anthropology, place attachment, and religion. At the outset, the readings my advisors and I chose were intentionally exploratory and I read about a variety of topics that I later discovered were only loosely related to the findings I was most interested in exploring. My reading became more focused the more interviews I conducted, transcribed, and reflected upon in the notes of my field journal. After months of data collection, analysis, and reading, I finally determined I wanted to focus my written work on the economic consequences of disaster resettlement among Katrina evacuees of different racial, socio-economic, and
regional backgrounds. Specifically, I drew upon many of the ideas inherent in Pierre Bourdieu’s “general theory of the economy of practices.” I hoped that by applying his theory to my data set I would be able to better articulate why some people were having more or less difficulty recovering from their disaster resettlement. In contrast to how recovery was popularly discussed in the media, my interviews made me keenly aware that an individual’s likelihood or ability to recover was not dependent upon their financial resources alone. Equally important to an individual’s recovery were “social” factors such as the scale, scope, and function of an individual’s social network, their education, cultural knowledge, and the overall adaptability of an individual to new and foreign environments.

Methodological Problems

In previous sections of the paper, I noted difficulties I encountered trying to recruit and maintain contact with research participants. In addition to this methodological problem, I experienced two additional constraints that frequently impeded my ability to effectively collect or analyze my research data.

The Researcher as an Active Participant

Sociologist Robert Stallings, warns prospective disaster researchers to be aware that they will face “external and internal pressures to help solve the problems of disaster victims, practitioners, and policy makers,” regardless of the methods employed by the researcher (Stallings 2002). Indeed, during the course of my research I was called upon to become a representative or advocate for many of the evacuees. There was a concern among the evacuees that I would not do anything “valuable” or “productive” with their stories. They wanted to ensure that the tales they revealed would be used to help improve
their lives in Colorado by my serving as a mediator, advocate, or fundraiser. Many evacuees noted that they wanted me, or someone else of my racial, class, and educational background to help them because they felt as if I could speak the language of the people who were in positions of power, or would know the right questions to ask, or would have the ability to interpret and understand the responses that were given. Many of the evacuees noted that they did not understand how to negotiate relationships, access services, or compete for jobs in Colorado because the linguistic and cultural rules were different and foreign to them.

The evacuees faced many hardships in Colorado and frequently called upon me to take an active stance in their lives, which some researchers warn against, arguing that a position of involvement can bias the analysis and interpretation of data (Stallings 2002). I choose to adopt a degree of involvement with participants because it did not feel ethical or natural for me to try to maintain a distance when so many of my research participants were experiencing severe social, economic, and material hardships. I tried to help research participants in as many ways as I could. I helped numerous individuals locate medical or social services in the area they lived that would be cheap and affordable. I connected families with community members who had computers, software, or sewing machines they were not using and wanted to donate. I helped one family pack their belongings and prepare to move home, and finally, under extreme situations of duress, I assisted evacuees with small financial contributions. However, the assistance I could offer individuals and families was constrained by the limited economic and social resources I had at my disposal.
I do not think that such efforts of assistance impaired my research. In fact, I think that being able and willing to help research participants allowed me to develop a greater understanding of the daily efforts that evacuees had to go through living in Colorado. Helping evacuees find affordable doctors or available social services made me realize how time consuming and frustrating such efforts can be. Through such efforts, I realized that evacuees spent endless hours on the phone every day being connected and reconnected to machines or humans who did not have the information evacuees needed. After hours of such phone encounters I would finally be connected to the person who had the appropriate information only to discover that they were away from their phone and that I would have to leave a message. Tired and exhausted, I would leave a message, which would not be returned until many days later. Assisting evacuees helped me to understand how terribly overwhelming and trying life in Colorado is for those individuals whose only hope at recovery requires accessing help from the government and community organizations.

Through my small efforts, I do think that I was able to help some individuals and families. Still, there were many days when I felt terribly discouraged and disheartened that I could not be of greater assistance. In addition, there were a few instances when individuals contacted me and wanted me to help them with things that were beyond my economic or physical capabilities. Unfortunately, I think these individuals thought I was being dishonest and that I had the means to help him/her but that I chose not to do so. Rare encounters such as those saddened and angered me. I was saddened that I could not
be of greater assistance but I was also angered that someone would think it appropriate to ask me for a gift without consideration of my own very limited means.\footnote{One instance of this was when an evacuee contacted me and asked if I could provide her with eight roundtrip airline tickets so that her family could visit her in Colorado. After I spent some time investigating it became clear that there were no organizations or airline companies who were providing evacuees with complimentary airline tickets. I called the evacuee and told her what I had learned. She then asked me if I personally would purchase eight airplane tickets for her family members.}

**Being of a Different Racial Background**

Another methodological problem that might have detracted from my ability to recruit research subjects or gather data on sensitive subjects resulted from my being of a different racial background than many of my research participants. Towards the end of my research project I encountered a number of people who either directly or indirectly told me that they did not want to be interviewed by me because they did not trust me because I was white. I documented one specific instance in my field notes in which the following occurred:

Byron told me that he did not trust me or mine. He reminded me that as a white person I was an oppressor. He questioned why I was interested in talking to black people and he suspected that my intentions were disingenuous. Despite his suspicion, he did tell me that he thought it was good that I was trying to amend for the wrongdoings that whites had inflicted upon African Americans in the past.

Very few of the people I contacted so openly expressed their antipathy towards me. Moreover, I do not think that my status as a white woman deterred many people from being willing to be interviewed. There were occasions, however, in which my racial background did pose a problem. For example, when I asked people questions about race and its impact on their life before Katrina and after, I found that many of the African American research participants felt uncomfortable discussing race relations. Many denied that they had experienced racial discrimination in either state and they seemed unwilling
to admit that any of their difficulties were related to their racial background. In contrast to 
the silence that often met me when I asked African Americans questions about race, 
white research participants were extremely enthusiastic to discuss the topic. The majority 
of the white participants I interviewed could talk in great detail and length about the 
racial problems they witnessed in both Louisiana and Colorado. This difference led me to 
conclude that African American participants may have felt uncomfortable discussing 
issues of race with me because of the difference in our racial backgrounds.

All three of the methodological challenges I encountered impacted my research 
project in perceptible ways. My inability to recruit thirty African American research 
participants caused me to begin interviewing white evacuees whose experiences were 
strikingly different than most African Americans. This contrast in experience 
inadvertently caused my research project to become a comparative investigation not only 
of African American and white subjects but also of those people who considered 
themselves interdependent or self sufficient, upper-class or lower class, well educated or 
less educated, natives or non-natives, and capital-rich or resource-poor. My being called 
upon to help one group of evacuees rather than another, further cemented my belief that 
those who identified themselves as “interdependent” or “self sufficient” also differed 
from one another in terms of the resources they had to aid them in their recovery. Finally 
people’s negative response to my “whiteness” helped remind me of the important ways 
that race continues to unequally impact people’s lives, opening doors for some while 
impeding equal entry for others.

In the following chapter, we will examine the pre and post-disaster experiences of 
those individuals who described themselves as active members of “interdependent”
family and friend networks. The goal of the following chapter is twofold. First, I will describe exactly who identified themselves as a member of an interdependent network and I will delineate the social, cultural, and economic features that distinguished them from the other group of participants in this research study. Secondly, I will investigate the social and economic factors that made interdependent evacuees more “vulnerable” upon their disaster-resettlement and I will explore how these “vulnerabilities” might have caused or contributed to their downward-mobility in Colorado.
Chapter 3: Perceptions of Interdependence

This chapter discusses the economic situations of the Gulf Coast residents I am calling “interdependent” based on their attitudes and practices before and after Hurricane Katrina. In my sample, the majority of the participants who clustered in the “interdependent” group were African American; however, a much smaller number of white residents also engaged in interdependent behavior, albeit to a much lesser scale. Generally, interdependent participants shared key economic, social, and cultural traits that distinguished them from the “self sufficient” research participants. Most were lower-income New Orleans natives with large family and friend networks with whom they regularly “swapped” goods, services, and information. In addition, the majority lived in extended family households, had multiple jobs in both the formal and informal economy and had relatively low levels of education.

Race and area of origin were perhaps the main features that distinguished one group of interdependent participants from another. In the following sections, I will discuss interdependent residents in general, focusing especially on the experiences of African Americans who constituted the greatest proportion of interdependent residents. Towards the end of the chapter, I will turn my attention to the experiences of white

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24 I use the terms “lower” and “upper” class somewhat loosely in this thesis. Few people in my study specifically referred to themselves as either “lower” or “upper” class; however, from my interviews, personal observations, and informal conversations with evacuees, I was able to gather information about people’s social class standing before and after their disaster resettlement. More specifically, I used the following indicators to help determine someone’s class designation: employment status, occupation, class of worker, housing tenure, median income in neighborhood of residence, level of education, savings, financial investments, and whether the person was receiving need based subsidies.
interdependent residents in an attempt to illustrate how their racial identity, regional background, and more “valuable” network members helped them to reconstitute their lives in Colorado with more confidence and ease than similarly impacted interdependent African Americans.

**Before the Disaster: Economic Capital in Louisiana**

The financial situation of interdependent individuals was typically more precarious and less secure before the disaster. Most interdependent individuals were working class or poor African Americans who had small annual incomes derived from hourly positions in the service sector of the economy. Almost no one in my sample was a home-owner and very few individuals possessed savings. As a result, the vast majority of people found it necessary to work two or three jobs in order to make ends meet. The following quote helps to illustrate many people’s experiences with employment in Louisiana:

> In Louisiana you had to get like two jobs for both people. Like my husband is disabled and he still had to work in spite of that and everything. And the thing is that it was really hard for me to find a job there. It was hard to make a living.

Close to one half of all lower income people in my sample had more than one job and I heard of many instances in which a person worked fifteen or sixteen hours a day, six days a week. In addition, a small number of individuals tried to earn extra money working under the table. Only a few people in my sample openly discussed their undeclared side business with me. However, one of my informants who worked exclusively in the informal economy noted that many people in New Orleans had side jobs. He states:
That is kind of what New Orleans teaches you how to do - things that are under the table. People would pay cash for whatever they got and they would let the government worry about themselves.

Informal employment was an attractive option because it provided people with an opportunity to exert greater control over their schedule and earnings. The most common side businesses people discussed with me included: babysitting, cooking, repairing cars, cleaning, or helping people with various household repairs. Most of their business clientele consisted of people they knew fairly well. Others attracted new and unfamiliar customers through word of mouth advertising.

**Social Capital in Louisiana**

In spite of the number of jobs people had or the long hours they worked, few lower income people would have been able to survive financially had it not been for the assistance their social networks provided. The majority of people I have labeled as “interdependent” were New Orleans natives who were deeply embedded in kin networks that consisted of forty or more individuals with whom they engaged in frequent acts of reciprocity. Ronald, a 38 year old African American man who was born and raised in the Ninth Ward describes the value of reciprocity that existed among network members and New Orleans natives:

People in New Orleans are giving people. They share and help one another out. I may not know someone real well but they will still let you into their house and fix you something to eat. In New Orleans, many people act as if they be knowing you their whole lives. They help you out and when you can you help them out too. People just treat you like family there.
Interdependent people had an abundance of “family,” both biological and fictive, whom they could rely upon for assistance, help, or information.\textsuperscript{25} Family members engaged in everyday forms of reciprocity that enabled people of limited financial means to “get by” comfortably. Many lived in extended family households that were composed of three or four generations of relatives. In these households, people pooled their financial and material resources and shared the cost of rent, food, or transportation.\textsuperscript{26}

In addition, many parents (most often single women), received reliable and affordable child care assistance from their female kin members.\textsuperscript{27} Such assistance helped struggling parents to attend their jobs knowing their children were well looked after and that the cost of care was within their financial means. Family supported childcare assistance was a common and taken for granted aspect of interdependent people’s lives in New Orleans. People were grateful for the help they received but they did not think that such assistance was unusual or beyond the bounds of normal friend or family expectations. Violet discusses the problems her daughter encountered with many non-kin childcare providers:

\textsuperscript{25} For interdependent African Americans in New Orleans, the average family size was 46 people. Interdependent whites had much smaller families than interdependent African Americans, due in part to the fact that most of their families were relatively recent migrants to the area. On average, interdependent whites had 21 family members who lived in or near the city of New Orleans.

\textsuperscript{26} Anthropologist, Carol Stack has made similar observations about the residential behaviors of lower income African Americans. Among the people she interviewed in the Flats, Stacks writes that “the most predictable residential pattern in The Flats is that men and women reside in one of the households of their natal kin, or in the households of those who raised them, long into their adult years” (1970: 104).

\textsuperscript{27} Of the 13 interdependent women I interviewed, six were single mothers who lived in female headed households. According to the 2000 U.S. census, 24.5\% of all households in New Orleans were female headed compared to Denver where only 10.8\% of the city’s households were similarly affected.
My daughter had a hard time finding babysitters - somebody said that they would watch him and then they would renege on it and she would lose her job. She would have to take what she could get like night hours- late hours. She didn’t have dependable resources so we helped her. I sent my son Ted down there to help her. Then I moved down there to help her. I got part time work at the Shell station because I needed money. I worked the 3-11 shift and my daughter worked 11-7 and when we were gone my son would be there with the kids so we was just rotating. We just all rotated.

Family-provisioned childcare allowed individuals of limited means to stretch their wages farther than would have been possible if they had to pay a formal institution for daycare services. Such assistance also helped to increase an individual’s sense of job security. In the case of Violet, it is clear that her daughter directly benefited from her family’s willingness to “rotate” jobs, schedules, and responsibilities. Such assistance helped Violet’s daughter maintain her job and continue to support her children. In general, issues of childcare assistance were more of an issue for women than men who were rarely the primary or exclusive caretaker of their families.

In contrast to white New Orleans residents (interdependent or self sufficient), interdependent African Americans had vast friend networks composed of old friends, community members, and acquaintances who adhered to norms and values that stressed the importance of giving, sharing, and socializing. Interdependent African Americans recognized the importance of their friend networks and made significant investments of their time and energy trying to create new relationships and maintain old. When not at work or caring for their families, most interdependent African Americans were busy attending weekly barbeques, church events, or hanging out at their favorite local night spot. Many cited longer business hours as one of the primary reasons why they were able to sustain robust social lives in New Orleans despite their demanding work schedules.
Numerous evacuees recalled that they had more opportunities to socialize, maintain friendships, and meet new people in New Orleans than individuals who lived in areas of the country that adhered to more traditional business hours. Rich in social capital, interdependent African Americans seemed to intuitively understand that the “reproduction of social capital required an unceasing effort of sociability” (Bourdieu 2001: 104).

Family members also served as important conduit of information, however; they were by no means the only people whom individuals turned to in order to gather or disseminate information. Interdependent African Americans relied upon all of their network members to learn about employment opportunities or to advertise their own businesses. In fact, friends and acquaintances were often the best source of information available to people with regard to learning about employment or other income-earning opportunities. The services and information provided by network members helped them to overcome the economic insecurities of low wage work. In addition, network referrals helped people to secure a job quickly and allowed them to circumvent more formal hiring processes. People understood that they could not financially survive on their own. As a result, many people gave with the knowledge that they would receive and they understood that sharing was a productive action that all network members benefited from.

Although interdependent social networks helped people to stay financially afloat, they could not necessarily help them to get ahead. Evacuees commonly complained about the lack of opportunities in New Orleans and noted how the majority of their family and friends were “stuck” in low wage jobs that offered few opportunities for advancement. Many individuals thought it difficult if not impossible to improve their lives in Louisiana.
Denise, who saw herself as a being a little bit different than many New Orleans residents, described the situation as follows:

People in New Orleans are so used to accepting things. They are just so used to having a job and barely getting by and not just trying to get an education or a career because of the economy there. I guess they felt like a job was good enough for them. If they had a job they had something but making $5 an hour or $6 an hour to me is no money. I can’t live on that and I couldn’t deal with that part being in New Orleans. I couldn’t deal with the way some of them think in New Orleans - we call it being narrow minded. They were thinking in the box and when we would think outside of the box it was like we were speaking another language.

People’s feelings of frustration about their own occupational or economic plight were somewhat curtailed by the fact that most of their family and friends were similarly positioned. Relative to other network members, most interdependent residents felt as if they were doing “well enough” in New Orleans and were not better or worse off than anyone else they knew. Unfortunately, this lack of network diversity may have inhibited people’s ability to access novel information and opportunities and is likely to have promoted “downward leveling norms” among network members (Portes 1998).

**Embodied Cultural Capital in Louisiana**

Interdependent residents were proud of the musical, culinary, and social traditions that distinguished the city of New Orleans from other American cities. As a city that was 67% African American before Katrina, most of the interdependent African Americans described feeling “at home” in New Orleans, a place in which the majority of residents were of a similar racial, regional, and cultural background as themselves. In the words of Beatrice, a middle aged, mother of four, New Orleans was a place that was deeply steeped in African American traditions and culture. It was a city that exuded a profound sense of “black pride” and was home to many notable African American traditions.
including jazz, the second line, and the Mardi Gras Indians (Lipsitz 2006) All of the
interdependent African Americans I interviewed felt deeply “rooted” in New Orleans and
recalled how area residents felt “like family.” The words of one lifetime resident are
telling:

To me it is almost like it is family when you walk down the street - if
people know you or if they do not know you they look out for you.

Another interdependent resident mentioned a similar pattern of communication:

You go to sit in my sister’s beauty shop and it is family, and old family
friends, and someone’s cousin. I will go in there and people will say
“girl is this your sister” and I will say “yeah” and they would say they
had come there all their lives and they didn’t realize I was kin to them.
I miss that. No matter where you are at you could have a conversation
with a stranger on the bus.

Feeling “at home” in New Orleans was about more than just feeling comfortable
striking up conversations or relationships with other area residents. It also meant that area
residents had an innate and uncanny sense of “know how” about the city in which they
lived. They knew the fastest way to get to their favorite fish seller and the best place to
buy the most stylish, least expensive jeans. Unlike the many tourists who flocked to the
city each year, they also knew where to go to hear the most heartfelt, soulful jazz or drink
the finest cup of “Community Coffee.” They knew New Orleans as if the city itself was
inscribed into their bodies and knowing her, they treated her as if she too was a member
of their family. They recognized her flaws and condemned the violence, racism, and
poverty that at times seemed all too pervasive. But, like any good relative, they loved her
in spite of her flaws and imperfections. She, New Orleans, was home.

This sense of “know how” did not develop over night but as Bourdieu (2001)
notes was unconsciously learned throughout their lifetime as local knowledge was passed
down from one generation to the next. This intimate knowledge of place helped people financially. Individuals with “side jobs” knew where to go to sell their handmade wares, home baked cakes, or automotive skills. What is more, they also knew the correct way to approach people. They knew what kind of small talk to engage in as well as the general interests or concerns of the people they were trying to sell to. As a native, they knew all of these things unconsciously and many were successful at their side businesses in New Orleans precisely because the people they were selling to were also native New Orleans residents who recognized themselves in the person who was making the sales pitch. As mutual “insiders,” they were less apt to feel as if the sales person was overlooking their best interests or trying to take advantage of them. For instance, when Diana moved back to New Orleans after a year residence in Colorado, she knew that the best place to attract new Avon clients was at Lowe’s. In a phone conversation, Diana revealed how she would go to Lowes on the weekends and drop her Avon magazine in people shopping carts. As soon as she saw them browsing through the catalogue left in their cart, she would immediately go over and introduce herself. Apparently this strategy worked quite well. Diana’s successful Avon sales serve as but one example of an instance in which an individual’s embodied cultural was converted into economic wealth.

With regard to the concept of interdependency, Lipsitz writes that inner city New Orleans residents have “foster(ed) a defensive localism” because they were historically prohibited from participating in many of the city’s financial, social, and political institutions. Consequently, African American residents created their own financial and social institutions that functioned as an alternative to those that were governed and peopled by white residents. Perhaps nowhere is this better represented than in the
pleasure clubs that emerged among newly freed slaves after the Civil War (Nagel 207). These pleasure clubs functioned as mutual aid foundations for African American members who had few other places to turn for financial or social assistance. Later, these somewhat informal organizations developed into formal clubs in which members paid monthly dues, and if need be, were allowed to borrow against future payments (Nagel 207: 29-30). Looked at from within a historical framework, it should come as no surprise that the lower income African Americans I interviewed understood (the practice of) interdependency to be both a “natural” and “taken for granted” part of their lives. For lower income African Americans, interdependency was essential to their day to day survival. Furthermore, it was also an ideal that was institutionalized in many of the city’s social organizations including their families, neighborhoods, churches and social as well as in cultural traditions, such as the social aid and pleasure clubs discussed above.

It is also important to consider that one of the reasons interdependent African Americans might have felt so rooted and at home in New Orleans was because over two thirds of the city’s population were also of African American descent. Few cities in the United States can boast such a large African American population. If, as I am positing, race is to be understood as an aspect of an individuals embodied cultural capital, then it would make sense why individual’s would feel more comfortable striking up relationships with people whom they perceive to be like themselves. Their dominant racial status might have also created a situation such as that which Putnam discusses in recent research. Putnam (2007) argues that residents of racially, culturally, and financially homogeneous communities “trust” their neighbors more than individuals who live in more diverse communities. Similarly, results from trust experiments conducted
among undergraduate students in the northeast, found that people are more likely to trust individuals they believe to be racially or ethnically similar to themselves (Glaser et al 2000).

The culmination of all these factors enabled interdependent residents to convert their embodied cultural capital into financial capital in New Orleans.

**Institutionalized Cultural Capital in Louisiana**

Interdependent New Orleanians did not seem to place a great deal of importance on education or the attainment of advanced academic or professional qualifications. In conversations people stressed the importance of investing in family; however, few interdependent evacuees made similar comments about the benefits that could arise from an investment in education. Evacuees like Jaime, a 19-year-old high school graduate understood the situation as follows:

In New Orleans education wasn’t a big deal. They didn’t push it on anyone. The attitude was if you are not doing good in school - well okay - whatever. In New Orleans I was still in contact with my family almost every single day. There was not much else other than that.

For Jaime and other low-income interdependent residents, education may not have been considered a “big deal” because their families could ill afford to extend their education beyond high school. As Bourdieu reminds us, the attainment of advanced academic qualifications is not in and of itself determined by an individual’s “natural” aptitude nor is it necessarily a consequence of an individual’s propensity for hard work. More often, the attainment of advanced qualifications is due to the type and quality of capital resources a family possesses and is capable of transmitting to their children (Bourdieu 2001: 88-9). Most interdependent families in New Orleans were living from paycheck to paycheck and could not afford to make additional investments of their time.
or energy in the “institutional” education of themselves or their family members. What is more, few interdependent families possessed the economic or cultural capital to finance such an endeavor. The idea of having a child who could not financially contribute to the family’s welfare was simply too prohibitive for most families to endure.

To say that people placed less emphasis on education does not mean that they did not value education or think it unimportant to an individual’s development. Rather, most people seemed concerned about the quality of education they or their children would receive at a New Orleans public school. Time and time again people made comments about New Orleans ailing public school system. They spoke of strained or nonexistent school budgets, old building facilities, and a lack of academic options for their children, some of whom had special needs or learning disabilities. Beatrice, a married African American mother of four, agreed with Jaime that New Orleanians were more likely to invest in their family than education. On the other hand, she felt that a history of slavery, racism, poverty, and governmental disinvestment caused many working class or poor African Americans to make smaller investments in education than their middle class peers. Beatrice’s comments help to illuminate the sentiments of a number of working class African Americans in New Orleans:

People in New Orleans are not poor because they want to be poor. We can go back as far as slavery and that is why the black folk are as they are. The white folks they have education and they are liable to go to college and get an education but with the black folks we have been suppressed. From generation to generation you could not go to school or you did not have the money to go to school - it was taken away from

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28 Not all of the comments I heard about New Orleans public schools were negative. One interdependent African American woman noted that New Orleans public schools celebrated African American history and culture to a much greater extent than schools in Colorado. She acknowledged that Colorado public schools were better. However, she would prefer her children attend New Orleans public schools because of their pride and emphasis on African American history and culture. In addition, another working class mother noted that New Orleans public schools had a greater number of free activities her children could participate in after school.
you for all of those many generations. Now you want to be in school but you find that you don’t have that foundation because the foundation has been stripped away.

Beatrice’s feelings are not unfounded. Geographer Lewis Pierce (1976: 100) writes that southern states have traditionally allocated less money towards public education than other states in the country and “when money had to be split between two separate racial systems the results were truly miserable - especially on the negro side.” Louisiana is no exception to this rule. In fact, funding for New Orleans public schools steadily decreased after the 1960s when white, middle class residents began to move out of the city and into some of the area’s first suburban developments. In conjunction with the sudden decrease in white city residents was a sudden increase in the number of parents who began sending their children to private schools.29 This outward migration of area residents and public school attendants diminished the area’s tax base and left fewer, poorer residents to shoulder the burden of funding an already under-funded school system.

Almost none of the interdependent residents were able to afford a solution to the problem by sending their children or family members to private schools. The one exception to this rule was Diana, the most affluent and educated of all the interdependent research participants. Diana adhered to the values and norms of interdependency but she also strongly identified with being middle class, especially in terms of her views on

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29 According to Pierce (1976: 76) New Orleans was a relative “latecomer” in the development of their first suburbs and he notes that suburban expansion did not begin in New Orleans until the 1950s. Jefferson Parish was New Orleans first experiment with suburban development and differed architecturally and demographically from “old” New Orleans. Pierce writes that New Orleans first suburbs were populated primarily with middle to upper middle class white residents. Few non whites could afford to live in these new developments and those with the financial means were socially discouraged from moving outside of the city proper.
education and her support for advanced academic qualifications. Unlike other
interdependent research participants or members of her family, Diana possessed a
bachelor’s degree from an accredited university. According to Diana, her institutional
qualifications functioned as a “passport” to more secure, socially prestigious, and better
paid employment positions than that which her high school educated siblings could
access. In contrast to the physically taxing and poorly paid jobs held by her siblings,
Diana had always worked in white-collar industries where she received a relatively high
hourly wage, health insurance, and paid days off. As a single mother, Diana was unable
to make financial investments in her daughter’s education. However, she did expend a
great deal of time and energy helping her children with their homework and trying to
refine their academic skills. When her daughters began to have their own children, Diana
got a second job and set aside her extra income for her grandchildren’s future schooling.
She wanted her grandchildren to have the “advantage” of attending a private school and
she hoped her financial investments in their education would help to securely situate
them on the path to a future middle class status.

Few individuals I spoke with appeared to be worried about their lack of advanced
educational qualifications. As you can see from Figure 3.1, the vast majority of
interdependent participants possessed only a high school education - a figure that is not
necessarily inconsistent with the rest of the New Orleans population.
People did not perceive that their ability to attain employment in New Orleans hinged upon their possession of an advanced degree or a technical certificate. More often, becoming gainfully employed in New Orleans depended upon the resourcefulness of the individual or a word of mouth referral from a network member. It is unclear whether the de-emphasis on education stemmed from negative opinions of the New Orleans public school system or from a family’s inability to invest in the academic development of their kin members. What became apparent was that few interdependent residents felt their educational investments would “pay off” in the form of future economic rewards. Instead, people suggested that what “paid off” was investing in network members rather than an educational system that instilled few area residents with much confidence. Interdependent residents understood their network members would lend them a helping hand if they were in need of assistance - employment, financial, or otherwise. In contrast, they seemed much less certain of the types of returns they were likely to derive from investments in education.

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30 The New Orleans educational statistics listed in the above paragraph were derived from the 2000 United States Census.
Apparently, this de-emphasis on education among working class and poor Americans in my sample is not in and of itself rare and has been observed by other researchers. Fernandez-Kelly (1995: 231) for example, writes that lower income women from poor neighborhoods in Baltimore had no reason to “see education as a path to success.” She notes how these women distinguish between an “ideal” educational outcome in which they attained higher academic qualifications and landed a well paying job from their perceptions of “reality” wherein educational and occupational opportunities were severely limited. Sociologist Annette Lareau made similar observations about lower income Americans attitudes towards education in her ethnography *Unequal Childhoods* (2003). Lareau writes that a “parent’s social class position predicts children’s school success and thus their ultimate life chances” and notes how middle class and lower income Americans adopt distinctively different childrearing strategies with regard to education (2003: 29).

Like the interdependent individuals in this research study, Lareau observes how lower income participants assigned greater importance to the institution of the family rather than the institution of education. Worn out from a long day of work and plagued with routine worries about how to stretch a meager income, few lower income participants had the time, energy, or resources (financial or educational) to think about expanding upon their child’s education at home, school, or in the distant future. Parents trusted that the education their child received at school would be “good enough” for them to get a job and support themselves. Unlike middle class parents, they were not concerned to cultivate each and every one of their child’s potential talents nor were they worried about refining their child’s speaking or reasoning skills. At home, these parents spoke to
their children in short sentences, issued directives, and expected their children to be “respectful” of their commands. As a result, lower income children lacked the vocabularies and reasoning skills to effectively question or communicate with many people in positions of institutional authority. People’s attitudes towards education were exacerbated by the fact that many lower income parents did not feel they could adequately communicate with or understand their children’s teachers. Lareau notes how parents interactions with school employees were characterized by feelings of “constraint” because they lacked the requisite vocabularies to effectively voice their concerns or understand those of the teachers. In short, Lareau writes that lower income parents were more likely to invest in their families because kin assistance played a critical role in assuring their day to day survival. People could not make the same type of pronouncements about their investments in education and few had the luxury of preparing for an unknown and distant future.

**Life after Disaster Resettlement**

Based on my research, it is undeniable that lower income, interdependent people were more profoundly affected by the hurricane and their resettlement than were higher income individuals. Whereas most self-sufficient individuals described their disaster resettlement experience as an “inconvenience” or a “hardship,” lower income, interdependent individuals spoke of their experience in much more dramatic and weighty terms. Like most residents who lived in disaster-affected areas, interdependent individuals experienced overwhelming material losses after the disaster. Katrina’s violent winds and 20-25 foot surges of water drowned whole neighborhoods and communities and destroyed their homes and material possessions. However, in many ways
resettlement in Colorado proved to be more detrimental for interdependent people than the physical wreckage wrought by Hurricane Katrina. Resettlement ruptured social networks and divorced people from the family and friends who had provided them with important instrumental services. In addition, interdependent residents complained that they were resettled in a state that was as geographically distant as it was culturally dissimilar to the place they called home. People quickly discovered that most Colorado residents adhered to vastly different values in terms of family, education, and what constitutes sound economic reasoning, than what they themselves were used to in New Orleans. In turn, many evacuees felt extremely out of place in their new environs.

**Economic Capital in Colorado**

Unlike self-sufficient individuals, interdependent evacuees did not have the luxury of savings or insurance payments to help them rebuild their lives in Colorado. With little to no financial capital, interdependent people were forced to rely upon governmental or non-governmental assistance programs to get back on their feet. Ninety-five percent of all interdependent evacuees in my study participated in FEMA’s housing assistance program which promised to provide people with 12 to 18 months of rental assistance in Colorado. The housing program made it possible for people to live in Colorado despite rent prices that were prohibitively higher than they were used to paying in Louisiana. Housing assistance was one of the most beneficial sources of aid people received, although it was by no means perfectly instituted in Colorado. However, like many other aspects of their lives following the disaster, their housing situation was precarious and uncertain. For example, many people were placed in homes or apartments that they would not be able to afford once the FEMA program ended. In
addition, residences were often distant from town centers, social service providers, or places of employment. This proved particularly problematic for those individuals who did not own cars or live within walking distance of a bus stop. Geographic isolation and a lack of transportation impeded people’s ability to find jobs or access alternative sources of assistance.

Job loss and long term unemployment were two additional factors that contributed to people’s increased economic insecurity. Rates of job loss were especially high among interdependent evacuees who frequently lost multiple jobs per person. In contrast to self sufficient participants, only two of the interdependent evacuees in my study were affiliated with or employed by a national company. Few individuals had the luxury or opportunity to transfer their job to Colorado and resume work immediately. The two individuals who had the least degree of difficulty attaining employment were those who were employed at Wal-Mart in Louisiana. Employment ties to a national company like Wal-Mart helped both people obtain comparable employment in Colorado rapidly.\textsuperscript{31} In contrast, it took the other five individuals in my sample four to six months to find a job but even then, none of them were able to find financially equivalent employment positions. Indeed, all those except the Wal-Mart employees complained they were making less money in Colorado than they had in Louisiana. Jennifer, a massage therapist, describes her feelings of frustration in regard to her reduced wages:

\begin{quote}
The new place I work pays about half of what I had made in New Orleans and I have to do more massages in order to make less than I did there. I can’t work many more days then I already do because I am required to do a massive number every day and by the end of the day my body is just tired. I would go into the salon in New Orleans and do
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{31} The other five people who found employment in Colorado possessed a technical skill, worked in the restaurant industry, or found a job through a family member or a family friend.
three massages but I made over a hundred dollars. Here I have to do 6 massages to make a hundred dollars.

Despite people’s frustrations, employed evacuees were well aware they were better off than those evacuees who remained chronically unemployed. Working class and poor evacuees understood they needed to find employment in Colorado. Most received weekly or monthly reminders from aid agencies regarding the status of their rental assistance, unemployment benefits, or other types of aid. Unfortunately, messages from aid agencies were often contradictory and misleading. Few people had a clear understanding of how long they would be able to access disaster assistance and many feared their benefits would end abruptly. Fears of homelessness were never far from people’s minds. Evacuees like Diane, a former nurse’s assistant in her mid-fifties, understood assistance would not last forever:

I need to be on some person’s job - where I can be making me some money because when the pay from FEMA runs out I need to be able to pay for my rent, my utilities, and some transportation. If I can’t start working and banking up on that now - I am going to be in a pickle. Who will come to my aid then?

Regardless of people’s awareness that they needed to begin earning money, a number of factors prevented people from immediately seeking work. Most were unsure how long they would stay in Colorado and they were hesitant to become employed if they planned to return home. Others argued that trying to negotiate disaster assistance programs and social service providers was a full time job that left few hours in the day to look for work. A smaller number of individuals cited family problems or concerns as yet another reason why they had to postpone their job search. Evacuees like Cheryl, who relocated with her ailing mother, her two dependent children, and her sister’s family, postponed her job search in Colorado when her mother became deathly ill and was
hospitalized. Cheryl did not feel it was appropriate to begin looking for work until after her mother was released from the hospital and began to show signs of physical recovery.

By mid November 2005, the majority of interdependent evacuees felt as if they had their lives well enough in order to begin looking for work. In general, people perceived that there were a greater number of employment opportunities in Colorado than Louisiana and felt relatively confident about finding a job. The following statement from Caroline, a single mom with two children, neatly describes how many evacuees felt during their first months of residence in Colorado:

There are more opportunities, a better financial situation and job opportunities in Colorado. And my boy is in a good school. He is in CCI charter school. So I see it as a big turnaround for us. It was really hard and depressing at home so I am not really sad. I do miss home but right now I see I am living better. So I don’t have a problem with Colorado and now that my kids have been settled and are coming around things are going to be better.

Social Capital in Colorado

Despite people’s optimism, two thirds of all working class and poor evacuees in my sample had still not found work a year after their resettlement. A small number of evacuees attributed their inability to find employment in Colorado to issues of racial and gender discrimination while other evacuees cited a lack of formal work qualifications as their greatest impediment to finding work. More commonly, however, I heard people mention that they did not know how to go about getting a job in place where they were unfamiliar with the workings of the city and where they knew few people. For many evacuees, this was the first time in ten or twenty years they had had to apply for a new job. Most were used to relying upon friends or family for employment help and were unaccustomed to the formal hiring process in Colorado whereby one filled out an
application (often online), submitted a resume, and attended one or more job interviews. Without these valuable social networks, many individuals found it difficult to attain formal or informal employment. Individuals like Elton were well aware that their social connections could help them to acquire a job or learn about alternative ways to earn an income:

Maybe by the first of the year I will have met enough people to decide and think about if I can financially make it here. I don’t know enough people here yet so that means that the job that I decide to pick is not only going to be for money but also for contacts. So I can use those people to help me with my business plan.

Elton understood the social relationships could yield important economic benefits. He recognized that his ability to “financially make it” in Colorado depended in large part upon his capacity to develop new social acquaintances. The creation of social connections was especially important for evacuees like Elton who had no pre-existing social connections in Colorado and who was evacuated to the Rocky Mountain state without family or friends from home. Lacking either financial or social resources, these individuals had few alternatives but to rely upon disaster assistance programs, social service providers, or the charity of local residents, all of which offered evacuees short term remedies for complex and potentially long term problems.

Many evacuees tried to circumvent their dependence on aid by engaging in relationships of reciprocity with local volunteers or other evacuees. Frequently unemployed or underemployed evacuees were hired by local volunteers or other evacuees for help with short term “side projects” such as house painting, furniture assemblage, or yard work. Evacuees were able to earn extra money through side work; however, side projects were too infrequent to serve as a viable source of income. More commonly,
evacuees “swapped” goods and services with other evacuees who they had become friends with or who lived in close proximity to them. Unfortunately, geographic isolation and a lack of transportation prevented many people from initiating or maintaining reciprocal relationships with Katrina evacuees in Colorado. All too frequently evacuees who relied upon rental assistance were housed in residences that were distant from commercial areas of the city and lacked convenient access to a bus station. A common complaint issued by evacuees was that they felt isolated and trapped in their new homes. These individuals lamented they had to ask someone for a ride anytime they wanted to go to the grocery store or attend a Sunday church service. Without a centrally located home or access to transportation people were not positioned well to independently care for their needs and desires. As a result, what people had once considered to be the simplest of tasks in New Orleans, such as walking to the corner store to get a container of milk, became transformed into difficult and trying experiences in Colorado.

Interestingly, most of the interdependent evacuees, especially those of African American descent, expressed doubt at the possibility of establishing a meaningful relationship with native Coloradoans. Evacuees noted that people in Colorado were different “culturally” from Gulf Coast residents and seemed to adhere to an unfamiliar set of norms and values. People spoke about these differences in a number of different ways. One 55-year-old New Orleans native noted that the “texture” of people in Colorado was different. Other evacuees were more specific and described Colorado residents as “unfriendly,” “cold,” and “selfish.” Interdependent African Americans were shocked that people in Colorado smiled infrequently, socialized less, and appeared reticent to speak to people they did not know. They also complained about the shorter business hours in
Colorado, noting how the area’s effective “curfew” impinged upon their ability to go out and meet new people. For individuals who were used to going out late in the evening, it was disappointing to go out in Colorado where bars and nightclubs closed as “early” as two in the morning.

Some evacuees called into question the sincerity of Coloradoans and complained that area residents issued empty promises they had no intention of honoring. Many evacuees expressed feeling let down and disappointed by Coloradoans who did not follow through on their verbal assurances to help them and their family. One such case involved Annika, a single mother with two young children. In an outraged tone of voice, Annika relayed how she felt betrayed by the congregants of her church in Colorado, whose hollow assurances of assistance brought Annika nothing more than inflated hopes, dashed expectations, and a nagging sense of having been overlooked by people who were significantly better positioned than she. After months of inaction on the part of her church, Annika finally confronted the members of her congregation during a weekly Sunday service. She recalled how she stood up, looked around at her fellow parishioners and told them how ashamed and disappointed she was that they could not “find it in their hearts” to help a single mother and her two young daughters. Her feelings of dismay and frustration towards Colorado residents were common among many of the interdependent African Americans I interviewed.

More than anything else, interdependent evacuees seemed astonished to learn that the Coloradoans they came into contact with did not believe in an ethos of interdependency. Nor did they seem to establish relationships characterized by regular
acts of reciprocity and exchange. The words of one 45-year-old African American native of New Orleans help to illustrate this sentiment:

This is a different place than New Orleans. This place is a taking place and it is not as much of a giving place as New Orleans. People here are not used to you helping them and when you help them it’s like either you are up to something or you are a nice guy and we can take advantage of. I am just trying to be friends with you and show you that this is what I can do help you – but you have to be there for me too.

Among lower income, New Orleans natives, reciprocity and exchange were the central ways that people established new relationships and cemented old ones. Unfortunately, these patterns appeared absent among the Coloradoans whom evacuees met. In fact, some evacuees felt that Colorado residents grossly misinterpreted their efforts to establish relationships. As a result of these regional discrepancies in friendship styles, interdependent evacuees were more likely to form friendships among other southern transplants whom they met through family members or a friend of a friend.

Church was the one exception to this rule. Highly religious, the majority of interdependent evacuees felt they were most likely to meet people in Colorado who adhered to similar norms and values by attending a local church. Finding a “church home” was central to people’s vision of rebuilding their lives in Colorado and interdependent evacuees actively pursued finding a religious organization with which they could become members. This was especially important for interdependent African Americans who sought a “church home” that had large numbers of African American congregants and religious traditions that mirrored those of their former congregations. Initially, interdependent evacuees were courted by a number of different Christian churches in Denver, many of whom promised to provide evacuees with long term care and assistance. At the forefront of the recovery effort, was a series of African American
churches collectively referred to as the “Coalition of Faith.” For some individuals, extended care was forthcoming and church congregants valiantly attempted to assist evacuees with needs that were both great and small. For evacuees like Melvin, a middle aged, African American male with severe health problems, church formed the basis of his social life in Colorado. Were it not for church members providing Melvin with weekly rides to and from Sunday mass and other church related activities, evacuees like Melvin would have seldom attended social events or interacted with Coloradoan residents.

During their early residence in Colorado, several churches also provided evacuees with modest monetary contributions that rarely exceeded a few hundred dollars.\(^32\) In general, evacuees spoke positively about the initial assistance they received from churches.

As time wore on, however, people became increasingly frustrated with the lackluster or non-existent assistance they had been so enthusiastically promised in the early months of their relocation. For every individual I interviewed whose church-related experience was positive, I met an equal number of people who were bitterly disappointed with their encounters with religious institutions in Colorado. These individuals complained that aid was not forthcoming or that they were unable to establish meaningful relationships with other church congregants. In the bitterest of moments, some even claimed they had been duped by “false men of the cloth” who capitalized on their evacuee status to drum up media attention and attract new congregants.

While not common, a few interdependent individuals recognized the futility of “interdependency” and actively sought instead to embrace the ideals of individualism and self sufficiency after they moved to Colorado. These individuals were keenly aware they had few if any people whom they could rely upon like “they was family” in Colorado. In

\(^32\) However, one of the pastors in Denver actually gave an evacuee family his house.
addition, they understood that their ability to recover hinged upon the strength of their will alone. In their new “home,” they began to re-formulate their beliefs regarding the practice of interdependency. What they had once characterized as an adaptive strength or a “natural” part of life in Louisiana was recast as a weakness in their new locale. In the following excerpt Elliot explains how the practice of interdependency made some Katrina evacuees “vulnerable” in Colorado:

The way I am trying to help Terrell is by making him more comfortable and more independent. I don’t feel that where he was from he was very independent. I feel that he depended on someone or somebody. That happened to a lot of people in the south was they had depended on others and now that we are here we have to know how to get up and get out and make things happen for ourselves.

Evacuees like Elliot believed many New Orleans natives were at a distinct disadvantage in Colorado due to their adherence to the values of interdependency. He posits that some New Orleanians had a difficult time “making things happen” in Colorado because they were unaccustomed to doing things on their own.

Individuals who were able to reinstitute relationships of interdependency and reciprocity with family members who were fellow Katrina evacuees fared better than individuals who arrived in the state by themselves. However, many interdependent individuals evacuated and resettled in Colorado because they had family that lived in the state pre-Katrina. During evacuation, people strove to keep their family members together and many evacuated to Colorado with 15 or 20 family members from home.

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33 Seven interdependent individuals in my sample had been forcibly evacuated to Colorado by the U.S. government. They arrived in Colorado by themselves and did not have family or friends who lived in the state pre-Katrina.

34 On average, interdependent African Americans evacuated to Colorado with close to four family members from home, though some resettled in the Rocky Mountain state with upwards of ten relatives from the Gulf Coast region. The interdependent whites in this sample evacuated to Colorado with an average of 11 family members from home, all of whom were nuclear family members. Interdependent
Diana, one of seven siblings and a mother of two daughters, explained why many of her family members moved to Colorado following the hurricane:

We all stay close together because we all want to make sure that the other is taken care of. My daughters are grown and I did not even ask them if they wanted to come up - they just followed me. Many of my sisters and their kids followed me here too. We all just tried to stick together so that we can help one another out.

The presence of displaced Gulf Coast kin in Colorado made it possible for these people to re-establish many of the forms of everyday reciprocity that characterized their lives in Louisiana.

Unfortunately, disaster resettlement in Colorado severely impaired the size, strength, and capacity of many family networks. The six single mothers in this sample, were especially disadvantaged to be separated from network members who had offered them free and reliable childcare assistance in Louisiana. Parents without family in Colorado found it difficult if not impossible to pay for childcare assistance. The following quote from Annika helps to demonstrate her anger and frustration over the high cost of care in Colorado:

In New Orleans I didn’t have to do everything by myself. If I needed to go to work or go out I knew I could call their father or one of my family members for help. Here I can’t do that and I have to do everything by myself. I have tried to put my daughter into kindergarten here so I can have some time to myself but they told me that a full day kindergarten is $285 and I told them that I didn’t have that kind of money. I applied for child care assistance but I have yet to hear from the lady who worked for that program. I have been living from paycheck to paycheck but now I am over my account and I have two separate accounts. I owe a lot of money and basically I don’t know what I am going to do.

whites had much smaller family networks in New Orleans due in part to the fact that their families were relatively recent migrants to the area. When these individuals evacuated to Colorado – they evacuated with almost all of their kin members from the area.
Family-provisioned childcare assistance provided single moms with a financial safety net. When that was taken away in Colorado – many women wondered how they would be able to afford to attend a job if they also had to pay for childcare assistance. This put many single moms in a very precarious situation and many complained they were “stuck between a rock and a hard place.” They needed jobs in order to support their families, but few could afford to pay for daycare services on top of all of their other disaster resettlement expenses, especially once their rental subsidies ended. Among the displaced evacuees in Colorado, many grandmothers, older sisters, or great aunts also assumed control of a kin member’s child when it became apparent that their relative was having a hard time taking care of the child on their own. Separation from instrumental kin members did not affect women and men equally. As the primary caretakers of their family, women were much more vulnerable than men after their disaster resettlement. Few of the men in my study had young, dependent children whom they were financially responsible and of those who did, none were the primary caretaker. Although men also suffered from their familial separation, they did not experience the same type of stress as women, mainly because they did not have to contend with many of the issues that are commonly associated with being the primary caretaker. In this sense, they were spared the emotional and financial hardship that many of the women routinely endured. The burden of the kin group fell overwhelmingly on the shoulders of women, be they single mothers or elderly grandmothers. When the family was in a state of crisis, it was interdependent women in this sample who bore the brunt of the responsibility.

Evacuees derived many benefits from their uprooted Gulf Coast relatives, but as a whole, their kin networks were in a state of crisis. Few evacuees or their extended kin
from home were doing well emotionally or financially making it difficult for people to rely upon their displaced networks for the same variety of services they had regularly accessed before Katrina. In addition, many evacuees associated exclusively with other disaster-affected family members who were limited the same sorts of information and services as they. Few of the evacuees were acquainted with Colorado locals who could introduce them to their friends in Colorado or provide them with helpful knowledge about the opportunities or services available to them in their new state of residence. In the worst case scenario, a handful of interdependent evacuees had disaster-displaced family members whose financial or mental health situation was so dire they inadvertently jeopardized their kin member’s financial situation. The following excerpt from my field notes is perhaps the most tragic example of a kin network overburdened by numerous individuals financial and mental health woes:

I just got off the phone with Caroline. She started crying when I asked how she was doing. She said she just drove to Dallas to take her two grandchildren away from her daughter who is severely depressed and can not find a job. Her grandchildren have been living with her since the end of June. She is no longer receiving food stamps and has received an eviction notice from her apartment. She is also having her electricity cut off in a few days because she has an outstanding electricity bill of $561. To make matters worse, her son just tried to kill himself. She said she has been receiving rental checks from FEMA every three months. Her last check came a month ago and she used it to pay June’s rent. She has not paid the rent for July because many of her family members are having financial problems. She said she has been supporting three families with her rent money. Specifically, she has been helping out her children who are mentally and financially “struggling.” She does not feel bad about not paying her rent because “family comes first.” In a week’s time Caroline believes she will be evicted from her apartment.

Caroline’s experience serves as a powerful example of one instance in which relationships of mutuality can be maladaptive for the individual involved. For Caroline,
the demands of her troubled family members were so great that they actually threatened her financial, emotional, and physical well being. Viewed from the perspective of social capital theory, Caroline’s experience calls attention to the “dark side” of social capital in which the interests of the group are likely to be considered more important than those of the individual (Field 2003, Portes 1998). In the end, the persistent demands of kin members served as another factor that may have hindered the financial recovery of interdependent evacuees in Colorado. Although Caroline’s decision may have seemed maladaptive when looked at from the vantage point of her individual person, it was a decision that made “good sense” when looked at in relation to the health of the kin group. As a member of an interdependent family, Caroline was not making decisions based upon what would be good for her and her alone. For her, self preservation involved much more than just the health of her individual body - it meant trying to preserve the entirety of the kin group.

Individuals with family in Colorado pre-Katrina reaped the greatest rewards from their kin ties. Their local Colorado relatives helped them to become acquainted with their new place of residence and assisted them in locating social service providers, employment opportunities, and affordable housing. Evacuees like Troy, a 39-year-old New Orleans native, relied upon his sister and cousin to provide him with useful information about the workings of the city. In particular his family members in Colorado helped him to find a centrally located and affordable place to live. Troy described the process by which he found his current home:

My sister and my cousin they got with me and we rode around the different neighborhoods so we could find me a house. The landlord of my apartment – well he knew my sister. They are good friends. That is
how I wound up in the apartment that I am in now – my sister knew the landlord.

Troy found a home in Colorado with ease and confidence due to his family members’ knowledge of the city as well as their social connections. His sister’s social connections also provided him with employment information. In fact, it was one of his sister’s acquaintances who helped Troy to find a job in Colorado. This local resident told Troy about the employment opening at her work and encouraged her boss to hire him for the position. Her employment referral helped Troy to quickly secure a job through informal avenues. The “strength of weak ties” is clearly demonstrated in this example.

Evacuees with Colorado relatives were lucky to have a native family member to assist them; however, evacuees were quick to remind me that there were limits to the types of services their relatives could feasibly provide or that they felt comfortable requesting. Evacuees did not want their Colorado relatives to become overwhelmed by the frequency of their requests and several individuals admitted they refrained from asking these relatives for assistance until their need for help was extremely pressing. Moreover, a family member’s ability to help their disaster-affected kin was often hindered by the small amount of economic resources they too possessed. Like their disaster-affected relatives, the majority of their Colorado kin were also of working class backgrounds and had little money they could lend their financially needy, displaced relatives.

**Embodied Cultural Capital in Colorado**

Most interdependent residents had spent their entire lives within the confines of New Orleans or the state of Louisiana. What is more, many of the most impoverished interdependent residents had never travelled outside of Louisiana, and of those who had,
few had ventured further than neighboring southern states. To say that people felt a profound sense of “rupture” or culture shock when they moved to Colorado would be a serious under-estimation of the situation. Within days of their arrival, people described feeling “out of place” in Colorado. They were not used to the high altitude, the newness of the cities, or the mountains that seemed to rise, out of nowhere, from the flat, lunar looking plains. The contrast to their homes was striking. People not only felt dislocated from their homes and families but in someway also disconnected from themselves.

Psychologist Mindy Fullilove argues that an unexpected separation from one’s home produces what she refers to as “root shock.” She writes that “familiar spatial routines are indelibly etched on the nervous system and the musculature” and that “the sudden loss of the exterior world that conditioned those motions is perceived as a loss of the self” (1996: 1518). So too was the experience of interdependent evacuees in Colorado.

As discussed in the literature review, embodied cultural capital, like social capital, is extremely place-bound. As such, the value of an individual’s embodied cultural capital is likely to vary from one place to the next, depending upon the mores, values, or customs of the people in a given society. For instance, what is considered “natural,” “polite,” or “customary” in one place may not necessarily be understood as such in another locale.

Unlike economic or institutionalized cultural capital, the value or worth of an individuals embodied cultural capital is not guaranteed by a larger institution such as the U.S. government or a public or private university. Consequently, it is much more difficult for an individual to transfer their embodied cultural capital to a new place and attain an equivalent value for their capital resource, especially if, as Ong notes, the said individual is of a different racial, cultural, or linguistic group than majority of society members. Ong
contends that the “dissonance between the racialized immigrant and the cultural skills they wish to acquire produces structural limits to the conversion of economic wealth into cultural prestige” (1999: 96).

Among interdependent people in this sample, the type of “dissonance” Ong describes occurred when these individuals attempted to convert their embodied cultural capital into social or economic capital upon their resettlement in Colorado. Immediately, interdependent evacuees, especially those of African-American descent, described feeling “uncomfortable” in their new Colorado environs. Instead of finding people who were open and receptive to their attempts at friendship or their pleas for assistance, the majority of interdependent evacuees described people in Colorado as “cold,” “unfriendly,” and “aloof.” Residents in Colorado did not feel “like family.” The following quote from Francis helps to demonstrate how many interdependent evacuees felt in Colorado:

   People are kind of cold here - you have to try and warm the people up you know to get them to respond to you. You know you can walk and say “Good morning - how is everybody,” and no one will say anything

   For interdependent evacuees, to say that someone was friendly was in many ways an admission that the person adhered to values and norms that encouraged generosity, reciprocity, interdependence, and sociability among network members. When the same people moved to Colorado they noted a difference among area residents. They found that people in Colorado were not “friendly” or “giving.” They used this “discourse of friendliness” to remark upon the economic changes they were experiencing since their disaster resettlement. Though this discourse hinted at people’s loss, it could not adequately capture the depth of their loss.
Several evacuees told me stories about how they had been confronted by their neighbors or co-workers in regard to their “strange,” “foreign,” or “disruptive” behavior. Many of their neighbors were especially unhappy about the frequency with which evacuees had people over to their homes for family gatherings, afternoon barbeques, or some other type of weekend revelry. Several evacuees recalled how their neighbors issued complaints when they thought one of their social gatherings was “getting out of hand.” One instance of this occurred to Donna, a middle aged African-American woman, whose neighbors called the police and complained about the noise level of her three, young grandchildren who were playing outside. The worst case of neighbor intolerance occurred to Lester, a blind, retired, elementary school teacher who was evicted from his apartment in Colorado after his neighbors and apartment manager accused him of selling drugs to the people who daily congregated in his home. As a result of these accusations, Lester, a disabled man who had lived in the same apartment in New Orleans for thirty five years, was forced to relocate for the fourth time in one year.

Few African American evacuees were willing to talk to me, a white woman, about whether they had encountered racism in Colorado. Despite their silence, I could not help but wonder whether some of the “unfriendliness” or “coldness” they were experiencing might not have something to do with their being a racial and cultural minority in Colorado. This hypothesis deepened once I realized that neither interdependent or self sufficient whites were making similar complaints. Interestingly, the majority of whites did make similar kinds of comments about their living experiences in New Orleans, a city where most of them described feeling like a cultural and racial “other.”
Friedmann writes that making the transition from the embodied cultural capital of one place to another is ultimately a “matter of economic survival” (1995: 319). Unfortunately, interdependent evacuees did not have an embodied cultural capital that was consistent with that of Colorado residents. As such, it was difficult for them to convert their embodied cultural capital into social or economic capital upon their disaster resettlement and it was nearly impossible for them to attain an equivalent value for the embodied cultural capital they possessed. This impacted them financially. Where they had once been insiders in New Orleans, they most definitely felt like outsiders in Colorado.

Institutionalized Cultural Capital in Colorado

When asked what some of the biggest differences were between Colorado residents and New Orleanians, an overwhelmingly common response was that people in Colorado placed a much greater emphasis on education than residents of Louisiana. In contrast to the family-centric focus of New Orleans residents, many interdependent evacuees felt Colorado residents were more likely to consider education as their most important priority rather than the maintenance of their kin network.

The perception among evacuees that Coloradoans place less emphasis on their kin networks may be due in part to the fact that Denver has a far greater number of residents who are transplants compared to the city of New Orleans. 2000 United States Census data reveals that 77.4% of New Orleans residents were born in the state of Louisiana while only 40.1% of Denver residents were born in Colorado. Non-native status is an important variable to consider and may impact the size of an individual’s family network. For instance, if an individual moved to a new state of residence as an adolescent or an adult
they are likely to have moved by themselves or with their nuclear family. In turn, they are also less likely to have many relatives who reside in their new locale. Consequently, geographically-mobile people may be less apt to engage in habitual acts of reciprocity with their kin members than more “rooted” people who maintain residence in the city of their birth and live in close proximity to the rest of their kin.

Their perception that Coloradoans made larger temporal and monetary investments in education than New Orleanians is not unfounded. As you can see from Figure 3.2, interdependent evacuees were significantly less well educated than the majority of their neighbors in Denver, Colorado.

**Figure 3.2 Highest Level of Academic Achievement for Interdependent Evacuees Compared to the Greater Denver Population**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Interdependent</th>
<th>% Interdependent</th>
<th>% Denver Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No High School Diploma</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College No Degree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree or Higher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from the 2000 U.S. Census reveals that 48.8% of New Orleans residents have a high school degree or less compared to 41.1% of Denver residents. In addition, census data shows that only 25.7% of New Orleans residents have achieved a bachelor’s degree or higher compared to 34.5% of Denver residents. In both cases, we see that the average Denver resident has a higher level of academic achievement than the average New Orleanian. In both instances, there is less than a 10 percent difference distinguishing one city population from another. It may be questionable whether or not a ten percent difference is significant enough to declare Denver a more educated city than New
Orleans but what can not be disputed is the striking difference between the levels of academic achievement for a Denver resident compared to an interdependent evacuee. Such a comparison clearly points to the existence of significant educational disparities between the resettled interdependent evacuees and their new “host” population.

Evacuees were well aware that they possessed lower levels of education than many of the social service providers, aid workers, or volunteers they initially encountered after their resettlement in Colorado. Many complained that people in Colorado assumed they were “illiterate” and “poor” upon learning they were a Katrina evacuee. Such experiences left interdependent evacuees feeling angry and vulnerable. They often felt judged by a Coloradoans as unintelligent because they spoke with a southern accent, had attended New Orleans public schools, and were unlikely to have a degree beyond high school. At home in New Orleans, most interdependent evacuees felt fine with their level of academic achievement. Only upon moving to Colorado did these individuals begin to feel as if they might be less well-educated than the individuals who surrounded them.

This perception of difference had both positive and negative consequences among interdependent evacuees. In the best case scenario, some interdependent evacuees felt they and their children would benefit from Colorado’s educational system. Adults excitedly discussed the possibility of going back to school and learning a new skill or trade. They hoped that by furthering their education they would be able to achieve a better-paying and more secure employment position in Colorado. For these individuals, the chance to go back to school to earn a certificate, an associate’s degree, or an undergraduate diploma was a rare opportunity that few would have considered a viable

35 Most of these individuals were also of middle class backgrounds and were likely to have extended their education beyond high school.
option in New Orleans. Similarly, parents were excited that their children would receive a superior education in Colorado. Many hoped their children would be able to extend their education in Colorado, as was the case with Jeannette who enrolled in college. Likewise, parents also felt optimistic that their children with learning disabilities would be better served in Colorado public schools. Although these individuals felt confident about the benefits they could derive from advanced education they were also aware that such investments would take time and money before they paid off in the form of more lucrative job opportunities. Unfortunately, without significant financial assistance from the state or aid organizations, the promise of extending one's education beyond high school was likely to elude most lower income, interdependent evacuees.

Close to half of the interdependent evacuees I interviewed seemed unconcerned that their level of academic achievement might affect their ability to find a job. They believed they had enough work experience to demonstrate their level of skill and competence in their chosen profession. Comfortable with their career path in life, these individuals were disinterested in branching out and trying a new profession. Many other evacuees believed their disaster resettlement in Colorado had finally put them in a position to make a long awaited career change. In particular, they wanted to find a job that was both more profitable and interesting than their former employment position. It was these individuals who were the most aware of their lack of institutionally recognized work experience or accreditation. Many felt certain they had been passed over for jobs in Colorado because they could not provide employers with this type of documentation.

Government assistance was the one safety net capital-poor evacuees had available to them during their troubled job hunt. Unfortunately, accessing and negotiating social
services was difficult for many interdependent evacuees because of perceived communication differences. Many interdependent evacuees complained they did not feel comfortable communicating with people in Colorado, particularly if they were an institutional employee. Upon moving to Colorado, only two of the interdependent evacuees in my sample had experience communicating with social service providers before the hurricane. Both of these individuals received disability assistance in New Orleans. The other interdependent evacuees were unfamiliar with the rhetoric used by social service providers. In addition, they were ignorant of the protocols and procedures social service providers used when interacting and communicating with them. Their descriptions of their interactions with institutional authorities were often fraught with feelings of frustration at having not being understood by institutional authorities or alternatively not understanding what institutional authorities were saying. Several interdependent evacuees described feeling angry and enraged during an encounter with an institutional employee. The following excerpt from Donna helps to demonstrate this point:

The lady I called had me so upset that my pressure went completely up. I really told her that if I was close to her I would shake her silly. Just for her to shut up and listen to what I am saying because she didn’t hear me. And she didn’t hear me because she was trying to talk over me. Like I told her, I am the one that needs to be talking to you because this is what your job is.

Donna’s display of anger calls attention to her frustration at having not been listened to or understood. It also highlights her feeling of powerlessness vis a vis the person she hoped would offer her assistance. Rather than being treated like an equal, Donna was angry that she was being treated like an impoverished supplicant.
Feeling unable to effectively communicate with institutional authorities had real economic consequences for many interdependent residents and may have prevented some interdependent evacuees from seeking assistance. In fact, there were a number of occasions when interdependent evacuees contacted me and asked if I would call some type of institutional authority for them. While I was conducting fieldwork, I was asked to call social service providers, caseworkers, business representatives, medical providers, landlords, travel agents, and bank employees for various evacuees who thought I would have more success communicating with institutional authorities than they. Many assumed I would know the appropriate questions to ask and would be able to correctly interpret what was being said. The following excerpt from my field notes highlights one instance in which an interdependent evacuee asked me to contact a social service provider on his behalf:

Bernard told me that he does not understand how to communicate with people here or how to negotiate receiving certain social services. I told him that he should contact a social worker named Sybil. I thought she might be able to help him get disability assistance in Colorado. He responded by saying that he wanted me to call for him because he would not be able to communicate with Sybil. He said he would not know the right questions to ask. Feeling both frustrated and sad, Bernard began to cry. Shortly thereafter, he asked to stop the interview. When we finished, he begged me not to tell anyone what transpired.

Interdependent evacuees like Bernard were intimidated to talk to social service providers or other institutional employees. I think this type of discomfort may have prevented some from applying for certain services to which they were entitled to receive or inquiring about whether such services existed. Others adopted an attitude of resignation during their encounters with institutional authorities. They assumed their pleas for assistance would fall on deaf ears or be misunderstood altogether.
This opinion was corroborated by Rebecca, an African-American social worker I became acquainted with at a Mardi Gras party held by an evacuee I interviewed months earlier. Rebecca had a unique perspective about how the “average” lower income, African-American evacuee was faring in Colorado. As a social worker she helped evacuees find available social services and she held weekly counseling sessions for evacuees who wanted to vent their frustrations, air their concerns, and seek advice. Time and time again, Rebecca heard evacuees complain that they were having trouble communicating with local area residents. Like me, Rebecca had received phone calls from displaced Gulf Coast residents who wanted her to contact a possible employer, bank, landlord, or social service provider to help them voice their needs. She recalled how alienated and frustrated many evacuees felt during their interactions with Colorado residents who seemed to misunderstand much of what the evacuees themselves were trying to communicate. Similarly, evacuees also admitted that they had a difficult time trying to decipher what many Colorado residents were saying, especially those who were aid workers.

Both these feelings of frustration and resignation have been observed in other research studies chronicling the experiences of lower income Americans interactions with institutional authorities. Sociologist Annette Lareau observed how lower income Americans were passive and deferential during their encounters with institutional authorities in part because they “lacked the requisite vocabulary to challenge such individuals” (2003: 199). She writes that “incompletely or incorrectly understanding the terminology professionals favored was a common problem among parents in the working class and poor families we observed. It is one of many elements that contribute to the
parent’s tendency to defer to, or at least silently accept the pronouncements of teachers and health care providers” (2003: 216). Interestingly, Lareau found that lower income parents communicated with institutional authorities in a completely different fashion than parents of middle class backgrounds. In contrast to middle class parents, lower income individuals did not question institutional authorities, make special demands, or seek concessions for themselves or their children. In turn, institutional authorities, who were frequently of middle class status, often misinterpreted their silence or lack of questioning as a sign of their general disinterest in the health or education of their child. As a whole, Lareau seemed to doubt whether institutional authorities understood the logic or reasoning that guided lower income parent’s communication or parenting styles.

Problems with communication highlight class differences and call attention to “taken for granted” issues of class privilege. Institutionalized cultural capital is not just about the number of degrees a person is able to accumulate. It also has to do with how one talks and engages people in conversations. Annette Lareau argues that the way a person communicates reveals their level of academic achievement as well as their parents’ class background (2003). Like Bourdieu, Lareau argues that cultural capital is transmitted from parent to child. To assume that people are “naturally” more gifted is to ignore the ways in which parents transmit their knowledge, time, and money to their children thereby affording some children the opportunity to develop larger vocabularies, more advanced reasoning skills, and higher academic degrees. This generational transmission of economic and cultural capital endows children of upper class backgrounds with advantages that few lower class people are likely to possess.
Interdependent White Participants

Whites did not fit neatly into the interdependent category but they did possess similar capital resources and social characteristics as their African American counterparts. Rarely did any of the interdependent whites in this sample use the words “interdependence” to discuss their lifestyle; however, all expressed that they would not have been able to make it on their own were it not for the assistance they received from their families. Based on their identification as being a member of cooperative and highly intertwined family, I have included them in the same section as interdependent African Americans despite the differences between each group of people. In this section of the chapter, I will focus on the ways these two groups of people differ. Unless otherwise stated, the reader should assume that the previous section of the paper incorporates and details the experiences of both groups of interdependent people.

Most of the interdependent whites considered New Orleans to be their home. They were quick to note, however, that although they were from New Orleans, they did not necessarily identify with all aspects of New Orleans culture. Specifically, they actively distinguished themselves from African-American city residents. At the most fundamental level, interdependent African-American and white participants differed in the extent to which they established relationships of mutuality with other network members. In contrast to interdependent African-Americans, lower income white residents engaged in interdependent behavior with their nuclear families only. Like self-sufficient individuals, none of the interdependent whites in my study were natives to the area and they had small family networks composed entirely of nuclear family members. They relied upon their family members for a host of instrumental services including but not limited to: financial
and childcare assistance; employment referrals; transportation; and housing. In addition, whites possessed small friend networks that were composed of a handful of friends and acquaintances they depended upon for affective services only. Very rarely did interdependent whites cite an occasion when they or one of their friends assisted one another with an instrumental service. Unlike interdependent African Americans, whites did not appear to establish fictive kinship relationships with their friends. Nor did they seem to view their friends as “family.”

In New Orleans, interdependent whites lived in households with their natal families where they shared household expenses, chores, and other family responsibilities with their relatives. Financially, interdependent whites were slightly better off than many of their African-American counterparts, namely because they earned a higher hourly wage or held a commission-based employment position that could be quite lucrative at times. Like interdependent blacks, most interdependent whites possessed a number of different jobs and complained they were living from paycheck to paycheck. However, their financial situation was less precarious than many of the interdependent African Americans I interviewed.

The differences between interdependent whites and African Americans became more pronounced after Hurricane Katrina and their disaster resettlement in Colorado. White interdependent evacuees experienced similar damage to their homes and material possessions as interdependent African Americans and most came to Colorado with little to no money to their name. But while, both groups of interdependent families arrived with similar amounts of economic capital, they did not arrive with similar amounts of

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36 None of the interdependent whites were institutionally evacuated and all arrived in the state of their own accord via the comfort of a family owned automobile.
social capital. As non-natives of New Orleans, interdependent whites had family networks that were less localized than those of interdependent African Americans and they had a larger number of relatives who lived outside of the disaster affected area.

The presence of kin in Colorado served as the primary reason why white interdependent families evacuated and resettled to the Rocky Mountain state. All of their relatives were financially secure individuals who possessed the financial means to assist their disaster-affected kin during their first months of residence in Colorado. In addition, their relatives acquainted them with their network members who were also of middle class status and extremely enthusiastic to lend a helping hand to a disaster ravaged family. More financially secure, their Colorado network members were able to offer them greater economic assistance than that which similarly affected African Americans could access. Stated in the language of Bourdieu, we could say that both their weak and dense ties were “worth” more than the social connections of interdependent African Americans.

The disaster resettlement experience of Jennifer and her daughter Israel serves as perhaps the most striking example of the differential resources interdependent whites were able to derive from their Colorado network members. Jennifer and Israel evacuated to Colorado at the urging of Jennifer’s father who was the pastor of a large non-denominational church in Denver. Immediately following Katrina, her father’s congregation wired Jennifer and fifteen of her family member’s gas money to drive from Louisiana to Colorado. Upon arriving in Colorado, members of her father’s church took it upon themselves to house, feed, and financially support all of Jennifer’s family until the beginning of 2006. The funding for this charitable largess was provided by church
congregants who made weekly financial donations towards the support of Jennifer’s family. In the following paragraph, Jennifer describes the financial help her family received from her father’s congregation.

When we got to the church they had papers typed up for us telling us where to go and who to call if we needed anything. They had everything organized. My dad was like if you all want to sleep for a month, sleep for a month. You all do not need to worry about anything. We were all thinking about how we needed to get jobs because we had bills and everything. It was such a relief to know that we had time to process and readjust. My mom and my brothers had a little savings but I didn’t have any. If it wasn’t for the church we would not have had any income. The church gave us their donations right up till about Christmas which was good because we did not have any other assistance. It was only later that we got our own apartments and FEMA started paying our rent.

Had Jennifer’s father not been the pastor at a large church in Denver, it seems doubtful her family would have continued to receive the church donations for months after their arrival. Jennifer was well aware of the financial benefits her family was able to obtain as a result of their association with her father.

Krista, another white interdependent evacuee received similar levels of support from her Colorado relatives and their weak ties and associates. Like Jennifer’s family, Krista’s relatives were also middle to upper middle class residents whose friends and acquaintances were similarly financially positioned. Upon arriving in Colorado, Krista and her family had a free place to stay at one of her sisters vacant rental properties. Initially, Krista’s sister did not require her relatives to pay rent until after they had become better situated in their homes and new environ. Krista felt that their rent was “fair” and reasonable” and she notes that she “did not expect them to give us a house without paying rent” especially because their home was located in a “nice part of town.” Irrespective of the rent Krista’s sister charged, she was well aware she was getting a
better deal staying in a relative’s rental property than would otherwise be possible. In a particularly vulnerable moment during our interview, Krista exclaimed that if she “was not living here (in her sister’s home) and had to live on my own it would really be a worry. Financially, it would be a huge worry.” Residence in a family member’s home decreased her anxiety about the future. She did not have to worry about the consequences of making a late rental payment. Nor did she share with other interdependent evacuees the fear that she would be evicted from her home in the event that FEMA or Catholic Charities stopped paying her rent. In contrast to other interdependent evacuees who moved to Colorado with little or no savings, Krista’s concerns about how she would economically recover were somewhat less pronounced because she knew her family could “afford” to help her if times got tough.

Krista’s Colorado relatives provided her with more than just affordable and secure accommodation, they also offered her a built in social network composed of financially secure friends and associates who were excited to be of assistance to a family devastated by Katrina. Krista’s family derived financial and material benefits from her sister’s weak ties. Several of her sister’s friends organized fundraising events for her family and collected a significant amount of money and household items to help her family get back on their feet. Krista was particularly struck by the efforts of two distant family friends whose endeavors to help were more elaborate than most. Krista recalls the generosity of these particular individuals in the following paragraph:

One of my sister’s friends here was a refugee and they had no place to live for a long time so they really sympathized with us. They put out a flier in their neighborhood that said “the Baker’s need your help.” Those neighbors, you could hardly believe it but they gave us everything you could possibly imagine. They gave us a washer and dryer, a refrigerator, they bought us a new stove – it was amazing. Then my sister has a friend
in England and she made a bunch of jewelry which she sold at a craft market type thing and she sent us $1,500 that she had made from selling her jewelry. So for the most part people have just been super nice.

The greatest benefits Krista derived may have come from her relative’s social networks rather than her relatives themselves. Although interdependent African Americans with family in Colorado received help from their kin and their family member’s associates, rarely were the benefits they derived as lucrative as those that interdependent whites received from their dense and weak ties. Having middle class relatives with middle class friends and associates provided interdependent whites with financial and material benefits that few similarly affected interdependent blacks were able to access.

Stated in the language of Bourdieu, this discrepancy illustrates that all social connections do not yield similar benefits or opportunities and that some social connections are financially more “valuable” than others. In addition, the disproportionate number of “valuable” network members held by lower income, interdependent, white participants seems to corroborate Michael Eric Dyson’s assertion that “race makes class hurt more” (2006: 145). From Dyson’s point of view, “the pull of racial familiarity” is so pervasive in American society that poor whites will always be able to access a greater number and quality of resources than their African American peers (2006: 145).

In the following chapter, we will examine the experiences of the other major group of evacuees in my sample. Predominantly upper middle class, these self proclaimed “autonomous” individuals had vastly different capital resources than interdependent evacuees, which in turn, helped them to achieve a more resolute recovery.
Chapter 4: Perceptions of Self-sufficiency

Like the previous chapter, the sections that follow will examine the economic and social experiences of very distinct subset of African-American and white research participants before and after Hurricane Katrina. In this chapter, the focus shifts to my work with nine individuals who will be collectively referred to as the “self sufficient” research participants based upon their own identification as “independent individuals.” One of the goals of this chapter will be to clearly delineate who a self sufficient person is and how it is that they differ from their “interdependent” peers.

Perhaps the most fundamental difference between the two groups of people is that self sufficient residents did not engage in pronounced relationships of mutuality with their family or friends, namely because they claimed they were not in “need” of such assistance. Intensely individualistic, these evacuees argued that their medium to high annual incomes freed them from the economic need of recruiting help or assistance from their network members. One’s status as a “self sufficient” individual was not, in and of itself, determined by the amount of economic capital a person possessed. Other factors that impacted their ascribed sense of identity included: their history of geographic mobility, the small size of their family and friend networks, advanced academic degrees, and an identification with people and issues that extended beyond the local bounds of the Gulf Coast.

In addition, all of the self sufficient participants possessed relatively low levels of social capital compared to other interdependent residents, due in large part to the fact that
most had relocated to New Orleans from other areas of the country when they were adults. Though they may have had some degree of “place-bound” capital in New Orleans, they were much better positioned in terms of the “place-less” resources they possessed, resources like economic and institutionalized cultural capital. All of the self sufficient participants were college-educated and possessed highly valued forms of institutionalized cultural capital. In addition, most described themselves as “financially secure” though it is important to note that self sufficient African Americans had far fewer financial resources than their white peers as will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

For all their similarities, however, the individuals who fell into a distinctively “self sufficient” category were by no means homogenous. Interestingly, annual income and area of origin were perhaps the most important factors that differentiated these self sufficient evacuees. But more to the point, these differences correlated to a third factor – race. Of the nine individuals in this sample who identified themselves as “self sufficient,” seven were of Caucasian descent while the remaining two were of African American origin. Self sufficient whites and African Americans did not possess the same type of financial resources. Generally speaking, self sufficient African Americans had smaller annual incomes and few to no financial investments they could draw upon in a time of need. They also possessed a stronger “place-bound” type of cultural capital than the whites in this sample, which likely impeded their ability to convert one form of capital into another upon their resettlement. In the following sections, I will discuss the experiences of self sufficient white residents since they constitute the majority of the larger group. In the last section of the chapter, I will discuss the factors that distinguished
the two African American participants from their white peers and I will examine how these differences impacted their disaster resettlement.

**Before the Disaster: Economic Capital in Louisiana**

Self-sufficient residents were usually middle to upper middle class individuals who either worked in, or were retired from, white collar industries where they received an annual salary and health benefits. These individuals strongly identified with the idea of being a “professional” and they felt proud they held employment positions that valued knowledge and skill over one’s physical brawn or level of endurance. As sales representatives, skilled healthcare workers, or former retail store owners, they enjoyed the joint privilege of earning a high annual income and holding a well respected job. Of those who were still employed and not yet retired, many worked for national businesses that had offices throughout the country while others worked in industries such as the healthcare sector where jobs were easy to come by if one possessed the requisite training, skills, and experience.

Rarely did self-sufficient individuals possess more than one job in the formal economy and most worked fewer hours than the average interdependent resident. Although I am sure self sufficient individuals worked hard at their jobs, none discussed feeling overworked. Indeed, these self sufficient individuals spent more time away from their jobs and in pursuit of leisure activities than did lower income, interdependent residents. Similarly, I heard of no instances in which a person tried to supplement their income with an informal side business. As a whole, people did not feel they had to “hustle” to make a living and most described themselves as being “financially secure.”
Still, many expressed interest in seeing their money “grow” and many indicated they had invested in financial ventures that were likely to yield future profits. Of all the investment opportunities available to higher income residents, none was as popular or widespread as the act of homeownership. With the exception of the two self sufficient African Americans, everyone else in this sample was a homeowner, a number that was significantly higher than the average rate of homeownership in New Orleans. Several individuals also owned multiple investment properties they rented to tenants or had renovated and resold at a later date. Among white self sufficient individuals, homeownership was considered to be a secure and profitable place to invest their wealth and if the need should arise, they were aware they could extract capital from their property by taking out a second mortgage or by selling their home at a price that had appreciated in value.

In contrast to interdependent residents, the majority of self sufficient participants possessed the financial means to develop and protect their capital investments. Higher annual incomes, savings, and the possession of a solid credit record, provided self sufficient residents with the economic resources to protect their investments and mitigate against future risk. Indeed, the purchase of flood and homeowner’s insurance were but some of the ways people in this category attempted to safeguard their financial investments. In the low lying city of New Orleans, owning flood insurance proved to be critical to recovery from Katrina’s calamity. The self sufficient participants in my sample were among the 67% of area residents who could afford to pay the annual flood insurance fee (Meitrodt & Mowbray 2006). Investments of this kind proved especially important.

According the 2000 U.S. census, 46.5% of all residents in the city of New Orleans lived in owner occupied housing units and the other 53.5% of city residents lived in renter occupied housing units.
after Katrina when area residents began to receive letters from their insurance companies denying their homeowner claims of damage on the basis that the destruction wrought to their homes was as a result of flooding rather than wind damage.

The possession of economic capital thus made it a great deal easier for these self sufficient individuals to adopt a proactive stance in regard to their finances. Unfortunately, however, not all self sufficient participants made enough money to afford the luxury of investing in a home or purchasing insurance policies. Neither self sufficient African American owned a home. Nor did they own renters insurance, an investment that would have enabled them to recoup some of the value from their damaged material possessions. Despite being financially comfortable on a day to day basis, self sufficient African Americans were not as financially secure as their counterparts. What is more, they did not have capital investments they could draw upon in a time of need as will be discussed in greater detail in the African American section of this chapter.

Social Capital in Louisiana

The majority of self-sufficient individuals were white, non-natives who moved to New Orleans with their nuclear family when they were adolescents or adults. As a result of their relatively recent migration to the area, few of these individuals possessed kin networks in the city of New Orleans that exceeded more than five family members. Compounding their small family size was the fact that over half of all self-sufficient individuals in the sample had no children and of those individuals who were parents, the average family size was limited to one or two children.38

38 It is important to note that only one self-sufficient individual had dependent children in Louisiana for whom they were financially responsible. All of the other parents had children who had reached adulthood and were financially responsible for themselves.
None of the self sufficient participants relied upon their relatives for instrumental services. Indeed, all assured me that they were “self-sufficient,” “economically secure” individuals who need not rely upon network members for services they were well positioned to purchase. William elaborates upon this sentiment in the following quote:

Well, I did not really need help in New Orleans. I was pretty self-sufficient. When I was young and in school my parents helped me out financially and let me borrow some money - but honestly I really do not need that much help. My wife and I do just fine as nurses.

For self sufficient individuals like William, being able to take care of one’s self without help or assistance from others was a point of great personal pride. Conversely, relationships of interdependency were viewed as a kind of weakness that hinted at an individual’s inability to properly care for or support themselves or others. In general, self sufficient individuals thought it unnecessary to rely upon assistance from family or friends. In fact, many laughed when I asked them questions about the types of instrumental services they were likely to request of their kin members such as help with rent, transportation, or childcare. In contrast, they did not express reticence about relying upon their kin members for affective services and most described their relationships with relatives as an important factor that contributed to their sense of well being. Above all else, self sufficient participants valued their relatives for the unconditional emotional support they provided. Although family members may have been an important emotional “support system” for self sufficient residents, they were not vital to their current financial security. Despite their air of individuality, most self sufficient individuals were really not as autonomous or self reliant as they imagined. Many had spouses with whom they shared homes, pooled financial resources, and relied upon for their present and future needs. Those without partners also had relatives and friends who had assisted them at
some point in their life. For the most part, their personal narratives did not necessarily match the reality of their lives. For instance, William did not acknowledge that much of his financial success was due to the efforts of his father who handed over a thriving family business to William when it came time for him to retire. Similarly, Jennifer failed to recognize the important investments her parents made in her college education which is likely to have helped her attain a well paid job upon graduation. Self sufficient people are not ahistorical beings who sprang from the womb as financially secure adults who held steady, well paid jobs. Rather, they were people who had clearly received continuous help and support from their families, friends, and acquaintances, most of whom were financially secure and well educated adults.

Similarly, their non kin-networks were also small, consisting of a few close friends and a larger number of associates they encountered at work or social events throughout the year. In general, they did not seem to be as close to their friends as interdependent African Americans and no self sufficient person I interviewed ever referred to one of their friends as being “like family.” Self sufficient residents did have close friends in other areas of the country but few had any in the city of New Orleans.

Having a large social network and a robust social life appeared to less important to these residents than interdependent residents. In spite of having more free time than interdependent participants, most self sufficient residents had fairly spare social calendars. They seemed content to spend their leisure time by themselves or in the company of their spouse alone. In addition, the social activities they reported enjoying were more individualistic in nature and included things such as exercising, dining out, or staying home and watching movies.
Like the way interdependent residents felt about their lives in Colorado, self sufficient whites reported feeling at odds with the cultural environment in New Orleans and with the vast majority of area residents. This “outsider” sense in turn prohibited them from establishing relationships with local residents as I will discuss in a subsequent section of this chapter. In spite of feeling like a cultural “other” in New Orleans, self sufficient residents did manage to strike up friendships with a small number of people, all of whom they felt were financially, educationally, and ideologically similar to themselves. In addition, the friends this group developed were also white. Many became acquainted with their friends through a relative, a rare neighbor, or through their membership at a religious or secular association.

All of the self sufficient whites in this study vehemently proclaimed they were “not racist” but many later confessed that they were “not really interested” in establishing a relationship with someone who was of a different racial background than themselves. Many were concerned they would have “little in common” with someone who was of a different race or ethnicity. In contrast, both of the self sufficient African Americans let me know they had numerous white friends and felt comfortable interacting with people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds. In fact, of all the participants in this study, self sufficient African Americans seemed to have the most interaction both socially and professionally with people outside of their race. Very few people in this study made similar types of claims.

In general, self sufficient residents were quick to distinguish themselves from Louisiana natives who they saw as operating within a “good old boy” system in which interests were advanced or opportunities accessed based upon one’s social connections
rather than one’s merit, experience or educational qualifications. One of my informants described the importance of social connections among locals in the following way:

I don’t know what the deal is - what is going on with people but it is just a slower pace of life. There is no hurry down there. There are a lot of kick backs and good old boys down there - you know brother, uncle type deal. In a lot of ways it was all about who you knew there.

Non-native, predominantly white self-sufficient individuals felt as if they had little in common with many of the values or norms that were espoused by native residents. Self-sufficient individuals lived and worked in Louisiana but they did not really see themselves as being part of the area. Armed with economic resources and nationally recognized credentials these individuals had greater ties and connections to national business and interests. They were not embedded within the local cultural economy of New Orleans and few felt it necessary to rely upon local connections to access opportunities or services.

**Embodied Cultural Capital**

Part of the reason why self-sufficient residents may have had such small friend networks in New Orleans was because their embodied cultural capital was inconsistent with that of New Orleans natives. Several self-sufficient whites described feeling “uncomfortable” when they interacted with New Orleans natives as will be discussed in greater detail shortly. Consequently, many had trouble converting their embodied cultural capital into social capital in New Orleans in large part because their unconscious, learned dispositions did not match those of people who had been born and raised in the “big easy.”

On of the most fundamental level, self-sufficient participants imagined themselves to be “autonomous individuals.” They did not adhere to an ideology that advocated for
the continued support or assistance of their network members and the notion of “swapping” goods and services among family and friends was relatively foreign. Self-sufficient participants hated the idea of becoming indebted to someone. They preferred to purchase the goods or services they needed or desired. Though they did not like receiving help or assistance from others, they themselves, did not have a problem making an occasional monetary or service oriented contribution to a “good cause,” or a “needy” relative or friend. In their eyes then, it seemed to be acceptable for others to become indebted to them but not for them to become indebted to others. This type of “self-sufficient” identity has been observed by other social scientists, such as Fothergill (2004) who conducted research among North Dakotan residents whose homes and communities were badly damaged during the Grand Forks flood. Among the North Dakotan women Fothergill interviewed, almost all described themselves as “self sufficient, stoic, hard-working, private, self-reliant, and independent”- traits they in part attributed to their Scandinavian heritage and upbringing (2003: 663). Though none of the self-sufficient participants in this study were from North Dakota specifically, they too felt as if the “culture” of their hometowns had impacted the way they understood and related to the world. For them, self sufficiency was not just an ideal to which they aspired; it was also an ideal that each and every one of them embodied.

Self-sufficient whites felt different than the majority of native New Orleans residents and this relates to their distinct forms of embodied cultural capital. Most of the people in this sample were from northern areas of the country and were unaccustomed to the hot weather, food, social customs, or pace of life. People complained about the “slowness” of everything in New Orleans, the “ignorant” opinions of the residents, and
the “good old boy” networks that seemed to dominate the city. This sense of “difference” manifested itself in a variety of ways among self sufficient participants.

In contrast to the interdependent residents who were discussed in the previous chapter, self sufficient individuals displayed little interest in participating in more communally-oriented social activities. In addition, they seemed to spend less time socializing with family, friends, or their social acquaintances than did interdependent residents. I was provided with a variety of reasons as to why this might be the case. On the most individual and personal level, one self sufficient male proclaimed he was “not much of a joiner” and was “more of a loner” than other individuals he knew. Others argued that the “culture” of New Orleans prohibited them from developing a more dynamic social life. The following quote from David, a northern transplant who moved to Louisiana 20 years prior, expresses the feelings of many self sufficient residents:

I tell you New Orleans is a very cliquish place. It is not easy to break into these cliques in New Orleans society. By saying New Orleans society, I do not mean high society. These people have their own groups and it is very hard. At first we thought it was us but we later found out from other people we knew that it wasn’t us. It was them. They do not accept strangers easily, particularly if the newcomers are from the north.

Other self sufficient individuals admitted they were equally disinclined to become friends with the bulk of New Orleans residents whom they described as “discriminating,” “prejudiced,” and “small minded.” Indeed, several felt so dissimilar from New Orleans locals that they recalled feeling a sense of “culture shock” when they first moved to the area. The following quote from a white, upper middle class couple from Minnesota aptly describes the sentiments of a number of self sufficient participants:
It was a huge shock moving there because it was like being in a different country. I couldn't believe that Minnesota and Louisiana could possibly be in the same country that is how different they were.

The “culture shock” the self-sufficient people in this study describe is probably very similar to the type of cultural “dissonance” that Ong (1999) details in her ethnography about the resettlement experience of upper class Chinese immigrants to the United States. This type of cultural “dissonance” was all the more pronounced for self-sufficient whites who, upon moving, went from being a cultural and racial majority in their home cities to a cultural and racial minority in New Orleans. If, as Glaeser et al (2000) and Putnam (2007) posit, individuals of different racial backgrounds are less inclined to trust others who are different from them, then it makes sense why self-sufficient whites felt as if people were cold or distant towards them.

Self-sufficient whites were not only aware of the cultural differences that distinguished them from the majority of New Orleans residents but also of the racial ones. As a city that was 67% African American before Katrina, self-sufficient whites were very much a racial minority in New Orleans. Research has shown that there is nothing to genetically distinguish people of different racial backgrounds; however, this does not stop people from believing that racial differences are “real” as was the case with some of the self-sufficient whites I interviewed (Marks 1995). Few of the self-sufficient whites I interviewed limited their discussions of racial differences to that of an individuals skin color. Instead, people noted how racial differences were also made manifest at the level of embodiment - in the way a person moved, spoke, dressed, and interacted with others. In this way too, self-sufficient whites also felt like racial “others” during their residence in New Orleans.
Institutionalized Cultural Capital in Louisiana

Education was valued very highly among middle class self sufficient residents and all but two of the participants had achieved a bachelor’s degree or higher. Unlike, interdependent residents, they did not feel it necessary to discuss their education at any great length and few thought it exceptional or unusual that they possessed college degrees from well respected universities from across the country. The majority of individuals were much better educated than the average New Orleans resident but they did not really acknowledge their educational advantage vis a vis the rest of the city. However, in the context of the evacuee population, their level of academic achievement was remarkable and does merit discussion. Figure 4.1 clearly illustrates that relative to other New Orleans residents, self sufficient residents in my sample were among the top 26% of area residents who possessed a bachelor’s degree or higher (2000 U.S. Census).

**Figure 4.1: Highest Level of Academic Achievement for Self Sufficient Evacuees Compared to the Greater New Orleans Population**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Self Sufficient</th>
<th>Percentage of Self Sufficient</th>
<th>Percentage of New Orleans Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No High School diploma</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Grad.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College No Degree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree or Higher</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although people did not discuss their academic degrees in any detail, most were quick to point out how neither they nor their children were the product of the New Orleans public school system. Indeed, many of the individuals received their secondary education in northern states where schools are better funded and understood to be more effective educationally. Moreover, the individuals who grew up or spent part of their
adolescence in New Orleans were educated at one of the city’s numerous Catholic learning institutions. Self sufficient participants recognized their educational advantages by acknowledging how fortunate they had been to have escaped the poor public schools in New Orleans.

In addition, these individuals believed that their tenure at alternative learning institutions impacted the way they socialized and communicated with people. This perception of educational difference influenced how they felt about New Orleans locals, many of whom they described as “poorly educated” or “difficult to understand.” In one interview, a couple spoke extensively about the speech patterns of New Orleans residents and bemoaned the different “dialect” of English they spoke - an English that smacked of southern regionalism rather than the accent-less speech patterns they associated with higher-class individuals. Social scientists have made similar observations about the behaviors and communication styles of people from different class backgrounds. Sociologist Annette Lareau (2003) posits that middle class children learn a distinctively different set of skills and behaviors than their working class or poor peers. She argues that the cultural logic of childrearing adopted by the middle class emphasizes the importance of “concerted cultivation” in which parents attempt to hone the individual skills and talents of each of their respective children and make strategic investments of time and money in the education of their children. As a result, middle class children become well versed in the “rules of the game” and develop excellent language and reasoning skills that enable them to effectively communicate with a variety of people in different institutional and interpersonal settings. Interestingly, middle class parents do not
teach their children to make similar investments in the extended family and most grow up geographically and emotionally estranged from their relatives (Lareau 2003).

Very rarely did self sufficient participants allude to the reasons why they were better educated than 74% of area residents. They did not discuss the direct or indirect economic investments their parents made in their education. Those who did acknowledge the economic investments of their parents spoke about it in an offhand, taken for granted manner. This group of individuals anticipated receiving a good education and it was not something they thought beyond their reach. Their possession of economic capital armed them with an advantage few interdependent residents had, namely the choice to decide where and when they wanted to attend school. Self sufficient individuals did not feel limited and because of the economic and cultural capital their natal families possessed, they were not.

**Life after Disaster Resettlement**

**Economic Capital in Colorado**

Everyone experienced economic loss after the disaster including higher income, self-sufficient residents whose homes, properties, and possessions were badly damaged by Katrina’s fierce winds and floodwaters. The destruction wrought to people’s homes and possessions frequently surpassed the value of a person’s home and even their annual income. One informant’s disaster losses exceeded $100,000 due primarily to the fact that he underinsured his home and rental properties for flood insurance. Among the most costly of the losses experienced by self sufficient people was the loss of “priceless” items

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39 On the most basic level, indirect economic investments include decisions about where to live based upon the merit or prestige of local school districts. These investments also include the “hidden” transmission of cultural capital from parent to child. Meanwhile, direct economic investments include the cost of educating children, paying for lessons, tutors, and extending one’s education beyond high school.
that were steeped in meaning and memories of the past. Sociologist Kai Erickson (1976) refers to these items as the “furniture of the self,” and he argues that the loss of such material goods can be extremely disorienting to people who afterwards find it difficult to imagine or have confidence in the future. Regardless of the type or quality of objects destroyed by the hurricane, it is important to note that self sufficient individuals sustained significant economic losses from Katrina.

Their ability to save money and invest in properties and insurance policies paid off after Katrina when white self sufficient individuals began to cash in on their former investments. Savings accounts were one of the primary ways self sufficient individuals stayed financially afloat in the weeks and months after the storm when many contemplated where they would go and what they would do. Later, many people were able to live off the proceeds from the sale of their homes. In my sample, those whose homes had not been completely destroyed by the disaster discovered they could sell their homes with ease and alacrity, just days after putting their property on the market. What is more, several individuals learned they could command a higher price for the sale of their residence after Katrina than would have been possible before the hurricane demolished large swaths of the city’s available housing stock. The value of homes and rental properties precipitously increased after Katrina when the demand for housing far outpaced the city’s ability to supply residents with habitable living units (Petterson et al. 2006). Insurance monies served as yet another source of income self sufficient evacuees relied upon to finance their new lives in Colorado. In fact, many used their insurance

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40 The city’s dramatic reduction in housing stock also created a living crisis for lower income residents who could not afford to move home because of a prohibitive rise in the cost of rent (Petterson et al. 2006).
settlements to make a down payment on a new home in Colorado or to pay for housing associated expenses.

The possession of the aforementioned resources permitted the self sufficient to respond with a sense of confidence to the disaster, a response I rarely witnessed among similarly affected interdependent residents. With the exception of the two African Americans in this sample, self sufficient whites claimed they “did not really need any help” from the government or non profit organizations after the disaster. All received a check from FEMA in the amount of $2,500; however, this early monetary compensation did not “make or break” evacuees financially and most viewed it as a nice perk rather than an economic necessity. In contrast to interdependent evacuees, their financial security did not rest on whether or not they received FEMA monies and the institutional assistance they did receive was usually limited to the procurement of clothes or furniture.

Daniel describes his experience with assistance after the disaster:

After Katrina, there was a great outpouring of generosity and goodwill. People and organizations gave us clothes to wear -I mean we had nothing. I had never worn used clothes before Katrina but we had lost everything so I had to. We also got a lot of free furniture and we were able to furnish our two bedroom apartment. The furniture was nice too and we still have a lot of it with us at our house in Colorado. That was about it. We were aware that there was a rental assistance program but we did not want to go through all of the paperwork to try and get rental assistance and really to be honest with you we didn’t need that kind of help. We had enough money saved to live off of for a while.

Despite their air of economic surety, self sufficient evacuees had their own host of worries. At the top of their list of concerns was whether their insurance companies would reimburse them for their losses and if so, whether their settlement would be fair. The uncertainty of waiting caused them to feel anxious about the future and many wondered how their economic status would be impacted if they did not receive the type
insurance settlement they anticipated. Although far less likely, self sufficient evacuees were concerned that they too might experience a dramatic reduction in their standard of living. The following quote from David, a former homeowner in New Orleans, best articulates the feelings of many self sufficient evacuees:

Since the hurricane one of the most difficult things for me has been the uncertainty of the insurance settlement. You hear stories about insurance companies. Some of my neighbors told me that their insurance companies tried to negotiate settlements with them which were unfair. I did not have that problem but I did not know that. All along I kept wondering what was going to happen to me because if they tell you that they are only going to give you some of your settlement then you have to get an attorney. That is something that weighs on your mind.

In the end, most were reimbursed for their homes and possessions “rather quickly” but as David attests, none possessed this knowledge in advance. The realization that they were likely to be reimbursed by their insurance companies did not relieve their fear that they might not be. Few thought a defaulted insurance settlement would throw them into the “poor house” but they did entertain the possibility that they might have less money than they were accustomed to live on.

Despite being more financially secure than interdependent participants, all of the non-retired self sufficient evacuees were eager to resume their employment shortly after resettling in Colorado. In contrast to interdependent evacuees, they had few to no impediments that would have obstructed their ability to become gainfully employed. They did not have to worry about caring for or financially supporting a dependent, unhealthy, or otherwise troubled family member. Unencumbered by dependent children, self sufficient individuals were able to stretch their savings longer than individuals who resettled in Colorado with relatives whom they were financially responsible. Nor did the
majority of individuals have to contend with issues of racial inequality and potentially discriminatory hiring policies against minority applicants.

Of those individuals who were employed before the disaster, all but one self-sufficient individual was able to find comparable employment in Colorado shortly after their relocation. Employees at national companies had the least trouble securing a new employment position. With relatively little difficulty, salaried employees at national companies were able to transfer their jobs to a local office in Colorado. Joanne remarks upon the benefits of working for a national company and she describes the ease with which she was able to transfer her job to Colorado:

So I came up here and I was lucky to be able to transfer with my company because they had an office in Denver and I called the office and I said can I work here temporarily and they were like fine. I am just lucky to have fallen into a company with the resources to let me do that. It was pretty easy to get my job transferred. It was a phone call.

Employment at a national company yielded other financial benefits as well. Many national companies provided their employees with generous relocation packages that paid for a portion, if not the entirety, of their moving expenses. Employees were keenly aware of the “big perks” they derived from their employment at a large, national company - perks that few small businesses could afford to extend to their employees.

Self-sufficient individuals who were not affiliated with a national company also found it relatively easy to attain employment in Colorado. These individuals knew where to look for jobs and felt comfortable submitting applications and resumes as well as being interviewed by potential employers. Local businesses were especially likely to hire

41 The one instance of job loss among the self-sufficient occurred with a man who was a home inspector in Louisiana. He could not attain equivalent employment in Colorado because he was unfamiliar with Colorado’s building codes and architectural styles and would have had to obtain new training.
individuals who possessed specialized training or skills. Always in short supply, skilled evacuees were able to begin work a few weeks after their arrival in Colorado. Individuals with less specialized skills found jobs through temporary employment agencies that placed them with companies that had “temp to hire” policies whereby a person was permanently hired by an employer after a few months.

The ability to quickly secure a job in Colorado helped to hasten the financial recovery of self sufficient evacuees. Steady paychecks allowed them to circumvent the worst of the financial woes experienced by interdependent evacuees whose dwindling or non-existent bank accounts could not keep pace with mounting resettlement expenses. Self sufficient evacuees were keenly aware of their privileged financial status vis a vis other Gulf Coast residents as the following quote from Christina aptly demonstrates:

> It is very clear to me that the people that had the least are the people that are suffering the most now. I have heard stories of people who couldn’t get any assistance after Katrina. These people in Slidell who lived across the street from me – they don’t have anything. They have three kids and they don’t make a lot of money and they hadn’t gotten any money from FEMA. We had already gotten money and they were giving out nice chunks of money to people. I was happy to have that FEMA money because that was during the time that I was in between here and there and I really wasn’t selling a lot. But even still, I knew I didn’t need that money as much as they did.

Self sufficient residents typically recognized that they were better off than the majority of Gulf Coast residents they heard about on the news or read about in the paper. However, they were adamant that they too had experienced loss and hardship as a result of Hurricane Katrina. Several criticized the media for ignoring the experiences of higher income evacuees and bristled when people attempted to minimize their losses on account of their higher socioeconomic status. In the following quote Celeste, an upper middle
class, pharmaceutical sales representative, describes one encounter in which an individual trivialized her disaster resettlement experience:

One of the doctors said to me “Oh you are not a Hurricane Katrina victim.” I said what do you mean by that? He said “well nobody with money was affected.” I said “that is a bunch of crap” but they never show that on TV. There are people who have money that were hurt too but you don’t hear about them. Somebody that has the resources to rebuild is still a concern but people are not as concerned about how they are going to rebuild as they would be about someone who doesn’t have anything and is looking for their next meal. They are not going to interview somebody who already has another house to go to and does not have the problems of someone who does not have anything. They just don’t put those people on TV.

With the exception of one African American participant, disaster resettlement was never associated with the downward mobility of a self sufficient participant. The financial loss sustained by these individuals was significant but it never spelled their financial ruin. At most, people experienced a financial setback; a setback they could recover from because they possessed savings, owned insured homes, and were able to resume employment at new jobs in Colorado within weeks of the storm. Their possession of economic capital before Katrina had allowed them to set aside money for savings and investments that would prove profitable in the future. In addition, it enabled them to invest in insurance policies that would help them to mitigate risk and minimize future financial loss. These investments paid off after Katrina when self sufficient individuals discovered they needed to extract money from their bank accounts, sell their homes, and cash in on their insurance policies in order to generate money for their disaster resettlement. In this instance we can see how a person’s pre-Katrina economic status served as a reliable predictor of that person’s post-Katrina financial outcome.
Social Capital in Colorado

Few self-sufficient evacuees reported a need for kin assistance upon their move to Colorado. Most people evacuated and resettled in Colorado by themselves or with one other person including their spouse or another family member.

Two self-sufficient individuals evacuated to Colorado because they had relatives who lived in the state pre-Katrina. The Colorado relatives of both of these evacuees were financially secure homeowners who possessed the physical space and financial resources to make it possible for them to house their relatives for weeks or months on end. These two evacuees felt extremely fortunate to have had relatives who were willing and able to offer them long term shelter since living with a relative spared them the hardship and frustration of having to find temporary housing elsewhere. In addition, family-provisioned shelter supplied them with free accommodation. However, despite their gratitude, neither evacuee felt comfortable accepting the generosity of relatives help without offering them payment for such. The following quote from Janet typifies the discomfort they felt about accessing kin assistance:

I didn’t want to have to depend on my relatives here. I didn’t want to mooch off anyone and basically I didn’t feel like I had to. I am paying them rent and I think that benefits everyone.

Janet tried to avoid relying upon family members for instrumental services and was opposed to asking her relatives for help lest she appear to be a “mooch” or a financial burden. Instead, she made sure to give her relatives monthly rental payments in an effort to repay them for their help and assistance. Despite Janet’s need, she was reticent to accept assistance from others and viewed “charity” as something that reflected personal weakness or a lack of individual fortitude. In order to minimize what sociologist
Fothergill (2003, 2004) refers to as the “stigma of charity,” Janet, like many of the self sufficient individuals I interviewed tried to offer her relatives monetary recompense for their assistance. Fothergill (2003, 2004) observed similar levels of discomfort at receiving assistance among middle class, South Dakotans after the Grand Forks flood. Fothergill observed that North Dakotan women experienced similar types of discomfort when they accepted charity from people after the Grand Forks flood. In many case, these woman, like Janet, felt “stigmatized” by the assistance they received from others (Fothergill 2003 & 2004).

Both evacuees were infinitely more at ease relying upon their kin members for affective services and they were extremely appreciative of the social and emotional support they derived from their relatives. If they needed someone to listen to their grievances or concerns they knew they could turn to one of their kin members for support and guidance. Similarly, if they desired companionship, they could contact a relative to attend a sporting event, dinner, or show. Oftentimes their Colorado relative would also invite them to socialize with their local circle of friends and acquaintances who hailed from a similar class background as themselves. However, in contrast to lower-income evacuees, self sufficient participants made no mention of having received goods or services from their family member’s social acquaintances.

Both evacuees with Colorado family described feeling more confident and secure in Colorado because of the presence of their kin. However, they were also wary of becoming too dependent upon their relatives for emotional and social support. They found the constant interaction with their kin members to be somewhat stressful and spoke longingly of the days when they used to see family members every couple of weeks.
rather than every other day. In the following paragraph Janet discusses the downsides of living close to her kin in Colorado:

Well since she is in there (referring to her mother) I can say that sometimes being too close in proximity to your family can be hard. Just like I said about how I turned my phone off the other night – I have been used to living by myself and now it feels like I am SOOOO close! I like to be alone. I feel bad when they call and ask if I want to come over for dinner and then I say no. I don’t think there is anything wrong with that. You just have to try and keep a healthy balance, right?”

For people who strongly identified as autonomous individuals, the prospect of relying upon a few family members for the bulk of their emotional or social needs was at best unsatisfying and in the worst of circumstances overwhelming.

Having stated that self sufficient participants were less dependent upon their kin does not mean they did not feel close to their family members or saddened by the abrupt turn of events that separated them from their relatives who lived in New Orleans. Individuals who were separated from an adult child appeared to be the most distressed by their disaster resettlement and many struggled with daily bouts of doubt in regard to whether they should stay in Colorado or return home. Despite their longing to live closer to their child, the decision to move home was not an easy one. All worried about leaving their jobs in Colorado and returning to a city that offered few guarantees in the way of employment, affordable housing, or protection from a potentially ruinous future disaster.

In the end, I am aware of only one woman who moved back to New Orleans to be closer to her son. She recalled how her separation from her son caused her to spiral into a deep and immobilizing depression in which she could no longer muster the resolve to attend her job. In an effort to combat these feelings, she took some time off work but when she did not begin to feel better she decided to quit her job, pack her bags, and move
back to New Orleans. By relocating back to New Orleans, she forfeited her sense of economic security in favor of the privilege of living closer to her only child. To an outsider, this may not have appeared to be an economically “rational” decision but in the end it was the only one that granted her a sense of solace.

Although self sufficient individuals may have had a difficult time living too close or too far from certain family members, they did not have any trouble becoming acquainted with people in Colorado. In fact, most self sufficient evacuees remarked that they had an easier time meeting and befriending people in their short time in Colorado than they had during the entire time they lived in New Orleans. The ease of establishing friendships with area residents was in large part a product of locating others who were similarly positioned to them in terms of their socioeconomic status, level of education, race, interests and hobbies, and personal and religious convictions. I will discuss the details of this phenomenon in the subsequent section.

Naturally, not all residents in Colorado were educated, middle class, professionals. However, the majority of the individuals self sufficient residents became acquainted with were affluent neighbors, co-workers, or members of exclusive clubs, sports teams, or religious or secular organizations. At the time of the interview, few could recall having received help or assistance from one of their new network members. In fact, most thought it inappropriate to rely on new friends for instrumental help.\(^{42}\) Should such an occasion arise, however, their network members would be in a better position to help them than the network members of lower income evacuees.

\(^{42}\) African American evacuees did receive instrumental assistance from their new network members as I will discuss at greater length in the last section of this chapter.
Embodied Cultural Capital

In stark contrast to their living experiences in New Orleans, self sufficient participants described feeling comfortable and “at home” in Colorado. They remarked upon the “friendly,” “warm,” and “outgoing” demeanor of Colorado residents and they spoke enthusiastically about the ease with which they were able to establish friendships in their new state of residence. There were a number of reasons why people thought it easier to establish friendships in Colorado. At the top of their list was the perception that they had more in common with residents of Colorado whom they described as being educated, middle class, transplants who were more “active” and “goal oriented” than New Orleans residents. One participant went so far as to describe people in Colorado as being “normal like us.” What is more, many individuals felt their new place of residence bore a striking similarity to the cities and towns where they grew up. The following quote from Randolph helps to underscore this point:

You have to understand that the place I am living now is just like my hometown, only five times larger. We had a population of 25,000 and here you have a population of 125,000 give or take a few. The lifestyle and the cultural events are very much the same. They are both university towns so they had concerts and they had plays and they had sports which I was really interested in. All I can say is that it was culturally very much the same as here. In contrast, New Orleans and here is like night and day!

In Colorado, self sufficient whites found homes in racially and financially segregated neighborhoods where everyone around them lived in similar looking homes, earned a similar amount of money, and for the most part had had similar types of educational and life experiences. This came as a great relief to several of the self sufficient whites I interviewed who bemoaned the “diverse” communities where they had
resided in New Orleans - communities in which you could have “a dilapidated shack with beer bottle strewn all over the lawn, right next to a really nice mansion.”

Several self sufficient evacuees I interviewed went so far as to describe their resettlement in Colorado as something that closely approximated a homecoming. They enjoyed having returned to an area of the country with four distinct seasons and they recalled how the weather in Colorado reminded them of the northern climates from which they hailed. In addition, they were pleased to have resettled in a place where people “made sense” and where they were not considered an outsider or a cultural “other.” In contrast to the “good old boy system” of New Orleans, they felt people in Colorado believed that doors opened on the basis of hard work and individual merit rather than one’s social connections.

In Colorado, self sufficient individuals, especially those who were of Caucasian descent, felt as if their embodied cultural capital was consistent with that of other area residents. Consequently, they did not have a problem converting their embodied cultural capital into social capital in Colorado.

**Institutionalized Cultural Capital in Colorado**

As mentioned in the previous section of the paper, self sufficient participants are very well educated: all but two possessed a bachelor’s degree or higher from an accredited university. As is clearly illustrated in Figure 4.2., the majority of self sufficient

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43 Geographer Pierce Lewis (2003) argues that the spatial organization of New Orleans dates back to the state’s slave holding past when affluent, white landowners built their homes on one of the city’s grand boulevards with the homes of slaves or help situated on lesser streets behind their homes. Ultimately this led to the creation of “super blocks” in which the outer perimeters of neighborhoods were dominated by the homes of prosperous whites while the inner cores of these neighborhoods were peopled by lower income African Americans who lived in much more modest (and oftentimes less well constructed) dwellings.
residents ranked among the top 34% of Colorado residents who held advanced academic degrees.

**Figure 4.2: Highest Level of Academic Achievement for Self Sufficient Evacuees Compared to the Greater Denver Population**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Self Sufficient</th>
<th>% Self Sufficient</th>
<th>% Denver Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No High School Diploma</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College No Degree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree or Higher</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>34.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast to interdependent residents, those who considered themselves self-sufficient did not have to worry whether their level of academic achievement might hinder their ability to find a job. Quite to the contrary. All of the non-retired participants seemed confident they would be able to find a job faster and with more ease than less well-educated evacuees. Luckily, all but one individual found an employment position shortly after their arrival in Colorado. There can be little doubt that their academic achievements helped them to secure an employment position in Colorado. Indeed, as Bourdieu (2001) reminds us, the most “valuable” and sought after job applicants are those who possess the rarest skills or academic qualifications. And, as Bourdieu would predict, advanced academic qualifications did serve as an asset during their job hunt in Colorado and in the end, helped to open doors for them. Unlike less well educated

44 This individual remained unemployed of his own choosing. Rather than go back to work, he wanted to stay home and care for his newborn son. In time, he believed he would return to the workforce but it was not financially necessary for him to do so immediately. His wife made over a $100,000 a year and they both had plenty of money saved in bank accounts and other investments.

45 As a reminder, it takes a great deal of time and money to acquire more advanced academic credentials Thus, it is usually more affluent individuals who are able to attain the most “valuable” forms of institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu 2001).
evacuees, the academic qualifications of self sufficient evacuees helped them to locate better paid and more socially prestigious jobs.

Unlike interdependent participants, self sufficient evacuees had very little interaction with the majority of institutional authorities who regularly communicated with interdependent evacuees. With the exception of two African-American participants, none of the self sufficient evacuees received rental assistance, food stamps, or any other type of government-sponsored benefit available to evacuees in Colorado. Nor did the vast majority of evacuees have dependent children who attended local schools. In general, their communications with institutional authorities were limited to weekly conversations with insurance companies about the status of their insurance claims.

Like interdependent evacuees, self sufficient participants admitted to feeling frustrated when they communicated with an institutional employee at their insurance company; however, they found the experience upsetting for vastly different reasons than interdependent evacuees. Specifically, they complained of the slowness and inefficiency of the insurance bureaucracy and spoke with disdain about the “red tape” they had to go through before they were able to submit their insurance claim. In contrast to interdependent evacuees, they did not mention feeling unable to effectively communicate with institutional authorities. Nor did they discuss feeling anger or humiliation as a result of institutional authorities treating them as inferiors. Rather than acting as a poor petitioner, they demanded assistance, asking detailed questions and becoming frustrated when it appeared as if they were speaking to someone who would not be able to intelligently address their queries and concerns.
In general, self sufficient evacuees reported feeling far more in-control when communicating with institutional authorities than did interdependent evacuees. They were less upset about needing to confront an institution if a situation did not work out in their favor. In the case of their interactions with insurance companies, several individuals discussed how they would push for legal and financial recompense in the event they received an insurance settlement that was smaller than anticipated. Their possession of financial and educational resources made them better equipped to deal with a host of potential problems upon their resettlement in Colorado. For Sociologist Annette Lareau, these outcomes “highlight the way in which institutional standards give some people an advantage over others as well as the unequal ways that cultural practices in the home pay off in settings outside the home” (2003: 257).

Self Sufficient African Americans

The majority of the “self sufficient” individuals identified in this study hailed from financially secure middle class families in which both they and their parents earned a medium to high annual income. Although the majority of self sufficient participants possessed a secure annual income, savings, and property, none of these things were necessary for an individual to claim a self sufficient life orientation. Much more important was whether or not an individual adhered to a specific ideology or world view that celebrated middle class ideals of individual accomplishment, self reliance, and the attainment of advanced academic degrees. Self sufficient African-Americans lacked many of the financial trappings that were commonplace among self sufficient whites but they strongly identified with the overall ideology espoused by self sufficient participants.
Their experience was quite different from that of self sufficient whites, in large part because they lacked financial capital to assist them in their recovery. In contrast to self sufficient whites, self sufficient African Americans did not possess savings. Nor did they have other financial investments such as a home or insurance monies they could access in Colorado. Both individuals were able to “get by” at home but they did not make enough money to invest in savings, property, or stocks. Their lack of economic capital limited the number of choices available to them after Katrina and made it necessary for them to enroll in rental assistance programs upon their resettlement. Neither individual felt comfortable accessing rental assistance but they realized that such assistance was necessary if they were to financially recover.

Self sufficient African-Americans may not have been rich in economic capital but were wealthy in terms of the institutionalized cultural capital they possessed. Both counted themselves as one of the “lucky few” who were able to attend a Catholic learning institution rather than a local public school. Their attendance at a Catholic school was not something they or their parents took lightly. It required a major financial sacrifice on the part of the parents who had limited discretionary incomes. Their parents willingly paid the high price of tuition in the hope that it would help their child attain a secure and comfortable employment position at some point in the future. Similarly to self sufficient white participants, their parents also encouraged them to attain a bachelor’s degree from an accredited university. Like their parents, self sufficient participants were keenly aware of the benefits and opportunities they had been able to access as a result of their education and advanced academic degrees.
Similarly, they had a slightly different embodied cultural capital than that of interdependent African-Americans namely because they had lived other places and were more accustomed to interacting with people from different racial or cultural backgrounds. For this reason, they had less of a problem converting their embodied cultural capital into economic capital than interdependent African Americans. Still, they had a more difficult time than self sufficient whites who were members of the racial majority in Colorado. In many ways, the self sufficient African Americans in this study were like the Hong Kong immigrants Ong (1999) studied in her ethnography *Flexible Citizenship*. Like the Chinese immigrants described by Ong, self sufficient African Americans had to contend with the “historical construction” of African Americans “others” who were “politically and culturally subordinate subjects” (1999: 101).

Neither individual feared they would have a problem converting their institutionalized cultural capital into economic capital in Colorado. Indeed, both individuals expressed confidence about their ability to locate work in Colorado based on the strength of their resumes, references, and academic records. In their home environment, both Danielle and Terrell would have found it easy to convert their cultural capital into economic capital. In Colorado, however, both had to contend with something white self sufficient participants did not: being a racial minority in a predominantly white state. Race-related issues may not have impacted Terrell’s livelihood in Colorado but they were ultimately responsible for the disintegration of Danielle’s financial situation.
Danielle

There was nothing about the mannerisms or style of speech of Danielle’s family that would have marked them as southerners. Perhaps as a result of having lived in various cities throughout the United States, Danielle and her children spoke in the accentless cadence of the Midwest. Like their mother, all of her children spoke with confidence, curiosity, and intelligence that reflected a history of intensive tutelage and voracious reading. For Danielle and her parents before her, investing in a child’s education was the most important gift she could pass on to her children. She made a point of reminding me that she “worked hard” to provide her children with both material and intellectual sustenance. Although Danielle could not afford to send her children to private schools, she made every effort to supply them with a superior education that included home schooling, computer tutorials, and hands on experience living in diverse areas of the country.

Despite her passion for education and reading, Danielle indicated that she and her children were commonly treated as if they could not “read or write” in Colorado. She recalls how many people “tried to speak for her” based on the assumption that she would have a difficult time verbally communicating her thoughts. She blames such ignorant behavior on news reports that frequently portrayed Katrina evacuees as poor, uneducated, African Americans. Unfortunately, according to her, this type of treatment began as soon Danielle and her children exited the plane in Colorado and it continued throughout the duration of their residence in the Rocky Mountain state. In the following quote Danielle describes how she and her children were frequently “stereotyped” or “prejudged” by
Colorado residents because she and her children were African-Americans from New Orleans:

Here is this kind of thing where people stereotype you or profile you and they prejudge you and have these preconceived ideas. I just sit there sometimes and just kind of look like - okay - I am not supposed to know this in your mind?

Problems with discrimination did not prevent Danielle from finding a well paying, secure employment position in Colorado. She possessed the educational and occupational credentials that made her employable in a national context. In addition, she understood how to get a job in a different city without having to rely upon family or friends for assistance. With five children whom she was financially responsible for supporting, Danielle recognized she did not have the luxury of waiting to find the “perfect” job. As a result of her desire to attain immediate employment in Colorado, Danielle visited the offices of a local staffing agency where she quickly secured her an employment position at a national insurance company.

Though issues of racial discrimination may not have hindered her ability to find employment, they did impact her ability to maintain a job in Colorado. Months after their resettlement in Colorado, Danielle’s 10-year-old daughter came home from her new school upset with stories about how she had been hit, spit on, and called names by white students. Regrettably, these incidents did not stop and ultimately, Danielle became worried about her daughter’s physical and mental well being. In the following paragraph, Danielle elaborates upon some of the difficulties her daughter encountered at school and she briefly describes the reaction she received from school administrators when she confronted them about her daughter’s experience of racial discrimination:
Mary is having some difficulty. But she is the young one and since they were home schooled they have a certain culture and even for my older kids it is shocking what they see in school. My daughter was cussed out by a student and she was spat on. And I had to speak out about it and they treat me like I am a difficult parent. No. First of all if a kid is behaving like that he probably should not be in school. She is not supposed to be cursed at and she is not supposed to be hit. I don’t hit my kids. When I am saying something about it you can just hear them huffing and getting frustrated as if they do not know what to do.

Danielle expressed her concern to the teachers and administrator’s at Mary’s school but most of her complaints fell on deaf, indifferent ears. They told her she was overreacting and needed to calm down. After months of inaction on the part of the school, Danielle decided to take matters into her own hands. In an attempt to protect her daughter from further incidents of racially-motivated abuse, Danielle quit her job and eventually pulled her 10 year old daughter out of school. Naturally, this impacted the financial well being of her household - a household that depended entirely on the financial earnings of Danielle to raise and nurture her five children. Although Danielle’s decision to quit her job may not have appeared to be a financially sound decision to an outsider, it was ultimately the only option that made any sense to her at the time. Luckily Danielle’s family received rental assistance from FEMA; if they had not, it is doubtful they would have been able to financially withstand her job loss.

Unfortunately, I do not know what happened to Danielle and her children, and I can not verify whether her experience of downward mobility was a temporary situation or a permanent event. After the start of the New Year it became impossible for me to reach anyone in her family. Her phone was disconnected and any correspondence I sent her was returned to me unopened and without a forwarding address. Although I have no way to confirm whether or not this is true, I believe Danielle and her children left Colorado at
the beginning of 2006 and moved to another state in the country where they thought they might encounter less racial discrimination in the school system.

**Terrell**

Terrell’s disaster resettlement experience was very different from Danielle’s in large part because he moved to Colorado by himself. Unencumbered by responsibility, Terrell did not have to worry about financially supporting anyone but himself. For Terrell, disaster resettlement in Colorado was something akin to an adventure. He did not perceive it to be a financially stressful event. Instead, he viewed it as an opportunity to live independently from his family, to save money and to improve his credit.

Unlike Danielle, Terrell was a new “recruit” to the self sufficient lifestyle. Terrell had been an ideological proponent of “self sufficiency” before the hurricane, but he did not really begin to live these ideals until after he removed himself from his family network upon resettling in Colorado. Like many of the African American men I interviewed, Terrell had lived at home with his mother and brother before the hurricane and engaged in interdependent behavior with his natal family. Until his disaster resettlement in Colorado, Terrell’s only experience living away from home was as a college student in Georgia. Although I am sure Terrell loved his family members, he described living at home with his mom and brother as a bit of an annoyance. For Terrell one of the greatest advantages to living in Colorado was that he was able to tether his bonds to his family and free himself from many of the compulsory systems of exchange and reciprocity that characterized his interdependent daily life before Katrina.

As a whole, Terrell approached his disaster resettlement experience with zeal and exuberance. He spent a significant amount of time and money decorating his new
apartment and he spoke with excitement about the possibility of applying for a loan to open up his own church in Colorado. For the first time in his life, Terrell felt like he had “caught a break” and been awarded an opportunity to substantially improve his life circumstances. In the following paragraph, Terrell discusses his feelings towards his disaster resettlement experience in Colorado:

I feel safe and very blessed. This is for me an opportunity I would say. I mean I am going to take full advantage. You know to be able to land a job and work to build my credit I mean I think this is pretty good. With Catholic Charities and FEMA bagging for the first 12 and 18 months, I mean gosh that is a blessing. They will help pay my rent for the first 12 to 18 months including utilities. So I am going to take full advantage. I am grateful. I am seriously grateful.

In contrast to Danielle, Terrell’s financial situation did not deteriorate after his resettlement in Colorado. In fact, in many ways he believed his financial situation would improve thanks in large part to his ability to participate in FEMA’s rental assistance program while maintaining a well paying job. Additionally important, was the fact that Terrell lacked family in Colorado whom he was responsible for financially supporting. Like many of the men in this study, being an unmarried man without dependent children seemed to serve as an economic advantage in Colorado. However, unlike many of the men in this study who received rental assistance, Terrell found a secure and well paid job. The intersection of all of these “advantages” allowed Terrell to improve his financial situation in Colorado.

In addition, Terrell did not feel as if he was a target of racial discrimination in Colorado. If anything, he felt like he had more in common with people in Colorado than he did with residents of the Gulf Coast whom he described as “dysfunctional.” Although Terrell was born and raised in the south he never quite felt like he fit in and he was very
critical of southern culture. In particular, he bemoaned the importance placed on an individual’s social connections. Although Terrell may have been a racial minority in Colorado he felt he had more in common with the values and norms of Colorado residents whom he thought placed a greater emphasis on an individual’s level of knowledge and experience rather than their social connections.

The resettlement experiences of self sufficient African American participants are by no means conclusive. If anything, their contrary experiences help to illuminate the ways in which issues of race, gender, and parenthood may differently impact the financial recovery of middle class African American evacuees. These individuals had strikingly dissimilar disaster resettlement experiences. Danielle, a single mother with five children, was the only self sufficient individual in my sample who became “downwardly mobile” after Katrina due in some part to the racial discrimination her family encountered upon their resettlement. In contrast, Terrell encountered few of the problems that plagued Danielle’s family and he remained optimistic that his financial situation would improve in Colorado rather than deteriorate.

In the following chapter of this thesis, I will compare and contrast the resettlement experiences of interdependent and self-sufficient evacuees in an effort to show how issues of vulnerability are impacted by a myriad of social and economic factors that include, but are not limited to, a persons class status, racial background, gender, area of origin, and level of education. In addition, I will outline my major research discoveries and discuss how these findings support, refute, or contribute to the body of scholarly work I consulted throughout the development and analysis of this thesis.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Disaster Sociologist Charles Fritz argues that a disaster helps to make visible pervasive and often ignored social issues (1968: 658). Hurricane Katrina is no exception to this rule. In the aftermath of Katrina, the American public once again became aware of the fundamental ways in which issues of class and race influence person’s life chances in routine and non-routine circumstances. This thesis seeks to deconstruct how it is that one’s class, race, and cultural identity may impact their adaptation to one of life’s worst nightmares. As we have seen, both self sufficient and interdependent residents experienced material loss after Katrina and both were resettled in new communities they had little familiarity with. But, in few other ways were their experiences comparable.

Yet economic factors alone do not account for what made some evacuees more or less vulnerable in Colorado. For interdependent evacuees, their economic losses were exacerbated by the loss of their social world, or more specifically, the loss of the social institutions and networks that provided them with instrumental services and assisted them in their day to day survival in New Orleans. Interdependent individuals had created an adaptive economic system over generations, a system built on the principles of generalized reciprocity. In Louisiana, network assistance provided working class and poor residents with a built-in safety net. Among many native New Orleans residents, there was little separation between economic and social activities. Many of the economic transactions that characterized their lives in New Orleans were “hidden” from public view or “embedded in what appeared to be a regular social interaction. For instance, what
at first glance may have appeared to be a strictly social activity such as an individual’s attendance at a seafood boil may in fact have been an opportunity for that individual to “in debt” other guests in attendance thereby engaging them in a relationship in which future transactions were possible. As Bourdieu’s work on social capital suggests, interdependent residents seemed to intuitively understand that “an unceasing effort at sociability” was necessary for them to maintain their stores of social capital with others (2001: 104).

Interdependent participants did not adhere to the same economic logic as self-sufficient participants and they invested their time and energy in the cultivation of an entirely different type of economic resource than their middle class peers. In lieu of economic capital and the institutional form of cultural capital, interdependent people made substantial investments in the most plentiful and reliable resource they had at their disposal: their social connections. In the words of one of my participants, they understood that “family is strength” and they relied upon network members for everyday forms of instrumental assistance. The family, not the individual was the “structure” around which they “organized their lives” (Lareau 2003). These residents overcame the limitations of a small annual income by drawing upon their stores of social capital to informally access resources and opportunities in New Orleans.

For interdependent individuals, the economic loss that resulted from the disaster was significant, but it was only the beginning of their economic troubles. More profound was the economic loss that ensued from their disaster resettlement. Removed from home communities and separated from the bulk of their network members, many people found it difficult to financially recover. They quickly discovered that their economic system
was adapted to a particular place which could not be transferred to Colorado. In effect, the capital resources they possessed in greatest abundance (social and embodied cultural capital), were place-bound resources that had little to no value outside of the specific environment in which they were originally created. Situated within the local context of New Orleans, the practice of interdependency was viewed as an adaptive strength. Interestingly, several interdependent participants recognized the disconnect they were experiencing and attempted to reframe practice of interdependency as a weakness or vulnerability. These individuals suggested that interdependent evacuees had a difficult time in Colorado because they were unaccustomed to doing things on their own. With few people whom they could maintain their interdependent life style, interdependent participants quickly discovered they would not be able to parley their social capital into economic security in Colorado.

For those individuals who were lucky enough to resettle in Colorado with family of friends, many were able to re-institute some of the forms of everyday reciprocity that characterized their lives pre-Katrina. Such assistance helped evacuees; however, a significant decrease in network size and a lack of weak ties to local community members made it difficult for evacuees to access the same number or diversity of services they received at home. In some instances, the presence of family members from home proved to be maladaptive for evacuees in Colorado and actually hindered their ability to financially recover. The “negative” aspects of interdependency became more pronounced after resettlement, when the needs of the family became so great as to actually threaten the well-being of the individual. Caroline, who risked being evicted from her apartment
with her two young grandchildren serves as a perfect example of someone who was negatively impacted by the severity and persistence of her family members’ needs.

Individuals with “native” Colorado relatives fared better and were able to learn about their new place of residence from a local who was infinitely more knowledgeable about available resources and opportunities. Evacuees with native relatives were quickly incorporated into their kin member’s social network and were able to learn about a greater array of opportunities than evacuees who were not connected to many or any local residents. Interdependent whites derived the greatest financial benefits from their relatives in Colorado as well as their kin members’ “weak” ties. Stated in the language of Bourdieu, interdependent whites possessed more “valuable” forms of social capital in Colorado namely because both their dense and weak ties were more financially prosperous and secure than the vast majority of interdependent African Americans family, friends, or associates. Unlike interdependent African Americans, interdependent whites were able to convert their social capital into some measure of financial security in Colorado. Despite the benefits derived from native relatives, there were limits to the assistance they could provide or that evacuees felt comfortable requesting.

Many interdependent evacuees actively tried to create new networks in Colorado but their efforts were often fraught with frustration. In many instances, geographical and logistical factors constrained interdependent evacuees’ freedom of movement and made it difficult for them to leave their homes to attend social events or other types of gatherings where they were likely to meet people. Much more significant was the fact that interdependent evacuees felt misunderstood by Colorado residents and complained that people in Colorado adhered to different values and norms than those to which they were
accustomed. They described Colorado residents as “taking people” who frequently made hollow promises they had no intention of honoring. Although stated in different language, interdependent evacuees seemed to understand that they did not share the same type of embodied cultural capital as the residents of their new state of residence. This type of incongruity prevented interdependent evacuees, especially those of African American descent, from converting their embodied cultural capital into social capital upon their resettlement.

Their financial situation was further exacerbated by their lack of nationally and institutionally recognized academic qualifications. Interdependent participants did not have the financial or temporal means to invest in institutionally recognized systems of meaning such as advanced academic qualifications. Moreover, they were not entirely convinced that such an expensive investment would yield sure or certain financial rewards. Instead, they invested their time and energy in place-bound resources such as social and embodied cultural capital. Looked at from within the framework of their economic logic, an investment in family and friends was likely to prove more profitable than one in education. Upon arriving in Colorado, their inability to invest in institutionally and nationally recognized systems of meaning served as a great impediment to their ability to confidently or quickly secure a job. In contrast to self sufficient participants, they did not possess highly valued forms of institutionalized cultural capital and they were not able to convert their cultural capital into a secure or well paid employment position upon their resettlement.

Unlike self sufficient evacuees, interdependent individuals arrived in Colorado with limited or no financial resources. In addition, most interdependent evacuees arrived
in Colorado without a job or the promise of one. After almost a full year of residence in Colorado less than half of all interdependent individuals were able to secure employment and an even smaller number of those individuals were able to find a job that paid as well as their former job in New Orleans. Lacking both financial and social capital, most interdependent evacuees found it necessary to rely upon institutional forms of assistance upon their resettlement in Colorado. Institutional assistance prevented interdependent evacuees from total economic collapse. Unfortunately, much of the institutional assistance available to lower income evacuees had beneficial intentions but often maladaptive consequences. In addition, their lack of “middle class” communication skills posed a problem when they interacted with institutional authorities, many of whom they had difficulty understanding or being understood by when trying to communicate their problems. Perceived communication problems were likely to have prevented some interdependent individuals from applying for certain jobs or social services. The culmination of all these factors resulted in the financial “downward mobility” of interdependent evacuees in Colorado.

In contrast, self sufficient evacuees had the least degree of difficulty regaining their pre-Katrina economic status in part because they had invested in “place-less” resources such as economic and institutionalized cultural capital that could be transferred to a new locale with little difficulty. Savings and insurance money provided them with the economic capital to finance their new lives in Colorado. Economic capital was central to their sense of financial security and self sufficient individuals went to great lengths to try to develop and protect the financial wealth they possessed. They invested in ventures that were likely to yield future economic rewards and policies that would help them
protect their financial assets from an event such as Katrina. After Katrina, self sufficient participants drew upon the money from their savings, investments, and insurance policies to assist them with their disaster resettlement in Colorado.

Unlike interdependent residents, the financial situation of self sufficient evacuees did not hinder the number or variety of options available to them. Because of their financial and educational resources, self sufficient evacuees were able to exert a greater degree of agency during their resettlement experience. They did not end up in Colorado because they had been institutionally evacuated or because it was the only in which state they had a relative with whom they could reside. Nor did they stay in Colorado because they were unable to afford the return trip home or the price of rent upon returning. With the exception of self sufficient African Americans, their possession of economic capital allowed them to refrain from relying upon a large bureaucratic institution for disaster recovery assistance. The assistance they did receive was usually limited to the procurement of clothes or furniture.

Rarely did self sufficient, middle class evacuees mention feeling financially limited or constrained in Colorado. Their financial survival did not depend upon their being rooted in a particular environment. Nor was their ability to economically reconstitute their lives dependent upon their ability to exchange goods and services with family or friends. As non-natives to the area, self sufficient participants had small family networks in New Orleans whom they relied upon for little instrumental assistance. In contrast to interdependent participants, they argued their possession of economic capital freed them from the necessity of having to rely upon family or friends for instrumental assistance. Self sufficient evacuees felt uncomfortable asking their families for help;
however, their families were able to provide them with expensive and essential services such as long term housing. Though they may not have relied upon their kin members for their economic survival, they did depend on them for more intangible forms of assistance such as emotional or social support.

Despite having more leisure time than overworked interdependent participants, self sufficient participants seemed to socialize less and have much smaller friend networks. Self sufficient people spent a great deal of their free time pursuing activities they considered to be “individually enriching.” Rather than attend weekly barbeques, parties, or night clubs, self sufficient individuals described participating in activities that may have included few people other than themselves or their partner. Perhaps as a result of their greater economic capital they did not feel the need to build or maintain friendships because they did not think it would impact their financial livelihood. In the end, socializing appeared to be more of a supplementary part of their lives rather than an organizing principle. In some ways, self sufficient participants may have benefited from their small family and friend networks because they were less likely to become overwhelmed by the demands of potentially needy network members.

Middle class, self sufficient individuals may not have relied upon their families for their day to day survival but they did derive substantial benefits from the financial, educational, and social investments their families made in them growing up. The goal of these parental investments was to make their children as competitive a candidate as possible for future employment opportunities. Consequently, institutionalized cultural capital was the second most important resource self sufficient evacuees had at their disposal in Colorado and the vast majority were able to convert their cultural capital into
lucrative employment positions in their new state of residence. As a consequence of “the hidden transmission” of capital from parent to child, well educated, self sufficient participants were better prepared to recover from a host of potential problems including their disaster resettlement (Bourdieu 2001: 98). Their ability to convert their institutionalized cultural capital into economic capital in Colorado helped to protect them from many of the financial insecurities that seemed to plague lower income, interdependent evacuees.

For self sufficient evacuees, disaster resettlement in Colorado was an inconvenience. It was not an event that spelled their financial ruin or one that led to downward mobility namely because self sufficient individuals were armed with advantages that proved particularly beneficial outside of the local context of New Orleans. In contrast to interdependent residents, the majority of things self sufficient participants invested in were those that were able to transcend the local value systems of a specific place and people. Their connections to national businesses and their possession of economic capital and nationally recognized skills and credentials made it possible for them to embark upon their resettlement in Colorado with confidence and security.

An individual’s race and gender also impacted their resettlement experience and is likely to have obstructed people’s ability to accumulate or convert their capital upon moving. Although never addressed by Bourdieu in his “general science of the economy of practices,” evidence from this study supports disaster and resettlement research that shows there to be a strong correlation between an individual’s racial background and their likelihood or ability to financially recover (Bolin 1986, Cutter et al 2006, Dyson 2006, Elliot et al. 2006, Fothergill et al. 2000, Morrow 1997, Petterson et al 2006,
Phillips 1993). For both groups of evacuees involved in this research study, it was African American participants who had the most difficult time regaining their pre-disaster economic status. Unlike the white participants in this study, all of the African American evacuees in Colorado had to contend with problems related to being a racial minority in their new state of residence. According to the works of various social scientists, racially and culturally dominant groups may not trust or value the embodied cultural capital of minority members as much as they do people who are of the same racial or cultural background as themselves (Glaser et al 2000, Ong 1999, Putnam 2007). This in turn may prohibit people of minority backgrounds from attaining an equivalent value for their embodied cultural capital and it can prevent them from converting their embodied cultural capital into economic or social capital. Among the African Americans in this study, interdependent African Americans were the most financially vulnerable and all became “downwardly mobile” after their resettlement in Colorado. Well educated, self-sufficient participants who were African-American had a greater possibility of recovering from their disaster resettlement in Colorado but even they were not as well positioned to recover as their white self-sufficient peers. Regardless of whether or not African American evacuees hailed from working class or middle class backgrounds what seemed to ring true for all African Americans participants was that their “race makes class hurt more” (Dyson 2006: 145).

Gender also played a decisive role in the recovery experience of Katrina evacuees in Colorado. In general, results from this study support findings that show women to be more vulnerable than men in a disaster or resettlement context due to their lower socio-economic status and their role as the primary caretakers of their families (Alway et al
1998, Fothergill 2004, Morrow 1998, Ollenburger & Tobin 1998). As I have documented, gender inequity was most pronounced among the interdependent, who tended to have larger families and fewer financial resources available to support them. All of the interdependent women in this study with dependent children had a very difficult time trying to “make ends meet” in Colorado. Divorced from their kin networks, many women found that they could not afford to attend their jobs and pay for child care assistance. None of the interdependent men in this study were similarly affected. Gender differences were much less pronounced among higher income, self sufficient participants. This may have been due to the fact that few of the self sufficient people in this sample had dependent children whom they were financial responsible. The two exceptions to that rule were Karen, an affluent pharmaceutical sales representative who had an enfant son, and Danielle, a single, African American mother with five dependent children. Although both of these women had dependent children, their circumstances could not have been more different. Karen, made over a $100,000 a year, owned multiple investment properties around the country, and was married to a man who was determined to stay home and care for their growing son during his first few months or years of life. His status as a stay-at-home dad did not put an undue financial strain on their living situation. Danielle was not so lucky. She did not have the luxury of a high annual income, a small family, or a spouse who was willing and able to help with household chores and childcare assistance. Danielle’s diminished financial status, her larger family, and her role as a single mom increased her vulnerability vis a vis Karen.

From this study and the research of Pierre Bourdieu and other social scientists I have come to understand that many types of capital exist and, together, shape the
trajectory of human lives. The complexities of the social and economic world can not be understood through the narrow lens of relative of financial wealth. Society does not value the skills or behaviors of all classes of people equally. The financial resources and educational skills possessed by middle class evacuees made it easier for them to recover from Katrina. For those individuals who were members of interdependent social networks in New Orleans the loss they encountered upon their resettlement to Colorado is difficult to fully calculate or understand. To conceptualize loss only in terms of economic capital is to grossly minimize and underestimate the loss that actually ensued. Only by accounting for the fullness of a person’s resources – social and cultural, as well as economic, can we hope to grasp the life-altering toll of a disaster for some, and the adaptive resilience to these odds for others.
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