

The Role of Formal and Informal Support in the Decision to Return to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina

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ABSTRACT

Hurricane Katrina made landfall in New Orleans, Louisiana, on August 29, 2005. Seven years later, the effects of the storm can still be seen in the city and its culture. Walking in the lively downtown atmosphere of Bourbon Street, listening to the Jazz and sampling the best gumbo in the city, it would be easy to assume a hurricane had never come through; it would be easy to assume that no one had been forced to flee from their homes or huddle in the Superdome and wait for outside assistance. It is not until one travels out of the sprawling downtown district and the lovely French Quarter, past affluent neighborhoods, and into the middle to lower class neighborhoods that Katrina's mark is so plainly seen. Down unkempt roads with massive potholes and cracked sidewalks that belie the flat terrain, occupied houses at different levels of repair sit next to their silent, empty neighbors. Some of the uninhabited houses still bear the 'X' marking that offers details about the search and rescue efforts — how many inside were found alive or dead and in what rooms. The people, like their houses, are in varying stages of repair seven years after the storm. At the end of the day, there is only one true universal among these inhabitants, many of whom returned to their previous houses—none of these people are living in the same neighborhoods as before the storm. Such is the state of the St. Anthony neighborhood of New Orleans.

The storm's devastation brought disastrous conditions literally through people's front doors, with some interviewees reporting that polluted water reaches as high as eight feet inside their houses. Once it came, it sat in their homes and neighborhoods for days, destroying houses, valuables, and heirlooms before finally draining out of the neighborhoods. Slowly, after weeks of waiting, the displaced inhabitants of St. Anthony were allowed into their neighborhood to confront the mud-dominated world that used to be their home. Interviewees described the world around them as completely brown, with all plant life gone, and houses unrecognizable. The physical neighborhood they knew was now

a vacant lot that would hold different outcomes for each individual. Some had the resources, both financially and socially, to overcome their losses—albeit with much hard work and determination. The lucky ones were able to attain some semblance of their life before the storm. Others reported losing everything. To meet their basic needs, some of these people accumulated high amounts of debt. And in one extreme case, an interviewee was able to regain all his physical possessions and entirely repair his home but, being in the later years of his life, lost all ties with friends, family, and former neighbors. In his own words, he was left completely isolated and “desperately alone.”

Hardship, then, seems to have gone hand

in hand with returning to St. Anthony and rebuilding. But people returned in some part because of the help they got along the way from friends, family, neighbors, and governmental and non-governmental institutions. Thus, the broader questions motivating this paper are: why did these people return to this neighborhood, what keeps them in the neighborhood, and how do family, friends, formal institutions, evacuation experiences, other resources, and a sense of belonging to a place factor into these decisions? This manuscript is an exploration of how these sources of support—good, bad and otherwise—are brought to bear in the re-creation of place.

A Framework for the Study of Support and Commitment to Place Post-Recovery

Pieces of this puzzle can be found in past literature, particularly in relation to the importance of financial support evacuees receive after disasters. For example, a previous study discovered a substantial disconnect between the expected level of assistance from family and friends pre-disaster, and the reality of financial assistance after the disaster (Kaniasty, Norms & Murrell, 1990). Personal networks, then, are likely important for reasons other than “What can they give me, tangibly?”

Tangible benefits are certainly important, but not always or at least not only what evacuees and survivors need. Mental health is often affected post-disaster, with many individuals developing post-traumatic stress disorder (e.g., Rhodes et al, 2010). Studies conducted on areas impacted by the Exxon Valdez and BP oil spills, which includes Louisiana, echo this sentiment. In these studies, a relationship was found between stress from the events and economic loss, in addition to concern about family and worries about further

economic loss (Gill, Picou & Ritchie, 2011). Although aversive, it is easy enough to imagine being forced from one’s home, not knowing when to return, and knowing that the only thing one can come back to is a muddy shell of what used to contain so many memories. It is likely that one of the things that returnees wanted, or needed, to counter these stressors was some form of comfort that only home can provide. The effects of being engaged in one’s home atmosphere have been linked to increased life satisfaction, lower rates of depression, and lower rates of stress when individuals are in situations that interrupt their personal activities are interrupted (Wakui, Tomoko, Agree, & Kai 2012). These benefits are essential during such trying times as recovery, especially because the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder can be increased by low socio-economic status (Suar, 2004), although Jones et al. (2011) found only a weak relation between socio-economic status and post-disaster mental health in Mexico after controlling for social support. Thus, directly through lack of resources, or indirectly through fractured or resource-poor social networks, interviewees can lose protective factors for mental health with the loss of possessions or with the accumulation of debt.

Previous research provides the possibility that the quality of assistance at evacuation sites impacted individuals’ decisions to stay or go; aid was available from many sources at the locations studied. Welfare programs, food banks, and other nongovernmental organizations aided the displaced (Lein, Angel, Bell & Beausoleil 2009). However, the vast number of sources and lack of centralized access led to a complexity that required a substantial investment of time and energy to prove fruitful for impoverished families. Further, as Lein et al. note (2009), as the level of damage created a longer-term evacuation for many individuals, poverty assistance programs

were unsatisfactory as they “provide minimal assistance in addressing longer-term needs for education, training, job placement, and stable housing.” Combined with evacuees facing “a new institutional and social environment,” they ultimately were in a situation that lacked both “material and social resources.”

Aside from the possible emotional and social benefits of being home, overall outlook on life has also been shown to be predicted by social support in previous studies. The attitude of many of the respondents will be discussed later in the paper, and studies have shown that individuals who have been through similar events, such as a severe flood in Poland, have their post-disaster attitudes and social cohesion impacted by the perceived quality of social support seen immediately post-disaster (Kaniasty, 2011). Altruistic communities that offered high levels of social support immediately after the flood recorded favorable appraisals of community relationships twenty months after the flood, and Kaniasty found that communities that offered less emotional support indicated less community well-being.

Finally, in looking at what makes a location worth coming back to, the idea of ‘space vs. place’ should be considered. The terms, while often used interchangeably, are often used to indicate the difference between a simple location and a meaningful spot--a home, an area with fond memories, or at least somewhere with a familiar or important vibe. Margaret Livingstone’s (2007) essay “Sense of Place” examines the question of “What makes a place,” but with a twist that we can find particularly helpful: what makes a place when the location has been destroyed by a disaster, with all physical indications of the ‘place’ gone forever? Memories, faith and, community are noted as the important factors, even when physical possessions (including houses) are gone.

Study Site and Setting

The site that we selected to study the importance of formal and informal resources on one’s sense of space vs. place and the decision to return was St. Anthony, a neighborhood in New Orleans. St. Anthony is a neighborhood much like any of the others in New Orleans. It is flat, had a 2000 or pre-Katrina population of 5,318 residents (Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, 2012) who were spread out across its 1.6 square kilometer area, and is bordered by three streets (Elysian Fields Avenue, New York Street, and Mirabeau Street) and a canal (the London Avenue Canal) to the west. The inhabitants in my interviews describe it as having been a predominantly lower middle-class and middle class neighborhood. St. Anthony is set in the Gentilly section of New Orleans, abutting the southern edge of the University of New Orleans and close to a beautiful view of the Mississippi river. After Hurricane Katrina, the neighborhood is now a mixture of abandoned houses, repaired houses, and houses in every state in-between. In one section, there is a pristine park with slides, monkey bars, and swings next to some artificial hills created for children to play on. In the middle of the playground is a sign bearing gang-related graffiti, a reminder of one of the problems that concern the inhabitants of St. Anthony: crime.

Still, it would be erroneous to imply that each interviewee lives in fear, huddled inside their houses with blinds drawn to hide from their neighbors. During the day the streets are still occupied by the occasional man or woman walking their dog, enjoying the fresh, warm Louisiana air. The occasional group of pre-teens and teenagers, enjoying each other’s company after school, can be seen milling about the newer, greener areas of their once uniform neighborhood. Intra-community activity is

still visible, though likely not as much as before the storm. As of 2010 census, the area had a population equaling 66 percent of pre-disaster St. Anthony (Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, 2012). The result of this is fewer houses and people, giving the neighborhood what some interviewees described as an “empty feeling.” However, one positive result of this is the increased green space. Some abandoned lots have been purchased very cheaply by adjoining owners, with the city giving the stipulation that the owners do something constructive such as making a manicured lawn or a garden with the area. Many of the houses have done this, giving Gentilly generally, and St. Anthony specifically, a more open feel. Combined with the old ruins of houses being overtaken by grass, vines, and other greenery, this almost gives the neighborhood a different aesthetic.

As sunset approaches, the figures do recede into their homes, and interviewees are quick to offer caution. “Don’t stray too far,” or “don’t be out past dark” are the orders of sundown, and genuine concern for our safety can be seen on interviewees’ faces as they tell us this.

Methodology

Research was conducted within the neighborhood of St. Anthony, New Orleans, over three trips. The first trip involved structured surveys with sixty people in late 2008 using a random sample that was geographically stratified to cover the entire neighborhood, and was focused upon services that people solicited after the hurricane, the nature of people’s personal networks, and physical health and mental health both pre- and post-Katrina. The examined data revealed a positive correlation—both financial reimbursements and emotional support correlated positively with the distance

between ego (the person interviewed) and their network members (their friends and families and acquaintances that came to mind), as well as between those forms of support and the distances between those network members, signifying the actual spatial spread of the network.

This led to a second, smaller round of interviews conducted over the course of four days in June 2011 in which twelve individuals (not from the original 60 due to the random selection) in St. Anthony participated in semi-structured interviews, including an invitation to tell their stories in a free-form narrative. The sample selection was via a geographically stratified random sample, by starting at each of the four corners of the neighborhood, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, and Southwest, and working in a zigzag pattern towards the center of the neighborhood. Each house on a block was offered a chance to participate in an interview, and each time a house responded, we would move on and begin the next section. Roughly one in six households that we contacted allowed us to interview. Questions in the interview inquired about assistance received, from what sources, and the distance that the sources lived from the interviewee, and if the sources were family or friends. The interviews each lasted roughly half an hour, and in some cases interviewees called upon other members of their household, or even neighbors, to expound upon their experiences. The interviews were written down by one interviewer, while the other continued conversation. When given permission, the interviews were recorded on tape. Answers to the specific questions plus information from the narratives provided were taken and coded. The results from these interviews indicated that those who left the city and stayed with a friend or family member in their wide-spread social network, they were much more likely to receive formal reimbursement, namely,

insurance money. The question, then, is: why is this so? A hypothesis was formed: perhaps it is simply being away from all of the chaos, combined with the sense of being taken care of, that allows people to clear their heads enough to navigate the maze of red tape that is insurance or government assistance in a disaster scenario?

The results in this manuscript are largely based on the third and final set of interviews. The third questionnaire was drafted, and we conducted a final round of interviews in St. Anthony during a week in February and March of 2012 (see Appendix for interview guide). The purpose of these interviews was to ascertain the importance of friends, family, and the feeling of being taken care of in the midst of a crisis. Ultimately, however, it was the narratives--the stories that each person wanted to tell in addition to the questions which were asked—that revealed the most about the story of St. Anthony. The goal of this third excursion was not to gain a random sample, but simply to obtain as many interviews as possible. Each street of St. Anthony was walked down, and each occupied house was offered the chance to participate in our interview. Twenty-five interviews were completed—two were conducted as household interviews, the rest with individuals. Each gave permission to be interviewed and to have their stories published, so long as their last names were not used.

As mentioned earlier, people were asked to detail the importance of their friends, family, and the feeling of being taken care of during their crisis. The interviews began with an inquiry as to how the hurricane changed their families' interactions, if at all. This was followed by a series basic, open-ended questions: what type of assistance was given during the storm, who gave it, where the providers live, if contact is still maintained with these individuals, and if a sense of being taken cared of was felt in the aftermath of the storm.

The interviewees were encouraged to give as much detail as they wished during these answers. The range of stories and emotions were remarkable--suspicion, discontent, fear, hope, compassion, concern, awe—each person had a new piece of the story to tell about that fall of 2005, and the reconstruction, of St. Anthony. The overarching storyline for each person was unique, as were the feelings and reasons behind their return. When asked about his experiences, one individual summed up the entirety of the story: “I would like to tell [you all my story], but you ain’t gonna believe none of it.”

Results

We present the results of the semi-structured interviews from the latter two waves of interviews in terms of four main themes: family, friends, community, and institutional support. These were the consistent themes in the interviewees' narratives throughout both waves of the interviews about what their return was like.

Family

Family was a big part of the recovery process and, after Katrina struck, many of the victims relocated to places where family resided. The most common places were other parts of Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas. Everyone who said they received help from family said they were also given a place to stay by them which ranged from a few weeks to several months. Family, which included in-laws, offered the most assistance during the initial period after the hurricane hit, but then most of the people of New Orleans were left to fend largely for themselves and rebuild. Those few people who did not rely on any family shared feelings of helplessness and loneliness because they didn't feel as adequately taken care of.

Some of the interviewees stated they either did not have family who wanted to help, or their family members lived too far away to temporarily assist them. Those who had a broad sense of social networks that included family showed feelings of hope in the earlier stages. This seemed to make for an easier transition towards receiving help. In one interview, a 25 year-old woman said she stayed at her uncle's Navy Base in Texas and the military gave her and her immediate family a place to stay and substantial support. The family members who aided the people in the St. Anthony area consisted of relatives who had already been in regular contact with them. What was assessed from the data on family was that family ties did not strengthen much following the hurricane. Most shared similar responses like, "We were always close" and, "I still keep in touch with them the same way I did before the storm."

Family members who offered assistance were generally talked about in a positive light, providing a safety net very suddenly. Most family members gave what they could; this consisted of money and clothes. Despite our prodding, there was hardly any elaboration on what specifically people received from family, except for those who received a surprisingly large amount or nothing at all. One woman, in her mid-40s, had received a couple thousand dollars from her cousins. Her family also worked within their community in Florida to raise awareness about their situation and sent over clothes they had collected from volunteers and family friends. However, one gentleman, Joe, recalled his only living relative, his brother, and his refusal to acknowledge or help him. Joe, who was 71 years of age, stated:

"My entire family is gone. I have one brother who lived in New Orleans during the storm. He isn't a millionaire but he has money. He didn't call me after the storm to ask where I was or where I was going..."

After the storm he took off for Tampa, Florida where his wife's family lives. I didn't get a word from him. I called and he said he did have my phone number. After that I didn't hear from him in a year and a half—no holidays, no birthdays. I drove down 4 hours to his job. He saw me but he kept working. I was devastated. He was the only person I had left who was blood related..My brother didn't come by the house or tell me people were looking for me."

Joe was the only interviewee who had a distinctively negative experience with a member of his family, which affected how he perceives his family since Katrina hit. Family was an integral part of the disaster recovery process. If family was not offering assistance by means of living space, clothes, or money, they were there for emotional support. Many families travelled together, instead of parting in different directions. Extended families from the middle-class St. Anthony area would load up cars, and drive together to a state where they had other relatives or friends. It was common for extended families to live close to one another, small households would reside within blocks of grandparents as well as aunts and uncles. The surrounding neighborhoods of New Orleans parish were familiar territory and a comfort zone to the interviewees. These tight-knit families in New Orleans remained close even if other relatives decided to relocate elsewhere permanently. Families kept in contact, and they respected a relative's decision to leave, because it meant being someplace more prosperous. Those who chose to return did so out of comfort and attachment. When asked questions about family assistance, a majority of the interviewees did not talk about them in much depth unless asked more involved questions. Answers such as, "Yes, my family helped me," and "No, I didn't receive any help from any family in Tennessee" showed that they did not feel inclined to share any resentment, or vice versa.

Any help at all, from any family was well received.

Friends

The topic of friends reached broader limits than family, because friends were there for many of the people in St. Anthony before the storm, they made plenty of new friends during the storm, and some people felt they made lifelong friends following the storm. Friends were valuable because the interviewees saw that friends contributed a lot regarding assistance. Friends helped with a place to stay, offering basic necessities, giving emotional support, and helping with the rebuilding process. Assistance came from early childhood and high school friendships, but also from strangers who became close with those relocated in Texas or the surrounding states. Some of the interviewees felt close with those volunteers who offered them church services, strangers who supplied them with food, and people from the Red Cross and local charities. Friends were an interesting trend in these interviews because people either stated they went to different states not looking to meet new friends, and that no one helped them, or that they were well received and kept in contact with those people who treated them so well.

The people who said friends didn't help them out usually moved the conversation towards feelings about discrimination, and that it was hard for them to make friends and feel welcome. As stated briefly before, interviewees discussed how some Texans associated them negatively. For example, Texans would perceive them as the dangerous looters they saw in the media, and others experienced prejudice from other states and parts of Louisiana. A 50 year-old woman stated:

"We made no friends nowhere. I don't keep in contact with any of them. In Atlanta we felt welcome, but

not in Texas. In Texas they were rude. I am 50 years old. I don't entertain that type of behavior anymore or things like that."

Based on our interviews, it often sounded like people in the St. Anthony neighborhood felt they were either taken in with open arms or left out to dry. Some people blamed others for their situation, and it was hard for them to trust others. Some people did said they were not focused on making friends, because all they wanted to do was return home. A teenage boy, approximately 15 said:

"I made a few friends in Texas, but I wasn't focused on making friends. I stayed there for 2 years with my family but I missed New Orleans and we decided to come back."

When the teenage boy did come back home, he relied on friends to give him a place to stay.

Despite some unfortunate tales of meeting new people in Texas, there were quite a few success stories from people who felt very secure and protected by the helping hands they later associated as friends. Christmas cards and letters were exchanged between some people, and contact has been maintained fairly well since Hurricane Katrina and the evacuation. A young woman recalled:

"A man had called us while we were at the hotel and asked us if we had found a place to stay yet. He met up with us and he allowed us to live in a spare home in the back of his property. We stayed in that house for 6-7 months. The area was nice, and it was a Hispanic neighborhood. My mom used to keep in contact with the people we met in Houston, especially the man who helped us".

Another woman said she had a good sense of being taken care of in Texas, and made herself a lifelong friend.

It seemed that friends played a larger role in giving aid than family did. Family

was more reliable in terms of giving first-hand support, especially a place to stay, but friends seem to have helped out over a larger period of time. Friends were talked about more because they were at times an unexpected and pleasant surprise. New friends in different states exceeded the expectations some people had, and brought more support than one could have conjured on their own. Also, friends were there for emotional support. Many local New Orleans friends suffered the same tragedy so they couldn't offer anything at all, but friends aided each other by lending an ear, or feelings of empathy. They gave reassurance because they experienced the same thing, and they were there to console and protect each other around their neighborhood. Friends also helped bring together the feeling of belonging, and after Katrina, people were lacking this feeling. Friends reached out with assurance, which stayed in the minds of those in St. Anthony.

Community Cohesion

There were mixed feelings regarding the closeness of the community and the commitment of the community to restore trust and normalcy. Many of the people residing in the neighborhood of St. Anthony seemed more threatened and uncertain than before the storm regarding the safety of the neighborhood as well as the closeness of their neighbors. In light of the clean-up efforts and home restorations, people were more skeptical than optimistic about the people of New Orleans connecting to one another and creating a place where they can see past the stereotypes and crime.

Crime is one of the universal concerns for residents of St. Anthony. The crime rate has, according to the interviewees, increased in their neighborhood since Hurricane Katrina, with some attributing it to the influx of renters into a neighborhood

formerly filled with home-owners. People from low-income areas are now living in the houses with supplemented money from government initiatives, creating a more diverse income demographic for St. Anthony. One interviewee accused his neighbors of selling cocaine, saying he could tell when the buyers would come by in the night. Another interviewee witnessed a drive-by shooting occurring at her neighbor's house. Whether or not their blame is accurate, the events are real, as is the fear that is apparent in their eyes as they recounted the new situations they live in.

It was almost unanimous among the interviewees that crime had gotten worse since Hurricane Katrina. St. Anthony was ethnically diverse, and the feeling of a looming threat was pervasive in all groups represented. The inhabitants who lived on the edges or boundaries of the neighborhood seemed to feel more victimized and trapped than those who were closer to the middle of the neighborhood. Those inhabitants who lived closer to the middle of the neighborhood seemed less apprehensive about their safety. Caution seems to be a second nature now in this section of Gentilly, as the general consensus states—it just is not as safe as it used to be.

One aspect that was important to the homeowners prior to Katrina was that neighbors were there to look after one another. Many interviewees talked about the elderly whom they mentioned as good friends; the elderly were friends who helped maintain respect for the neighborhood. Since the hurricane, numerous new residents have moved into neighborhoods and have brought with them drugs, loud music, large families, and a lackluster sense of building close relationships. Because many people on the block are new, there is already a disconnect between what was once a part of St. Anthony and what the original neighbors want to maintain. One young woman in her twenties stated,

“Renters mostly live here and I don’t feel the sense that this is my home.” This attitude is present despite the action of the local government which is taking steps such as building parks and initiating neighborhood watch programs.

Most people seemed the most hurt and disappointed talking about the community they once had. Family and friends had moved away, and they adjusted to new people changing and readjusting their neighborhood. An ambivalence about community cohesion was touched on by a small group of interviewees, which consisted of two female college students and their mother. Their home was in good repair, like many of the others on the street it resided upon. One of the students noted that she felt New Orleans used to be “like a big family- if you saw someone doing stupid, you could walk up to them and just say ‘Hey! Quit it!’” Now, she added, it felt as if no one trusted each other enough to have that sort of interaction.

On one particular block in St. Anthony neighborhood, an African-American woman in her mid-thirties whose favorite neighbors had relocated or had died regarded:

“I don’t think anyone is doing anything to build a sense of community. The city is dysfunctional. It is like the big easy and everyone is too laid back. It is not too organized. It is hard to help bring the community together when you have to watch your back, too.”

Without friends and trust that come from the strong bonds once held on to, it is hard for people to open up to those who may be suspect especially since the crime rate in St. Anthony is so high.

There is a great want for community closeness, but the people seemed unconvinced for the time being. Most of the pessimism was communicated with those who had experienced danger and had their

personal space violated. A gentleman in his mid-forties, whose house was broken into a few months prior, mentioned the gang violence and troubled youth who disturb the new parks and cause disruption in the early afternoons. He insists there is a sense of community, but sees other communities as getting more attention from local government. The St. Charles region has flourished, and the French Quarter has not changed. But St. Anthony in the Gentilly District seems to have been comparatively ignored. And the lack of attention seems to have spilled over from the governance to the very populace of the neighborhood. Uncomfortably he noted:

“There is not enough trust among the neighbors to build a strong sense of community...I do not feel safe here (in my neighborhood) at all. I am not paranoid, but I caution myself.”

Joe, whom we interviewed previously, stated how much he still wants to keep the community alive and wants to help it prosper. He continuously grows plants and trees for his neighbors, talks to everyone, and continues everything he started before the storm. Racial tensions and feeling isolation from other people are also common. The elderly gentleman said,

“I don’t think the community is going to change. New Orleans, where I grew up is different from now. The relationships were better.”

Formal or Institutional Resources

“Should I stay or should I go now? If I go there will be trouble- if I stay there will be double!” These 1982 lyrics from the music group The Clash probably weren’t written with a post-disaster reconstruction scenario in mind, but one would be hard pressed to find a better-fitting statement for the situation. As St. Anthony was a middle class neighborhood, its inhabitants

had varying levels of resources to work with when the floodwaters destroyed their homes. Regardless, rebuilding after this event was going to take a substantial amount of investment to redress the loss from even the most well-to-do individuals in the neighborhood. The question is, what resources, and what amount thereof, influenced people to stay or go? Or were resources simply a piece of the puzzle that made it easier for people to return to the place they called home, which they never had any intention of leaving?

The assistance offered to the people of St. Anthony, and all of New Orleans to help get back on their feet included Road Home grants, FEMA trailers, insurance money, and Red Cross emergency funds and supplies. Many of the individuals who returned to St. Anthony, however, had much trouble with obtaining these or other resources. Some interviewees were living out of the FEMA trailer for close to a year before they had enough financial stability or assistance to fix their houses. Others had to continually take out loans due to problems with obtaining insurance money, or they had to work on their houses bit by bit as money trickled in. Others still had no problems with money, but got hurt in the long run by inadequate construction workers. A lucky few had the money, good assistance, and even some friends to help with their reconstruction.

In the first round of interviews, the data show how hit-and-miss the assistance could be. One individual lost 100% of his possessions, and got no financial assistance from any of the formal institutions. Another lost less than 20% of all possessions, yet got 120% reimbursement--effectively making money due to the storm. Yet, both returned to St. Anthony neighborhood. In reading through all of the responses there is a glaring absence of a discernible pattern or even an 'average' amount of resources that each interviewee had. Some had lots,

some had a little- some had an easy time of getting help, some went to hell and back to gain anything at all. Through this, another piece of the puzzle seems to be gained. It must have been something else that drew people back to the mostly destroyed area of St. Anthony, still at risk of another flood, and now with more crime. We now know that people would fight tooth and nail to regain their home.

Discussion

The snippets of narratives presented here can be used to support the notion that individuals shared similar reasons for returning to New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina: a call to come home because of belonging, and a call to home because of refuge and understanding. These reasons came during the midst of loss and misfortune following the Hurricane. However, in reading through all of the responses, it is also clear that there was a wide array of resources that each interviewee had lost. In order to gain anything back at all, there was the long and difficult process to attain FEMA aid and Road Home financial support or fight the insurance company. A majority of the views about formal assistance were negative when interviewees were asked about being taken care of. The importance of a sense of being taken care of, first hinted at in the first round of interviews, is still being investigated and may be linked to higher rates of formal assistance. While the distant friends and family may have a significant role to play in this feeling, the government was perceived as unreliable and inconsistent and the insurance companies uninterested in taking care of those interviewed. Money was in high demand and there wasn't enough to go around for the people in the community.

Views lightened up when the people of St. Anthony talked about assistance from

strangers and friends. Whether people relocated further away from home or not, people were grateful for any aid. There was a difference in the types of aid received by family and friends. If the interviewees had family they had previously kept in contact with, those relatives gave assistance. The most common aid given was a place to stay but family hardly gave money. Additionally, lifelong friends gave less assistance compared to the strangers who later became good friends with the citizens of St. Anthony. Most of the interviewees were surprised at the amount of aid they received from strangers and charities. The interviewees made new friends and seemed to establish deeper connections with people who they met when they relocated as opposed to bonding with the people in their own community. Remembering Kaniasty et al.'s (2011) finding that friends and family gave less than our interviewees expected of them, and that these new, 'foreign' friends gave relatively much, we may understand why these deeper connections came about.

When the people of St. Anthony explained their experiences with discrimination and prejudice, they talked about it with nonchalance. African-American or Caucasian, both groups felt disfavored when they relocated after the storm, or when they returned home. Most of the people of St. Anthony who had experienced discrimination or prejudice in parts of Texas, Alabama, or Mississippi did not feel very resentful for any mistreatment they had received. The victims were only concerned about coming home and returning to normalcy. Returning to New Orleans meant reconnecting themselves to the community they were attached to. It was the desire to be at ease with their home and community that seemed to draw people back to the crime ridden, destroyed area of St. Anthony.

The sense of community in St. Anthony seems more detached today compared

to before the storm. Residents are more separated, and there is a heightened risk in the neighborhood regarding safety. Yet, rediscovering a place to belong overpowered all the negative associations with New Orleans. The data showed that even those who had a positive experience in another state and felt they were well taken care of still longed for the time they could return home. The neighborhoods were a burden to rebuild, and it disturbed the people of St. Anthony emotionally and physically. Still, the interviewees displayed a continuous eagerness to repair the city they loved and cared for, even six years later, echoing the ideas in Livingstone's essay- this is their place, where they would not have to face a new social environment as shown by Lein et al. (2009). It might be inferred that the assistance from friends and family gave the people of St. Anthony greater emotional fortitude and added to the latter's devotion to New Orleans. The study only covers one neighborhood of New Orleans, however. Further studies will be needed to see if different locations viewed their neighborhood or their city with any more, or less, devotion and care.

Conclusion

Examining the interviews, we can easily walk away with an appreciation that each disaster experience--like the individuals who experienced them--is unique. This applies to both the events during Katrina, and the long journeys that followed them. The trick in answering 'why return?' lies in identifying the universals that permeate between these tales. Differences are common in the experiences in evacuation sites and the amount of resources received. As such, it would seem that positive and negative experiences, along with wealth or debt, are simply asides to the true draw of home. However, the importance of friends, family, community are all seen throughout

the stories, either through the lament of losing them, the hope of regaining them, or the joy of returning to them. It is here, then, that we possibly find our answer

to what is worth going through to come back to New Orleans; what is worth going through to come back home.

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Appendix- Interview Guide

Introduction:

It's been a while now since the hurricane. Would you say this disaster has changed, in some ways, how your family gets along?

Specific points to address:

- Type of aid, money or material support received?
- Who gave support and where did they live?
- Do you keep in contact with these people? How?
- Did you have a sense of being taken care of during the emergency and after? How?