

KATRINA'S STORY: A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF NEWS COVERAGE AND FEMA'S
CRISIS RESPONSE STRATEGIES

by

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(Under the Direction of Elli Lester Roushanzamir)

ABSTRACT

Hurricane Katrina slammed the Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005. News media flooded the Gulf Coast immediately after Katrina to report the disaster. This study analyzes Hurricane Katrina's story as a disaster narrative in the *New York Times*, and concomitant external news releases from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to determine whether a link existed between the evolution of FEMA's crisis response strategies and the *Times*' coverage on Katrina. Using textual analysis, I discovered that Katrina's story was not told as a traditional disaster narrative in the news, and FEMA's news releases conveyed that the agency employed three major response strategies. There were similarities in language and tone in the *Times* articles and news releases that focused on the economic impact of Katrina, and the individualization of the crisis, which ultimately failed to recognize inherent social divides based on race and class.

INDEX WORDS: Hurricane Katrina, Crisis Communication, Disaster narrative, FEMA, New York Times, Narrative Theory

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	6
<i>The Narrative Theory</i>	6
<i>News Coverage on Katrina</i>	8
<i>Crisis Communications/Crisis Response Strategies</i>	11
<i>FEMA's Response</i>	15
3 METHODS	18
<i>Newspapers and Narrative Theory</i>	18
<i>FEMA and Crisis Communication</i>	20
<i>Grounded Theory and Data Collection</i>	21
4 ANALYSIS.....	25
<i>Phase 1</i>	25
<i>Phase 2</i>	30
<i>Phase 3</i>	39
5 INTERPRETATION	56
<i>The Times' Story</i>	56
<i>Crisis Response Evolution</i>	59
6 CONCLUSION.....	62

<i>Limitations and Future Research</i>	63
REFERENCES	66
APPENDICES	70
APPENDIX A	71
CATEGORIES AND EXAMPLES OF FEMA’S EXTERNAL NEWS RELEASES	71
APPENDIX B	72
CATEGORIES AND EXAMPLES FOR <i>NEW YORK TIMES</i> ARTICLES	72

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“New Orleans finally has something to celebrate,” stated Wolf Blitzer, a news reporter from CNN. On Sunday, February 7, 2010, the *New York Times* reported that the 44th Superbowl became the most watched show in U.S. history, generating approximately 106.5 million viewers. Sunday night, loud cheers and music resounded from Bourbon Street in New Orleans in celebration of the New Orleans Saints victory over the Indianapolis Colts. A little over four years ago, there was a very different scene. In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina slammed the Gulf Coast as the most devastating hurricane to hit the region (Stabile, 2007). Conversely, Bourbon Street, dark and deserted, was only a snapshot of the damage in the Gulf Coast Region from Hurricane Katrina’s destructive force. Katrina killed over one thousand people and displaced tens of thousands of Gulf Coast residents, many never to return to their homes. Its destructive force coupled with delays in governmental relief efforts garnered international media coverage.

Littlefield and Quennette (2007) referenced how people use the media during a disaster or crisis. They stated that the public seeks out information to evaluate if the crisis will affect them, how they should think, and what they should do (Littlefield and Quennette, 2007). For example, those in the disaster zone, or the path of hurricane Katrina, used the media to get evacuation orders, and those outside the strike zone, used media to track the storm (Littlefield and Quennette, 2007).

Before Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, news coverage provided evacuation and preparation information, and when the hurricane made landfall, news media focused on the

federal government's disaster relief efforts, as well as local and state authorities' relief action plans (Littlefield and Quennette, 2007). However, soon after initial media coverage, the media emphasized the ineffectiveness of relief efforts, and reported conflicting stories on who was responsible for human suffering after Katrina (Littlefield and Quennette, 2007). More specifically, Maestas, Atkeson, Croom and Bryant (2008) found that television coverage dominated Katrina's media coverage. The study found that 94 percent of viewers were attentive to Katrina news coverage, while 58 percent were very attentive (Maestas et al., 2008). Maestas et al. (2008) stated that the majority of the hurricane news coverage focused on the failures of governmental crisis response plans. News reports detailed that disaster relief supplies were not in place to help those affected by the storm (Littlefield and Quennette, 2007).

FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, created to manage natural disaster relief efforts, was responsible for providing federal aid to affected people and areas during and after Hurricane Katrina. During Katrina's news coverage, the public and media, "demanded accountability," (Littlefield and Quennette, 2007, p. 31) from FEMA and President Bush. The hurricane's news coverage portrayal of failure in governmental response, and floating bodies in New Orleans caused President Bush's approval ratings to drop, as well the Director of FEMA, Michael Brown to resign on September 12, 2005, not even two weeks after the hurricane. This study investigates if FEMA used the media to seek out information on how they should think about Katrina, and what they should do. Was there a link between FEMA's response strategies and the stories in the hurricane's news coverage?

“It was a sound of rage and grief and it seemed never to end.”

-Lois Lowry, *The Giver*

Faculty in my program sometimes ask why am I intrigued with Hurricane Katrina. If I am interested in crises, why not study September 11, 2001 or the California wildfires? At first, I found myself puzzled, and hesitant to reveal why I was so interested in Katrina's story. In August 2005, I was a sophomore at North Carolina State University and my cousin had just returned to New Orleans for her first year at Xavier University. She spent the majority of the summer in their Pre-Med summer institute, and she could not stop talking about how much she loved the South, and specifically New Orleans. Two weeks before Katrina, my aunt and uncle had just returned from their 40-hour roundtrip drive from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans, Louisiana, with their car full of dorm room necessities (e.g. linens, trunks, hangers, microwave). The semester was only thirteen days old when I received a phone call from my mother two days before Katrina's landfall.

My aunt and mother were frantic because the weather advisory predicted a deadly hurricane was headed straight for New Orleans. My cousin did not have a car, and my aunt and uncle could not drive to go get her. Flights out of New Orleans were booked, and my cousin was stuck. On August 28, 2005, my cousin packed up what she could and a friend of her father drove her to Birmingham, Alabama. At this time, I began to see news reports of Hurricane Katrina on the news. I watched as it made landfall in Florida, and continued to watch as it made landfall in the Gulf Coast. I had never witnessed a storm so powerful that it bent palm trees in half, but I was just thankful my cousin was safe.

However, on August 30, 2005, the images on the screen were very different from the day before. The television news reported that levees in New Orleans had failed and 80 percent of the

city was flooded. At the time, I was not knowledgeable about the geography of New Orleans, but I had heard my cousin say it was below sea level. On the news, I saw water at rooftop levels. I could not see street signs, and I said to myself, “Where are all the residents?” My question was immediately answered with images of black bodies floating in the water, then men and women wading through chest-deep water. I could not believe that people were still in New Orleans. Then, my disbelief turned into anger.

On August 31, 2005, I watched images of thousands of black men, women, and children on rooftops, wading through water, and being dropped off at the Superdome and Convention Center in New Orleans. The news reporters interviewed many of the victims, and they were angry and disappointed that no one was there to help them. They were hungry, tired, and lost. Their homes were destroyed, and in many cases, they had been separated from their families. Why were they suffering like this? Where was their help? Although I could not believe what was going on, I felt compelled to continue watching the television news reports and reading the newspapers.

As news reports continued, I started to pay more attention to how news reporters spoke about hurricane victims. I listened to television reports as they referred to victims in the Superdome as thugs and refugees. I watched and read about the looters in New Orleans. I could not believe that in 2005 in America, I was watching a complete failure in governmental response to one of the most devastating hurricanes in our nation’s history. I could not believe the media and government alike were exhibiting what struck me as overt racism and classism.

About a week after the disaster, I learned that my cousin, a freshman at Xavier, could not return to school for at least one semester. Although she was only in New Orleans for about ten weeks, the storm took something more than material possessions from her. The storm took her

first semester, which damaged the college career she envisioned. At this point, I needed answers. I needed to know why it took four days to get victims out of the Superdome. I needed to know why dead men and women and impoverished men and women were left outside of the Convention Center. I needed to know why so many black men and women were left to suffer along the Gulf Coast. I began to search for information that might help me understand how this could have happened in my lifetime, and in the United States of America. Therefore, when I first arrived at graduate school, and I got my first big writing assignment, a literature review, I chose to write about Katrina's story in the news and FEMA's crisis response strategies. I was interested to investigate whether there was a relationship or connection between how Katrina was portrayed in the news, and how FEMA responded to the hurricane.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina slammed the Gulf Coast and damaged regions of Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi and Florida. The U.S. Department of Health website reported an estimated 1,800 lives lost and more than 81 billion dollars of total damage. Hurricane Katrina severely damaged New Orleans, Louisiana, where failed levees resulted in flooding 80 percent of the city (Stabile, 2007). Because of the magnitude of the disaster and the lack of resourcefulness and inefficiency of initial crisis response plans from both local and national government agencies, news media flooded the Gulf Coast area (Stabile, 2007). Along the Gulf Coast, and specifically in New Orleans, news media focused on stories of evacuation and survival, and more importantly, the response from FEMA.

FEMA, under the umbrella of the Department of Homeland Security, was created to manage natural disaster relief efforts and threats to national security (Roberts, 2006). After Katrina, victims and non-victims depended on FEMA for financial and emotional aid. The media soon began to blame FEMA for its lack of knowledge of the storm's potential threats, lack of preparation and delayed response to the crisis (Fleetwood, 2006). News coverage on Katrina exemplified emotional appeal that often generates active responses.

The Narrative Theory

Narratives are contextual constructs that establish common knowledge for a particular purpose (Griffin, 1993). Shared meaning uses central themes to disseminate information—thus making it easier for publics to follow the sequences of stories within narratives (Griffin, 1993).

The narrative theory proposes that all humans are active participants in the creation and evaluation of messages (Fisher, 1987). Therefore, all human beings are storytellers.

Through the emphasis on shared meaning and human experience, narrative theory emphasizes dialogic and trustworthy communication (Fisher, 1987). Narrative theory states that in rhetorical narration, humans create symbols and interact symbolically. And through that interaction, respondents identify with each other through relatable perceptions in a message (Fisher, 1987). Thus, individuals see themselves in a larger context and relate to one another through story. These stories create communities of common knowledge and interest that confirm that the stories are relatable and recognizable in one's personal life (Fisher, 1987). Here, Fisher's emphasis on symbolic interaction and the establishment of universal meaning are similar to narrative approaches from Deslauners and Koch. In Deslauners's (1992) study on narratives in relation to dimensions of knowledge, he stated that narratives allow for individuals to form special connections with one another that will eventually lead to a quest for meaning. Similarly, in Koch's (1990) analysis of news as myth, he stated that narratives, as information systems, take messages and convey them as universal stories. Narratives foster shared knowledge through communicative experiences. Through those experiences, connections are formed that are made meaningful based on the recognition of one's self as a component of a larger story.

The narrative's ability to establish meaningful connections and commonalities requires accuracy and credibility. According to Deslauners (1992), narratives organize human experiences into episodes. Further, Fisher (1987) stated that life is comprehended through a series of ongoing narratives that have characters, beginnings, middles and ends. Therefore, in order for the episodes and ongoing narratives to accurately represent human experience, consistency is a necessary component.

There are two basic principles of a good narrative-coherence and fidelity (Fisher, 1987). Coherence emphasizes the logical order of the elements of the narrative and fidelity is concerned with the truthfulness of the story and its reasoning and values. If the elements within a narrative are consistent, presented in a logical sequential order and are accurate, the narrative is more effective in establishing relationships that have contextual and cultural relevance (Fisher, 1987). Ultimately, individuals identify with the messages within the story (Moeller, 2006).

Social narratives are often used in news mediums to inform the public (Koch, 1990). News reports summarize factual events involving “real” people, and thrive on repetition of themes and events (Lule, 2002a). In accordance with the reporting of “real” facts and the role of news in social order, Lule emphasized how throughout history, scholars and scientists have used inherent contextual patterns to explain origins, promote order, and represent social beliefs and values (Lule, 2002a). For example, both news and storytelling offer dramas of order and disorder, and portrayals of heroes and villains (Lule, 2002a). News and storytelling both function to inform the public through accurate stories of public interest. Based on the similarities in the functions of news and myth in society, Lule (2002a) proposed that news is reported and understood through storytelling.

Ryan (2002) discussed the power of narratives in her analysis on narratives in digital media. She stated that narratives have such a grip on human minds that the success of genres or mediums involving language is dependent on its ability to tell stories (Ryan, 2002). Thus, storytelling is a necessary component in the dissemination of news.

News Coverage on Katrina

News media coverage influences the immediate reaction to natural disasters, the shaping of disaster policy, and preventive efforts for future disasters (Fontenot, Boyle and Gallagher,

2009). Natural disaster news coverage generates high ratings on television around the world (Lule, 2002a; Moeller, 2006). Moeller (2006) stated that natural disaster news coverage is pervasive in news media because it is evident what happened and what is needed. For example, in March 2005, tsunami coverage created a resolution for the disaster on a global level (Moeller, 2006). In addition to natural disasters in international news coverage, Lule (2002a) stated that disasters close to home receive more attention.

In August 2005, coverage of Hurricane Katrina dominated most news media. Media became the main producers of information and knowledge that translated Hurricane Katrina as a national crisis. The first post-Katrina week, news media ran into difficulty in news coverage. Electricity was unavailable, cell phones were not working, and fact checking was at a minimum (Morris, 2006). Despite these difficulties, news media outlets continued to flood the area. For example, in “Regarding the Pain of Others,” Moeller’s (2006) analysis of media coverage of different natural disasters, she reported that Fox news sent more than 50 news cameras and CNN sent 125 staffers to the Gulf Coast. Television stations and print newspapers ran pictures of disaster scenes such as people airlifted from their homes, patients evacuated from hospitals, and bodies of nursing home residents who were not saved (Leighninger, 2006). Through personal accounts of death and survival, stories of reconstruction, and emphasis on the lack of national disaster preparation, the media shaped the nation’s opinion on what happened before, and more specifically, after Hurricane Katrina (Rozario, 2007).

The media used stories of suffering and death, survival, and reconstruction to dramatize the crisis and ignite emotion and action in the public. These stories played an integral role in shaping the behavior of many individuals and organizations. Stock (2007) noted in his analysis

of Katrina's news coverage, the characters of the story are the victims, and the conflicts are the hurricane itself and the lack of preparation for immediate rescue and relief efforts.

The beginning of the narrative includes stories of death and suffering, which allowed the public to understand that disaster of this magnitude can happen—no one is exempt (Stock, 2007). In *Journalism in a Culture of Grief*, Kitch and Hume (2008) found the media were active participants in the contribution to anguish. In Fleetwood's (2006) essay on technology and Hurricane Katrina, she discussed vivid imagery of dead bodies portrayed in the news. Through vivid imagery and emotional appeal, the public became intrigued with images of human suffering and the emotional involvement of the news media. Like Fleetwood, Stabile (2007) described stories of suffering and emotion in her essay on racial tension during Hurricane Katrina. She wrote how one reporter interviewed a victim whose wife was swept from his grasp during the storm and he feared she was dead. Stabile (2007) emphasized the emotional appeal of the account as she described the reporter's struggle to hold back tears during an on-camera interview. Through images of death and stories of suffering, the media were able to shape public perception, and create a common empathetic experience for victims and non-victims alike.

The middle of the narrative includes stories of heroism and survival. Heroism, as the main theme in journalism, portrays common people doing extraordinary things (Kitch and Hume, 2008). Fleetwood (2006) explains that hovering helicopters would capture trapped victims on rooftops with signs that read, "Help us," (p.775). But more importantly, she asserted that often times, the media would wait until the coast guard and rescue crews would arrive on the scene to run the story on television (Fleetwood, 2006). Images of victims using refrigerators and blow up mattresses as floatation devices, and young victims transporting other victims to shelter were all stories of heroism and survival (Fleetwood, 2006). And in relation to the role of media during

crises and Hurricane Katrina, these stories dramatized the crisis and were used to ignite emotion and action in the public.

And lastly, the end of the narrative consists of stories of reconstruction. After tragic events, the media often uses reassuring or reconstruction narratives to transform feelings of grief and suffering to healing and resolution (Kitch and Hume, 2008). Reconstruction coverage focused on rebuilding businesses and homes and strengthening levees to avoid crises. Fleetwood (2006) describes how President George W. Bush spoke of Katrina as “wiping clean the region” and a chance for new growth and restoration. Here, this description validates the media’s ability to portray Katrina as a natural disaster and crisis, and as a tool of reconstruction and new birth of a major metropolitan area.

These personal accounts allowed the media to influence the public’s understanding and relation to the effects of Hurricane Katrina (Littlefield and Quenette, 2007). During natural disasters, news media help publics understand who is affected by the crisis, how they should think, and what they should do (Davis and French, 2009). In specific relation to Katrina, news coverage in the hurricane’s aftermath played an integral role in the development of crisis response strategies enacted by local, state, and federal agencies in the hurricane’s aftermath.

Crisis Communications/ Crisis Response Strategies

Crisis communications is an integral component of public relations and crisis management within organizations (Cloudman and Hallahan, 2006). Crises consist of three stages- pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis. In a study on strategic excellence within organizations, Lee, Woeste, and Heath (2007) found that 79 percent of companies have a crisis plan and 71 percent have a crisis management team. Therefore, the majority of organizations understand the importance of crisis management and crisis management preparation. In contrast to Lee et al.

and their study on strategic excellence and crisis communication plans, Cloudman and Hallahan (2006) identify tangible indicators to measure the effectiveness of crisis plans within organizations. Indicators of preparation were identified as presence of a written plan, tactical preparedness, training, maintenance of contact lists and media monitoring (Cloudman and Hallahan, 2006). Cloudman and Hallahan (2006) found that 73 percent of organizations have written crisis management plans and 72 percent have a crisis management team. They also found that 82 percent of organizations had updated their crisis plans within the year (Cloudman and Hallahan, 2006). Updated plans and written plans are both tangible measures for effective crisis communication plans. Organizations formulate action plans through media monitoring and environmental scanning. The media expose organizations' response efforts throughout all three stages of a crisis to establish and maintain order and confidence among publics (Littlefield and Quenette, 2007).

Organizations must develop a crisis communication plan to communicate with both internal and external publics throughout all three stages of a crisis. Coombs (1995) classifies responses into five different categories. The first group is nonexistence strategies. Here, organizations use denial, clarification, attacks and intimidation to eliminate the crisis and make clear to publics that there is no link between the situation and the organization (Coombs, 1995). The second group is distance strategies, which use excuses, denial and justification to acknowledge the crisis. Although the organization recognizes the crisis, the main purpose is to weaken the link between the organization and the crisis (Coombs, 1995). The third group is ingratiation strategies, which use bolstering and transcendence to gain public approval for the organization (Coombs, 1995). The fourth group, mortification strategies, use repentance and rectification to win forgiveness of the publics, to accept the crisis, and to take action to repair

damages (Coombs, 1995). The last group is suffering strategies, which draws a positive link between the crisis and the organization by portraying itself as the unfair victim to a malicious attack from an outside entity (Coombs, 1995). The organization's goal is to win sympathy among publics (Coombs, 1995). Organizations choose appropriate strategies based on the magnitude and type of disaster.

Based on a crisis type matrix emanating from the intentionality and controllability of the crises, four mutually exclusive crisis types are formed-faux pas, terrorism, transgression, and accidents (Coombs, 1995). Faux pas is an unintentional action that is transformed into a crisis by an external agent (Coombs, 1995). The faux pas begins when organizations take actions that they believe are appropriate, and external agents challenge the appropriateness of the action. Because faux pas is an external challenges and unintentional in nature, organizational responsibility is minimal (Coombs, 1995). Therefore, Coombs (1995) prescribed distance and/or nonexistence strategies as the most effective response for faux pas. Transgressions are intentional actions taken by an organization that consciously place publics at risk or harm (Coombs, 1995). Based on the intentional nature of this crisis type, organizations are mainly responsible for the crisis. Therefore, Coombs (1995) recommended mortification strategies as the most effective response. Terrorism crisis types are intentional actions taken by external agents (Coombs, 1995). These actions are intended to directly and/or indirectly damage an organization. Since organizations do not have control over the crisis and are victimized by external agents, Coombs (1995) prescribed suffering strategies as the most efficient response.

The last crisis type is classified as accidents. Accidents are unintentional in nature and occur during normal organizational operations (Coombs, 1995). Accidents are broken into categories of human induced error and acts of nature (Coombs, 1995). Examples of human

induced error include workplace injuries and product defects, while examples of acts of nature include earthquakes, droughts and hurricanes. According to Coombs, publics are less likely to blame organizations for an act of nature because of the lack of control over the situation. Because accidents are uncontrollable and unstable, Coombs (1995) recommended excuse strategies to establish a weak link between the organization and the cause of the crisis. However, Coombs (1995) emphasized that publics still expect organizations to effectively respond to acts of nature. In accordance with Coombs' crisis response strategy groups, the most effective strategies to handle extreme acts of nature, such as Hurricane Katrina, are mortification strategies. Coombs (1995) stated that both victims and non-victims rely on the organization for a sense of closure and reassurances that actions have been taken to prevent reoccurrences. Through crisis preparation and crisis response strategies, organizations use the media to disseminate messages to publics and portray the effectiveness of the crisis communication plan and crisis management team (Lee et. al, 2007).

Organizations formulate action plans through media monitoring and environmental scanning. The media display organizations' response efforts throughout all three stages of a crisis in order to establish and maintain order and confidence among publics (Littlefield and Quenette, 2007). Publics rely on the media to provide information during crises. Fleetwood (2006) recognized how government officials relied on visual coverage of Katrina to implement rescue plans. During Hurricane Katrina, governmental officials were one of several key publics that relied on news media. Rozario (2007), analyzed through historical context, the role of media in acts of nature as he described the Mississippi Flood of 1927. He recognized in 1927, there was a turning point in both the involvement of media and the government in natural disasters (Rozario, 2007). Through increased media attention, the public became emotionally invested in the flood

and insisted the government do whatever it could do to help. In contrast, in the media coverage of Hurricane Katrina, imagery and stories were used to invoke change and action in relief and rescue efforts from governmental agencies (Fleetwood, 2006). In a content analysis of the hurricane's media coverage, Barnes, Hanson, Novilla, Meacham, McIntyre, and Erickson (2008) discussed how the media played the historic role by pushing government to action. Here, Barnes et al. (2008) validated the agenda-setting theory and the media's power of influence on behavior. And through the media, failed governmental preparation and ineffective response strategies were exposed and challenged (Rozario, 2007).

FEMA's Response

FEMA was created in 1979 by President Jimmy Carter to manage disaster policy and improve disaster response. The agency was intended to be the intermediary between the White House, state, local governments, National Guard and other organizations that might be called on during national disasters (Roberts, 2006). In 2001, President Bush moved the agency to the Department of Homeland Security, which devotes its efforts to security and terrorism preparation (Roberts, 2006). In accordance with Hallahan and Cloudman's (2006) measures of crisis preparedness, FEMA was not prepared to respond to Katrina. According to Roberts (2006), state and federal governments spent time designing plans and procedures for terrorist attacks, but failed to update plans for natural disaster response.

According to Rozario (2007), FEMA had a simulated hurricane response plan but did not implement it before August 2005. Roberts (2006) stated that FEMA's plans were not thoroughly rehearsed. The National Response Plan gives the Department of Homeland Security authority during crises to distribute essential resources (Roberts, 2006). This plan also stated that an operating picture might not be achievable 24-48 hours after the disaster (Roberts, 2006).

However, the secretary of Homeland Security has the power to bypass normal procedures to begin rescue and relief efforts (Roberts, 2006). Hurricane Katrina's response did not use this authority. Maestas et al. (2008) found that federal authorities attributed blame for delayed response in a lack of communication between state and local governments. FEMA could only coordinate governmental responses once state governors requested federal aid (Maestas et al., 2008). Because of the storm's damage to infrastructure, technologies, and failure to prepare, state and local officials could not immediately communicate with FEMA, and other federal agencies (Fleetwood, 2006).

Therefore, it was difficult for FEMA to have relief supplies and evacuation plans structured and in place prior to Hurricane Katrina. Immediately after Katrina, FEMA lacked a crisis team and effective spokesperson. The agency did not conduct media monitoring, which scans the environment to assess the public's perception of the words and actions of an organization during a crisis (Littlefield and Quenette, 2007). And because the media focused heavily on the FEMA's response efforts, the common theme throughout the news coverage was a lack of a well-organized crisis response plan (Rozario, 2007).

Roberts (2006) stated that initially, FEMA blamed the Bush administration and poor state governmental responses. FEMA also accused local organizations of not having a crisis plan in place. In addition to shifting blame, Barnes et al. (2008) found that FEMA blamed the media for exaggeration and underreporting disaster management. As the media continued to emphasize unsuccessful relief efforts, approval ratings of the Bush administration and the Department of Homeland Security decreased (Rozario, 2007). In mid-September, FEMA's director resigned, and Littlefield and Quenette (2007) found that FEMA proposed its first relief package and recovery plan. Rozario (2007) discussed how FEMA promised the government 200 billion

dollars to rebuild damaged areas. The agency also passed a 62.5 billion dollar relief package. In 2007, the United States Government Accountability Office reported that FEMA provided temporary housing in the form of travel trailers and mobile homes to thousands of displaced individuals. Despite FEMA's monetary contribution, Roberts (2006) concluded that Hurricane Katrina exposed the disconnection between preparation and response. FEMA's inability to adequately prepare for a disaster of this magnitude resulted in human suffering and warranted criticism of the organization and other federal agencies in news media coverage.

Therefore, this textual analysis, using Coomb's classification of crisis response strategies, will analyze the specific constructs and language that FEMA used to convey its crisis response message in external news releases immediately after Katrina. Similarly, using narrative theory, I will analyze concomitant online news coverage in the *New York Times*. This research examines how elements of disaster narratives emerge in online news media. Ultimately, by analyzing news coverage and FEMA news releases through a narrative lens, this research proposes a link between the disaster narrative and the evolution of FEMA's crisis response strategies.

More specifically, I expect to find that Hurricane Katrina's news coverage emerged as a story that initially focused on the destruction and damages of the storm, and near the end focused more on ineffective response strategies. Additionally, I propose that as news stories detailed damages and strength of the storm, FEMA's news releases conveyed distance strategies to weaken the link between the organization and Katrina, and minimize organizational responsibility for hurricane relief efforts. However, as news stories focused more on inefficient relief efforts, FEMA's news releases conveyed mortification as dominant crisis response strategies.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

News is deeply rooted in the tradition of storytelling (Lule, 2002a). According to Hall (1980), an event must become a story before it becomes a communicative event. The story allows for humans to understand and comprehend the world (Lule, 2002a). News coverage, conceptualized as story, allows individuals to see themselves and the world in dramatic terms, and these terms are “equipments for living,” (Lule, 2002a). These assumptions help inform research on the construction and interpretation of stories in the news. The tradition of storytelling contributes to this textual analysis on how disaster narrative elements emerge in news coverage of Hurricane Katrina and the news’ influence on the construction and evolution of messages in FEMA’s news releases. The purpose of this research is to: examine how elements of Hurricane Katrina’s disaster narrative was written in the *New York Times*; examine the evolution of FEMA’s crisis response strategies in their external news releases; and identify a link between Katrina’s disaster narrative in the *Times* and the evolution of FEMA’s crisis response strategies in concomitant news releases.

Newspapers and Narrative Theory

Newspapers are dominated by day-to-day events that are dramatic, topical and immediate (Hall, 1975). Traditional practices that define what constitutes news are embedded in the structures of newspapers (Hall, 1975). Hall’s (1975) recognition of these traditional practices is congruent with Lule’s (2002a) conjecture that news is produced and understood through the use of specific patterns. Hall (1975) defined newspapers as literary and visual constructs that are

shaped by rules, have symbolic meaning, and consist of traditions that are integral to the use of language. Hall (1975) further discussed newspaper as discourse. Newspapers do not just report the news, they make the news or news stories meaningful through their conscious choice of style, tone, linguistics, and rhetoric (Hall, 1975).

Lule (2002a) stated that the construction and dissemination of news is reliant on the tradition of storytelling, which Fisher (1987) stated is inherent in human culture. According to Lule (2002a), human life has the structure of story. Both Fisher (1987) and Lule (2002a) agreed that stories are best understood when they are told in a logical sequence with a beginning, middle, and end. Within story, Fisher (1987) postulated that there are consistent characters, conflicts, and themes throughout the story. For this research study, I analyzed the *New York Times* online newspaper articles to examine how Katrina's disaster narrative was conveyed in online news.

The *New York Times* has become a main channel of news for those interested in news, national politics, and international affairs (Lule, 2002a). Weiss (1974) found that the *New York Times* was the most often read newspaper publication for economic and political affairs. Studies have confirmed that the *Times* is a resource for information and has influence within the White House, Pentagon and State Department (Lule, 2002a). The *Times* has been awarded various awards, and often sets the agenda for other news organizations (Dill and Wu, 2009, Lule, 2002a). Because of the *Times*' positions of privilege and esteem within the newspaper industry, it has been recognized as an integral factor in the understanding of U.S. and world affairs (Lule, 2002a).

Lule (2002a) used the *Times* to examine how news is told as myth, which is a form of storytelling. Therefore, based on the *Times*' reputation in the newspaper industry and the

discipline, and its role in understanding international and national affairs, I chose the *New York Times* as one of my texts. This textual analysis will go further than counting the number of times a theme emerges in newspaper articles. This research study will critically analyze newspaper articles to identify thematic categories of Katrina's disaster narrative and concepts representative of storytelling in the *New York Times* newspaper.

FEMA and Crisis Communication

During Katrina, and especially in the hurricane's aftermath, the media became the main channel of communication and source for information for local, state and federal government organizations, evacuees, donors, volunteers, and the world community (Lundy and Broussard, 2007). Public relations practitioners across various relief organizations used the Internet to provide immediate information on rescue efforts and respond to media inquiries (Lundy and Broussard, 2007). During and after a crisis, it is necessary that practitioners effectively communicate clear, consistent, and credible messages to all affected publics (Lundy and Broussard, 2007)

FEMA, the governmental entity responsible for managing natural disaster relief efforts, utilized its website to disseminate information on organizational efforts to provide aid to Katrina victims. Because of the magnitude and catastrophic nature of Katrina, FEMA constructed and published numerous news releases pertaining to Katrina on a daily basis. In an analysis of FEMA's news releases using framing theory during Hurricane Katrina and Rita's aftermath, Murphree, Reber, and Blevens (2009) found four dominant themes; (1) FEMA's pledge to give financial aid to victims, (2) the President's declaration of emergencies, (3) the availability of disaster centers, (4) instructions for dealing with Katrina and Rita. This study's aim was to analyze the content of the news releases and the various frames to better understand the

construction and publishing of news releases within governmental organizations, specifically after a crisis (Murphree et al., (2009). In contrast, my research study will analyze FEMA's external news releases for conceptual indicators used to convey its crisis response strategies. Based on Coomb's (1995) crisis response classification and grounded theory, this study will aim to identify crisis response strategies and their evolution.

Grounded Theory and Data Collection

Hurricane Katrina made landfall on August 29, 2005, and extensive *Times* news coverage continued through August 2006. However, because this research aims to analyze FEMA's initial crisis response strategies, the time frame was based on the online availability of FEMA's external news releases in their archived pressroom. The specific time frame for data collection for *Times* articles and FEMA news releases was August 29, 2005 to October 31, 2005. After October 31, 2005, FEMA was not consistently posting news releases on Katrina. *Times* articles were found on Times Topics, The *New York Times* online archives, using the search term: Hurricane Katrina. Based on the purpose of this study and the use of two different forms of text, grounded theory was applied to the data collection and analysis process. Grounded theory seeks to identify and understand concepts, interactions between concepts, and the changing conditions and consequences of these interactions (Corbin and Strauss, 1990).

Grounded theory states that sampling is based on the phenomena or idea the researcher wants to study (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). According to grounded theory, the conditions of the phenomena of study are the sampling units (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Corbin and Strauss (1990) provided the example of a researcher wanting to study nurses' work. In the example, Corbin and Strauss (1990) stated that the researcher would not sample nurses. Instead, the researcher would sample the incidents and events that denote the nurses' work and the conditions

that facilitate the work (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). All concepts and conditions during data analysis are considered (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). In accordance with grounded theory's sampling guidelines, my research's sample was defined based on conceptual findings in both the *Times* articles and editorials and FEMA's news releases from August 29, 2005 to October 31, 2005.

Using grounded theory, it is important to note that the text itself is not the unit of analysis; the concepts are units of analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Corbin and Strauss (1990) prescribed that data collection should not be done separate from data analysis. As the first data is collected, the first level of analysis, open coding, should begin (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). This level of coding examines the initial data for general themes and concepts, which will guide the analysis as more data is collected. These general themes and concepts are abstractly categorized and subcategorized, and the next level of analysis, axial coding, examined the relationships and conditions of the categories (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). As both levels of coding are conducted, new hypotheses emerge (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). The repeated coding and categorization processes alter and verify hypotheses based on the categorized concepts and their conditions, interactions, and consequences (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). The third level of analysis, selective coding, is when all categories and subcategories are unified under a core category, which represents the central phenomena of the study (Corbin and Strauss, 1990).

Grounded theory's foundation in conceptual categorization and repeated analyses of relationships, interactions, and conditions of those categories provided access to the repeated critical analysis of *Times* articles for symbolic language and themes that work together to form disaster narratives. Grounded theory's simultaneous process of data collection and analysis is in accordance with Hall's (1975) premise that newspaper analysis as text requires repeated

categorization and development of new research questions to fully explore the words on the page as a reflection of and influence on society.

The intention of this study was to identify a link between the emergence of Hurricane Katrina's disaster narrative in online news coverage and FEMA's crisis response strategies in its external news releases. The abundance of news coverage and strategic messages from FEMA immediately after Katrina influenced my decision to collect data within a two-month time period. I used the search term: Hurricane Katrina and pulled 709 articles. It is important to note that as stated earlier in my study, I initially intended to use all news coverage on Katrina. However, because of the large amount of articles in this specific time period and the time constraints of this study, editorials, magazine articles, Associated Press, and Reuters were not used. Once these articles were eliminated, my total number of articles was reduced to 582.

Once I gathered my articles, I collected FEMA's news releases in the two-month time period. Using FEMA's online press room at their website, www.fema.gov, I accessed archived news releases from August, September, and October 2005. In order to gather all news releases pertaining to Katrina, I pulled all news releases with the words Hurricane Katrina in the title and those that mentioned Hurricane Katrina in the body of the release. After employing this search method, I collected a total of 433 news releases. Once both sets of my data were collected, in accordance with grounded theory, I began the categorization of my data. Categorization was necessary to organize my data and transition into close readings of the text. In accordance with Hall's (1975) description of textual and discourse analysis and grounded theory, my analysis involved three major phases: (1) Loose reading of two sets of data, i.e. press releases and newspaper articles, which allows for general categorizations; (2) Identification and close analysis of prototype examples of strategic messages as conceptual indicators of crisis response strategies

in FEMA's external news releases; and (3) Critical analysis of disaster narrative in *Times* coverage to identify patterns in the narrative's construction and describe significance in timing in relation to the messages in FEMA's news releases. In this final stage, I address my research questions and explain if any new questions and expectations emerged from the various phases of analysis. In the next section, I will explain my three phases of analysis.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Phase 1

After collecting 582 articles and 433 press releases, I did a loose reading of the texts. In this stage, I identified reoccurring themes in the articles and releases separate from one another. Because there were a smaller amount of releases, I conducted my loose reading of the releases first. More specifically, I began with the releases on August 29, 2005 and examined the title and first two paragraphs of each release. After the first two weeks of releases, I established five major reoccurring themes: contact information, housing assistance, FEMA's hurricane relief efforts, State of emergency, and disaster recovery center instructions. Below, I provide a brief description of each category. (See Appendix A for examples.)

Contact Information (23 total) This category provided detailed instructions on how to contact FEMA for hurricane assistance and local representatives for disaster relief. News releases provided information such as toll free numbers, online registration instructions for federal and local aid, and troubleshooting websites and phone numbers. Victims who acquired English as a second language also were provided with contact information for translated instructions on how to access hurricane assistance.

Housing Assistance (44 total) This category contained messages for displaced hurricane victims. Messages for displaced victims discussed availability of temporary housing and shelters, reconstructions of homes in damaged areas, qualifications for financial assistance, and procedures on mandatory home inspections. While this category is a sector of FEMA's relief

efforts, FEMA spent over 1 billion dollars on providing temporary housing for thousands of displaced victims.

Hurricane Relief Updates (232 total) The large amount of releases in this category is attributed to its inclusion of all news releases that revealed information on FEMA's efforts to aid hurricane victims. It also included messages about updates on specific action plans FEMA implemented in its relief efforts, such as financial and counseling assistance, coordination of local and federal agencies, and insurance claims. Lastly, a significant part of the releases in this category warned victims and relief agencies of scandals and fraudulent practices in relation to relief efforts.

State of Emergency (46 total) This category included releases that detailed the President's approval of emergency declarations in various states. These releases announced the states' access to federal funds for hurricane assistance.

Disaster Recovery Center Instructions (88 total) Messages in this category only contained information on the opening and closing of disaster recovery centers.

Once I established these categories, two in particular stood out because of their repetitiveness. Within the disaster recovery center instructions category, news releases announced the opening and closing of various disaster recovery centers and the relocation of disaster centers. Many of the releases listed functioning disaster recovery centers and provided contact information. Similar to the redundancy in the disaster center category, the state of emergency category consisted of declarations of emergencies in various states. Each release in this category was identical, with the exception of the name of the different states. Because the content of these news releases did not describe or detail any of FEMA's hurricane response or recovery efforts, these categories were not used in the next phase of analysis. After eliminating those two categories, my total number of new releases was reduced to 322.

After the loose reading and categorization of news releases, I began my loose reading of 582 newspaper articles to understand how Katrina's disaster narrative was told in the *New York Times*. In this analysis, I initially scanned the first week of news coverage to identify any reoccurring themes. More specifically, I looked at the headline, and first two paragraphs to determine the main subject of the article. In this phase, I identified 10 categories, which are listed in the order that they appeared in the newspaper articles: economic impact, destruction, reconstruction/renewal, relief efforts, health/sciences, law enforcement/crime, lifestyle, politics, death, and race/class. Below, I give a brief description of each category. (See Appendix B for examples.)

Economic Impact (115 total) Articles in this category discussed how Hurricane Katrina affected the growth of local and national economies. More specifically, many of the articles detailed Katrina's influence on the oil and agricultural industries. Articles also included stories about Katrina's impact on job losses and creation, tourism, and economic losses from property damage. These articles addressed how much government spending was contributed to Katrina relief efforts, and how that amount compares to other federal financial obligations, such as the Iraq War.

Destruction (50 total) Articles in this category describe the physical and emotional damage caused by Hurricane Katrina. In this group of articles, hurricane victims described their personal stories about their suffering, and what they had lost after Katrina. Other articles detail the loss of culture and tradition in the Gulf Coast Region. A significant amount of these articles described irreversible damage in the Gulf Coast Region and questioned if New Orleans, in particular, would ever recover from such a catastrophic storm.

Reconstruction/Renewal (107 total) Articles in this category all focused on plans and efforts to rebuild damaged areas. Highlights from President Bush's speech on Katrina were emphasized in many of the articles, while in other articles reporters questioned the timeliness and effectiveness of reconstruction efforts, specifically in New Orleans. Articles also included personal accounts of rebirth and revival. Some stories detailed how hurricane victims moved back to damaged homes to rebuild, while others focused on displaced victims beginning a new life in a different geographic location. Articles on the reconstruction of levee and levee repair were also included in this category. Lastly, this section included articles on the reconstructing and reordering of FEMA's organizational structure.

Relief Efforts (100 total) Relief efforts and plans were the general themes throughout this category. However, this category can be broken into mini categories, such as rescue efforts (by land and water), evacuation, counseling services, financial relief (governmental assistance and charity), temporary housing (trailers, shelters, hotels), military force (national guard and navy), timing of relief efforts, and criticism of FEMA and local agencies recovery plans.

Health/Sciences (28 total) The main themes throughout this category involved descriptions of public health risks and crises as a result of sitting floodwaters. Risks included chemical toxin and disease outbreak. A few articles addressed the concern for victims' accessibility to healthcare providers. Also, there were a few articles that discussed the environmental effects to the Gulf Coast, and specifically, how New Orleans was geographically vulnerable to severe damages from category 3 storms.

Law Enforcement/Crime (19 total) In this category, articles mainly discussed the role of law enforcement in the relief and reconstruction efforts. This category was separate from relief and reconstruction because many of the articles detailed specific actions of law enforcement officers

during the initial aftermath of Katrina such as, incidents of police officer's misconduct and mistreatment of prisoners. This section also included articles that addressed looting in damaged areas.

Lifestyle (87 total) This category included stories on the arts and entertainment. In this category, articles discussed the revitalization of sports teams (high school, collegiate, and professional) in damaged areas. It also included a number of articles that addressed Katrina's impact on media and interpersonal communication immediately after the hurricane. More specifically, articles discussed the reliance on online channels of communication, and emotions involved in news reports on Katrina.

Politics (44 total) The articles in this category mainly focused on Katrina's influence on the President's political agenda and local officials' political agendas. More specifically, many articles addressed how President Bush should use Katrina to improve his image and approval ratings. Articles also detailed how disagreements on government spending for Katrina relief prolonged the discussion of particular bills, and ultimately caused a rift in Congress.

Death (29 total) While there was a previous category for the destruction of Hurricane Katrina, I chose to make death a separate category for two main reasons. The number of deaths expected from Katrina continued to change throughout the articles. Also, there were complications on identifying the deceased and reconnecting family members after the storm.

Race/Class (20 total) After doing my initial phase of analysis, race and class were implicit themes in many of the articles. However, in this category, I only included articles that explicitly discussed race and/or class. These articles addressed the difference in language used to report stories from white and black victims. Also, these articles addressed the disappointment and

dismay black political leaders and victims felt towards the response and recovery efforts in specifically, New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward.

Phase 2

Once news releases and articles were loosely categorized, I moved on to the second phase of analysis. In this phase, I focused on the identification of FEMA's crisis response strategies in the remaining news releases. Although news releases were loosely categorized in the first phase of analysis, I conducted my second phase of analysis in chronological order to identify indicators of FEMA's crisis response strategies.

In order to identify which strategies FEMA employed, I used Englehardt, Sallot and Springston's (2004) coding guide in which they tested the effectiveness of Coombs' (1995) accident decision flow chart in the ValuJet airplane crash incident, as a template. In Englehardt et al.'s (2004) study, prototype examples of strategic messages were developed and used as units of analysis to identify ingratiation and mortification response strategies in ValuJet's external messages (e.g. news releases, video conferences, press briefings). The following statement is a prototype example of a strategic message: "We've set up counseling services for friends and family." Englehardt et al. (2004) used this statement as an indicator for mortification strategies. In contrast to Englehardt's study, this research does not identify the prototype examples as units of analysis. Instead, examples are used as conceptual indicators.

Similar to Englehardt et al. (2004), I scanned the first month of news releases to determine if FEMA used distance strategies and mortification response strategies throughout the two-month time period. In this analysis, in accordance with grounded theory and Hall's (1975) postulation that multiple stages of analysis leads to new research questions and patterns, I identified a third crisis response strategy that was frequently used in FEMA's first month of

news releases, ingratiation strategies. Ingratiation strategies work to gain public approval of the organization (Coombs, 1995). These strategies are mostly used when there is minimal organizational responsibility (Coombs, 1995). Therefore, during this scan, I identified prototype strategic message examples for distance, ingratiation and mortification strategies to use as conceptual indicators of response strategies in my close analysis of the strategic messages in the news releases throughout the two-month time period. Below are examples of each prototype example for distance strategies (excuse, denial, justification), and mortification strategies (remediation and rectification):

Distance strategies

- “Many...residents heeded evacuation orders and made the safe choice to leave areas threatened by Hurricane Katrina”- highlights that victims made an unsafe choice to stay behind, which reduces organizational responsibility
- “The only way to register for federal and state disaster assistance is by calling FEMA’s toll-free teleregistration line”-highlights the importance of victims’ active involvement in receiving disaster aid and justifies why there is a delay in response
- “This is a disaster of catastrophic magnitude like none we’ve seen before”-impossible to be fully prepared because of strength of natural disaster
- “We rely on community relations staff to get the word out”-community as scapegoat

Ingratiation

- “FEMA set to hire 500 employees over 5 days to assist with Hurricane Katrina efforts”- Organizational focus on opportunity for new employment in wake of disaster
- “FEMA staff is trained to work around missing information”-organizational focus on trained and well-equipped employees
- “The government has launched an unprecedented relief effort”-organizational focus on relief effort
- “We appreciate the overwhelming out pouring from our nation’s governors”-praising of target public

Mortification

- “FEMA is coordinating a massive mobilization of resources for urban search and rescue efforts, housing, food and medical care”-offering of services
- “FEMA reimburses for public and private removal of debris”-offering of services
- “Free crisis counseling available for victims”-emotional aid
- “Recovery officials urge property owners who are rebuilding...to take steps now to minimize damage in future storms”-information provided on how to rebuild safe homes

These indicators were used to identify the response strategies FEMA conveyed in their external messages two months after Katrina. Each release was labeled a response strategy based on the presence of statements similar to the prototype examples above. This phase of the analysis examined the language FEMA used to convey its crisis response strategies, and the evolution of its crisis response strategies. Below, I describe dominant crisis response strategies, and identify significant turning points in the evolution of crisis response strategies.

FEMA primarily constructed messages using mortification strategies in the form of remediation. Coombs (1995) identified remediation as the act of willingly offering some form of aid and/or compensation to help the victims. With this offering, negative feelings should decrease as an organization offers goods and services to victims (Coombs, 1995). Also, remediation helps the organization gain forgiveness from target publics (Coombs, 1995). Although mortification was the dominant strategy, distance and ingratiation strategies were still used as secondary, and sometimes primary strategies throughout the two-month time period. More specifically, FEMA used bolstering to iterate positive attributes about the organization and praising others to acknowledge recovery efforts from target publics, such as local and state governments in attempt to create common goals. FEMA used excuse strategies to weaken the link between the organization and the damages from Hurricane Katrina.

The first news release was issued on August 29, 2005, the day Katrina made landfall. In this first release, mortification strategies were dominant. The main subject of this release was to communicate that FEMA was prepared for and actively working to ensure victims and residents of disaster areas were safe. The Director of FEMA, Michael Brown, issued this statement, “FEMA, along with our federal partners and state counterparts, is working 24 hours a day to support emergency protective response and recovery efforts in the impacted states.” In this

statement, mortification strategies were dominant, but distance strategies were also used. In the first part of the statement, Brown made it clear that FEMA was not working alone on recovery efforts, which implied that FEMA was not solely responsible for the disaster or relief efforts. Therefore, distance strategies were used in conjunction with mortification strategies to communicate to target publics that FEMA was actively working to ensure safety, and also to remind target publics that FEMA was not solely responsible. There were several other releases issued on August 29, 2005 that primarily used mortification strategies.

On August 30, 2005, one day after Katrina made landfall, the tone of the releases changed, which was in result of the magnitude of destruction in disaster areas. Releases focused on the strength of the storm and new challenges the agency faced. FEMA's releases continued to convey mortification strategies, in providing information on the organization's action plan to aid victims. However, on August 30, 2005, FEMA issued this statement: "Many Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama residents heeded evacuation orders and made the safe choice to leave areas threatened by Hurricane Katrina." This statement was evidence of FEMA distancing itself from Hurricane Katrina, because FEMA reminded target publics that residents in disaster areas had a *choice* to leave. This statement implied that all residents had the option to remain or evacuate disaster areas. FEMA's generalization of residents distanced the organization from Katrina's destruction and immediate relief efforts, while also emphasizing individual responsibility immediately after Hurricane Katrina.

In accordance with FEMA's use of distance strategies, FEMA issued a statement on September 2, 2005 that employed distance strategies as the dominant strategy and mortification strategy as the secondary strategy. It stated:

This is a disaster of catastrophic magnitude like none we've seen before. It has created challenges that we are working around the clock to address and fix. In the

meantime, we continue life-saving and sustaining efforts and directing resources to those with the most urgent needs.

While this message described the strength of the storm, the words, *like none we've seen before*, relieved FEMA from being fully prepared for the disaster's damage. If the organization had never seen a storm like Katrina, there was no plausible way that it could have been adequately prepared with an immediate and swift response plan.

Thus far, news releases had predominantly conveyed FEMA's employment of mortification and distance strategies. However, on September 12, 2005, there was another change in tone of the news releases. On September 12, 2005, Brown, FEMA's director stated, "Today, I resigned as Director of Federal Emergency Management Agency. As I told the President, it is important that I leave now to avoid further distraction from the ongoing mission of FEMA." The use of the word *distraction* alluded to the organization's challenges in hurricane relief. Therefore, the organization's attempt to distance itself from the hurricane and recovery efforts was proved not to be an effective response strategy. The releases FEMA issued after this statement conveyed indicators of mortification and ingratiating strategies. The main subjects of these releases included praising state and local governments for partnerships in relief efforts, and highlighting positive elements of the organization, such as employee training and hiring efforts.

On September 13, 2005, FEMA issued a release that thanked state governors for generous response efforts and welcoming evacuees to their states. Acting Director of FEMA, David Paulison stated:

We appreciate the overwhelming outpouring from our nation's governors who have welcomed those who have lost so much. It has truly been representative of the American spirit, and we appreciate the efforts of those states who prepared further sheltering options had they been needed...

Paulison used ingratiation strategies to acknowledge state hurricane recovery efforts in an effort to strengthen positive attitudes towards FEMA. Paulison's choice of words, *representative of the American spirit*, linked state hurricane relief efforts to acts of patriotism, thus enhancing FEMA's organizational image and creating common interests between the organization and target publics. In this statement, FEMA also praised local officials and emphasized the necessity for community partnerships to ensure efficient response plans in the wake of natural disasters. In the next two weeks of September, FEMA used remediation strategies in providing updated information on FEMA's monetary contributions to hurricane relief and housing assistance for displaced victims. However, on September 26, 2005, FEMA issued a release that recognized the differences in victims needs in different geographic areas. For example, FEMA issued this statement.

Because of the wide swath of destruction, a variety of housing alternatives have been made available to meet the coastal and regional needs of residents as evacuees. We are looking at the unique needs of each region and evacuees from other states and working to meet those needs.

In this statement, FEMA did not generalize hurricane victims. The organization's use of the word, *unique*, provides evidence that the organization recognized that victims will need different accommodations and response action plans. This recognition contrasts FEMA's generalization of victims and their needs in earlier news releases.

FEMA's news releases continued to convey ingratiation and mortification strategies in the month of October. Also, FEMA's messages included some indicators of rectification strategies. On October 1, 2005, FEMA issued a release that highlighted its Public Assistance Infrastructure Program, which gave money to states for infrastructure repairs. This release focused on the amount of money obligated to Mississippi for protective measures, which validated FEMA's focus on disaster prevention plans for severely damaged areas. In addition to

rectification strategies, this release also used bolstering to emphasize the infrastructure program's success. Mississippi Governor Barbour stated, "The \$27 million today brings much needed dollars to Mississippi's infrastructure. We appreciate FEMA's quick response to our Public Assistance (PA) funding requests." In this statement, Governor Barbour praises FEMA for its expedient service and financial contributions, which worked to increase positive attitudes towards FEMA.

New releases in October continued to provide information on availability of free services, such as crisis counseling, and provided updates on FEMA's hurricane relief programs, such as housing assistance, and disaster claims. In the second week of October, ingratiation strategies were conveyed as the dominant response strategy. On October 7, 2005, FEMA issued a news release that announced that displaced Teach for America teachers were to begin working at disaster recovery centers in the Gulf Coast Region. The release stated:

Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco wanted to find a way to keep these teachers in Louisiana, so they will be available in the state when schools reopen. The Governor's office, in coordination with FEMA, worked to create jobs that would allow these teachers to stay in the area during the recovery process.

In the statement above, FEMA's focus was on job creation, and recruitment of teachers for the state of Louisiana. The release explained how teachers would also assist in managing disaster centers. FEMA's emphasis on jobs and teacher recruitment in Louisiana acknowledged the organization's dedication to public education, and shifted target publics' focus from immediate relief efforts towards FEMA's plans for long-term disaster recovery.

In accordance with FEMA's focus on long-term recovery, FEMA issued a release on October 11, 2005 that revealed plans to create a competitive contracting strategy for ongoing recovery work in the Gulf Coast. Acting FEMA Director, David Paulison stated:

The oversight safeguards are in place for those emergency contracts so critically needed when disaster struck, and we will now use competitive strategies everywhere-possible-placing priority on the use of local and small disadvantaged businesses-as we move into the long-term recovery phase.

In this statement, Paulison used transcendence strategies. His focus on creating competition between local and small businesses highlighted FEMA's dedication to community investment and success of local economic structures. Even though Katrina caused severe damages to local businesses, FEMA emphasized how the storm provided a diverse group of companies the opportunity to contract with FEMA in the future. Therefore, Katrina was discussed as a business opportunity, rather than a catastrophic storm and disaster, as in earlier news releases.

In accordance with FEMA's focus on revitalization of local businesses and economic structure, news releases continued to emphasize local and state government support in long-term recovery efforts. Releases also highlighted FEMA's community relations teams and their work with local officials to increase channels of message dissemination, and their plans to better understand the needs of victims in damaged areas. For example on October 17, 2005, FEMA issued a release that stated, "It is because of the effort of FEMA's community relations teams that difficult processes are being made easier and more comfortable for Louisiana's hurricane victims." While this release began with statements on community teams' action plans to work with officials in damaged areas, the statement above conveyed bolstering strategies, which worked to emphasize positive aspects of the organization, rather than the hurricane's destruction. FEMA focused on the success and effectiveness of its community relations program. Similar to the focus in this release, FEMA's releases continued to detail its recovery plans in damaged areas, warned victims of fraud and mismanagement of money practices, and also emphasized the success of its recovery plans and relief efforts.

Near the end of the month, remediation and transcendence strategies were dominant. On October 23, 2005, FEMA announced that President Bush increased relief funds. More specifically, funds for rebuilding damages were increased, and 100 percent reimbursements to local and state agencies were to continue thirty days later. On October 27, 2005, FEMA continued its focus on rebuilding community culture in damaged areas. FEMA announced:

Hiring local residents to help hire with ongoing hurricane-recovery efforts is a win-win situation. Not only does FEMA (insert word) a skilled workforce, but those who have may otherwise been left jobless get back to work while contributing to the long-term recovery of the local economy.

In this statement, FEMA focused on the organization's effort to supply jobs to victims, as well as contribute to local economies. Although FEMA offered services to victims, the main focus of this release was on how hurricane damages afforded new job opportunities and FEMA worked to stabilize local economies. While remediation strategies were present, transcendence strategies were dominant strategies in news releases at the end of October.

FEMA's dominant response strategies were mortification, distance and ingratiation. Initially, FEMA's news releases included indicators of mortification (remediation) and distance strategies (excuse). According to Coombs (1995), acts of nature, like Hurricane Katrina, are usually viewed as unintentional. Therefore, Coombs (1995) prescribed that organizations with positive performance history and minimal responsibility for the crisis, implement mortification and ingratiation strategies for victims and non-victims and excuse strategy for non-victims. In accordance with Coombs' (1995), FEMA did employ mortification strategies and excuse strategies to weaken the link between the organization and the crisis, while also providing services and monetary aid to victims. Excuse strategies antagonized victims, which was evident in FEMA's initial releases that emphasized individual responsibility to evacuate disaster areas, and distanced the organization from serving as the primary response agency. External messages

continued to couple excuse and remediation strategies until the resignation of Michael Brown, FEMA's director.

After Brown's resignation, FEMA's news releases conveyed messages of ingratiation and mortification strategies in an attempt to provide closure to victims, and reassure both non-victims and victims that this crisis would not occur again. While the majority of these releases post-resignation, used remediation strategies, FEMA was simultaneously trying to repair its image. The organization disseminated messages that focused on positive aspects of the organization, and highlighted positive effects of hurricane damages, such as job opportunities and revitalization of local economies.

In the next section, I detail the emergence of Katrina's disaster narrative in the news and identify patterns in the language and tone of news stories. This section will also seek to identify a link between the evolution of crisis response strategies and Katrina's story in the *Times*.

Phase 3

In phase 1 of my analysis, I described the loose categories of *Times* articles, and in phase 2, I identified and analyzed FEMA's strategic messages in FEMA's external news releases. In phase 3 of the analysis, I chronicled the articles and conducted a close reading of the text to find significant quotes and passages. These articles were examined to understand the emergence of Katrina's disaster narrative based on Fisher's definition of narratives and the description of the different stages in disaster news coverage. In the beginning, disaster news coverage detail stories of death and destruction to put the magnitude of the disaster in perspective. In the middle, stories of heroism and survival serve as a call to action, and in the end, reconstruction stories detail how disaster areas will be rebuilt and return to pre-disaster conditions (Stock, 2007).

In this section, I analyze the specific language and constructs within articles to reveal whether the *Times* coverage of Katrina was reflective of a disaster narrative. More specifically, I look for consistencies in characters and conflict, and coherency in themes throughout the narrative.

The first article, posted on August 29, 2005 in the National section of the *Times*, detailed the Hurricane Katrina's threat to the Gulf Coast. Treaster and Goodnough (2005) interviewed New Orleans Mayor Nagin and wrote about how Katrina could potentially destroy New Orleans. The article stated, "Hurricane Katrina could bring 15 inches of rain and a storm surge of twenty feet or higher that would 'most likely topple' the network of levees and canals that normally protect the bowl-shaped city from flooding." This article's prediction of Katrina's strength and capability to cripple the levees in New Orleans is significant because later in the narrative, the *Times* published many stories that stated the national government did not anticipate levee failure.

In addition to the description of Katrina's potential damage to the infrastructures and residents in the Gulf Coast, this article also was first to mention the Katrina's economic impact. It stated, "The approaching storm shut down much of the oil production in the Gulf of Mexico, which is responsible for one quarter of American oil production." The article's mentioning of the Gulf Coast's role in the production of oil was stated in between descriptions of Katrina's risks and threats. Immediately following this quote, the article focuses on the Katrina's threat to the French Quarter. The article included quotes from business owners in the French Quarter and tourists visiting the area. This article's emphasis on the Gulf Coast as a hub for oil production and specific references to the French Quarter's preparation for Katrina provides evidence that high economic value was associated with the region because of its oil production, and more

specifically, with the French Quarter because of its tourism traffic, which largely contributes to New Orleans' economy.

In accordance with the emphasis on oil production, on August 30, 2005, the *Times* posted an article in the Business section titled, "Another Storm Casualty: Oil Prices." The word choice of the title is significant. The use of the words *Another Storm Casualty* to describe oil refineries placed damages on oil refineries on the same level of significance as human deaths caused by Katrina. The content of this article detailed the impact of Katrina on oil refineries, stock investors, and consumers. For example, the article stated, "Halfway through the hurricane season, the storm hit at an especially bad time for consumers, who have seen gasoline prices climb to their highest level in a generation, and adds to worries that oil prices might be hurting the American economy." In this statement, the victims of hurricane Katrina were consumers, not residents of the Gulf Coast. Before personal accounts of residents and families of residents in the Gulf Coast region were prevalent in the *Times*, articles describing national economic impact were conveyed in Katrina's narrative.

Congruent with the economic theme of *Times* articles, the *Times* posted another article in the Business section that detailed Katrina's effects on oil operations in the Gulf Coast. The beginning of the article details the increase on oil barrels and price per gallon. In the middle of the article, this statement was written. "Hurricane Katrina, which made landfall early Monday, left a grim picture in the south, killing at least 70 people, submerging most of New Orleans and devastating communities in Louisiana and Mississippi." Immediately following this statement, the article explained America's reliance on domestic production on the Gulf Coast Region's oil industry. Therefore, in the context of this article, the reference to *grim picture*, described the state of America's national oil industry, not Katrina's devastation in Gulf Coast communities.

Two days after Katrina made landfall in the Gulf Coast, there were stories of damages to the Gulf Coast Region, as well as the lack of resources to adequately respond in the Gulf Coast Region. On August 31, 2005, the first personal account was posted in the *Times*. This article consisted of several different quotes from Bay St. Louis, Mississippi residents. For example, one victim told reporters that her dinnerware survived the storm but her valuables, such as her pictures, art, and collectibles were all gone. Her account ended with a glimmer of hope. She stated, “But we’re still here.” Although this article was the first personal account to describe suffering, it ended with themes of survival and resiliency.

On August 31, 2005, the *Times* posted an article that described displacement of Gulf Coast residents. In this article, Gulf Coast residents shared how they were forced to evacuate and American Red Cross volunteers described how thousands of hurricane victims were in shelters across the South. In this article, two statements stood out. The first sentence of the articles stated, “Hundreds of thousands of evacuees from the New Orleans area are stranded in overcrowded hotels, motels, and makeshift shelters....” The second sentence of the article stated, “As news spread that the devastated, largely emptied and cordoned-off New Orleans area would not be habitable until at least next week, hurricane refugees gathered in hotel lobbies and shelters around television sets....” Both sentences described conditions of Katrina victims. However, in the first sentence victims were labeled *evacuees*, and in the second sentence, victims were labeled *refugees*. This was the first article in the narrative, in which both *evacuees* and *refugees* were used to label Katrina victims.

In articles to follow, damages to the national economy, and inconveniences to tourism were emphasized. On September 1, 2005, the *Times* posted its first story about human death in the national section. The article stated:

Dave Bernzweig saw them as soon as he peered inside the small brick house: two more lost souls, wedged among the soaked ruins of their belongings. He recorded the location of the bodies, between the front door and the flowered couch, then moved across the street, where another victim of Hurricane Katrina lay.

In this statement, Katrina's devastation was conveyed in terms of human death and suffering.

The remainder of the article includes interviews with residents searching for family members, and discovering family deaths. The *Times* also posted the first article on conditions in the Superdome on September 1, 2005 in the National section. The article's vivid descriptions of the Superdome as, "a sweltering and surreal vault, a place of overflowing toilets and no showers," conveyed human suffering in the initial aftermath of the hurricane. In contrast to the narrative's first mentioning of economic damages as *another casualty*, the articles on September 1 described the hurricane's damages in terms of human death and suffering among families and residents in the Gulf Coast Region.

Similar to the first accounts of death and suffering on September 1, the *Times* also posted its first articles on crime in the region after Hurricane Katrina. In the National section, the paper posted an article titled, "Police and Owners Begin to Challenge Looters." This article conveyed chaos in the city as supplies and food ran low in New Orleans. Residents emptied stores, such as Wal-Mart for food, water, shoes, and electronics. Also, this article conveyed that New Orleans residents became law enforcers, as they patrolled the city and protected property and supplies with loaded weapons. The article stated:

Many people with property brought out their own shotguns and sidearms. Many without brought out shopping carts. The two groups have moved warily in and out of each other's paths for the last three days, and the rising danger has kept even some rescue efforts from proceeding.

In addition to the validation of the police force's loss of control in the city, this statement provided evidence that the *Times* portrayed crime as one justification for delayed rescue efforts. This statement came before any criticism or questioning of local, national, and federal response efforts.

On September 2, 2005, the *Times* posted an article in the National section titled, "From Margins of Society to Center of the Tragedy." This was the first article that explicitly discussed issues of race and class during Katrina's initial aftermath. The article quoted several African-American leaders in the New York Region, including Mark Niason, a white professor of African-American studies at Fordham University. He stated:

Is this what the pioneers of the civil rights movement fought to achieve, a society where many black people are as trapped and isolated by their poverty as they were by segregation laws? If Sept. 11 showed the power of a nation united in a response to a devastating attack, Hurricane Katrina reveals the fault lines of a region and a nation, rent by profound social division.

Niason expressed his disappointment and outrage towards response efforts after Katrina. He concluded his statement with the premise that Katrina exposed an inherent trait of America, social division. In articles to follow, class and race were mainly secondary themes in articles. At this point in the narrative, the *Times* began to detail the confusion in response plans between local, national, and federal governmental agencies.

On September 2, 2005, there were several articles posted that interviewed leaders of agencies responsible for relief efforts, such as the American Red Cross, the National Guard, FEMA, Army Corps of Engineers, local police, and the Louisiana mayor. In each article, a different agency was blamed for ineffective response plans. For example, in one article, Lt. Gen. Carl A. Stock, commander of the corps, stated, "It is FEMA who is really calling the shots and setting priorities here." In another article discussing the failures in response plans a FEMA

spokeswoman tells the *Times*, “It would have been up to local officials to hire buses to move people without transportation out of the city.” In both statements, the *Times* conveyed that there were excuses from all parties responsible for hurricane relief.

In accordance with the *Times*’ depiction of uncoordinated response efforts, articles focused on how uncoordinated response efforts impacted hurricane victims and damaged communities. More specifically, the *Times* posted articles that conveyed how television news reports shifted from recording a natural disaster to exposing human failures. The article discussed how hurricane stories usually all end the same, with neighbors helping neighbors, and emergency officials reciting emergency procedures. However, Katrina did not follow this pattern. The article stated, “But after three days, Hurricane Katrina still looked nothing like what Americans are used to seeing...At times, the scenes on television were so woeful they looked as if they could have been filmed in a former Soviet republic or Haiti.” This statement validated how Hurricane Katrina’s story did not fit the mold of past hurricane stories. The article ended with how one television anchor, that was “normally unflappable was not mollified,” stated, “So much is not being done for these people.” During Katrina’s initial aftermath, the American public and news media were equally dismayed at the images on the television screen and photographs in newspapers.

As the narrative continues in the first week of news coverage, the *Times* discussed what political strategies were employed in Washington to improve President Bush’s and Department of Homeland Security’s images. Articles detailed how federal agencies blamed local agencies for mismanagement of relief resources, and lack of communication with federal agencies. For example on September 5, 2005, the *Times* posted an article in the National section on the failures of government officials in Katrina relief efforts. New Orleans Mayor Nagin was interviewed

about the coordination between state and local officials in the first week after Katrina and stated, “We’re still fighting over authority. A bunch of people are the boss. The state and federal government are doing a two-step dance.” This statement contributed to the *Times*’ theme of mismanagement and delay in response efforts. As week one ended, the *Times* posted an article on September 6, 2005 that discussed how criticism of President Bush and federal response agencies led to action. One state senator who was quoted in the article stated, “When they started getting criticized, all of a sudden we got the troops coming, which is what we needed to begin with.” Here, the *Times* conveyed that media’s role in Katrina’s aftermath was to ignite active responses from agencies responsible for rescue and relief efforts.

Although the *Times* posted articles that discussed the lack of coordination and communication between local and federal response agencies, the *Times* also posted articles that called attention to residents who remained in the Gulf Coast region, even after evacuation orders. For example, on September 6, 2005, the *Times* posted an article in the National section that stated President Bush’s visit to the Gulf Coast Region was a means to lessen political damage his administration suffered after the storm. The article stated, “The president’s trip, an effort to calm the region and part of a major White House campaign to stem the political damage from the hurricane, came as rescue teams in New Orleans searched for thousands of residents who remained in the city, many having ignored pleas to evacuate.” In this statement, the *Times* conveyed that many residents did not evacuate the city. More specifically, the use of the word *ignored* implied that residents chose to stay behind, and therefore, increased the number of rescue teams and supplies needed in damaged areas.

In the beginning of the second week after Katrina’s landfall in the Gulf Coast, articles in the *Times* continued to discuss power struggles between local, state, and federal agencies, which

ultimately crippled response efforts in the Gulf Coast region. Articles shifted from stories of suffering to personal accounts of rescue missions, reconstruction efforts, and plans for displaced residents. On September 9, 2005, the *Times* posted an article in the Business section that detailed how many hurricane victims lacked job skills outside of waiting tables and fixing houses. The article went on to discuss how some hurricane victims were hired in the Mississippi school system as staff, which in the context of this article, was appropriate for victims who were, “less educated than the nation as a whole,” and come from, “households [that are] low-income.” The tone of this article was that Katrina exposed the lack of opportunity and education in certain areas of the Gulf Coast region, but again, the article did not address how and/or why hurricane victims were not able to acquire skills necessary for software designers, machine technicians, or business consultants. Also, this article’s emphasis on jobs was consistent with the *Times*’ focus on the national economy.

Articles continued to describe Hurricane Katrina’s destruction in the beginning of the second week. However, on September 10, 2005, the *Times* posted one of its first articles on reconstruction efforts in the Gulf Coast that was not in effort to mitigate political damages. More specifically, this article discussed how New Orleans would generate revenue after the storm. The article interviewed the chief executive of the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau about the revitalization of local businesses in New Orleans. The chief stated, “The French Quarter could prove key to the city’s rebirth; with jobs, there’ll be money to start rebuilding houses and start rebuilding communities.” Stories of reconstruction were conveyed in the beginning of Katrina’s story. Also, the French Quarter was discussed as an integral component in the rebirth of the city, which reiterated the importance of tourism to local and

regional economies. Although this article was mainly about reconstruction efforts, economic themes were also present.

As the second week of news coverage continued, personal accounts from survivors were conveyed in the *Times*. On September 10, 2005, one victim described how the hurricane destroyed his home, but he traveled to hurricane shelters to provide hope for victims through the distribution of food and services, such as job opportunities and entertainment for children. In accordance with the *Times*' focus on personal accounts from storm victims, articles during the second week also detailed the displacement of hurricane victims. On September 11, 2005, the *Times* posted an article that interviewed community leaders in New Mexico. One community leader stated, "This is almost like the exodus of Moses. These people have left everything behind. Their friends and relatives are far way. Most of what they had is gone forever. They feel abandoned by the government, but we are trying to make them feel at home." This statement referenced a biblical story in which people left Egypt to escape slavery and bondage. In contrast to the *exodus of Moses*, Katrina forced displacement, and the use of the words *abandoned by the government* conveyed that there was no guidance or leader (like *Moses*) to provide an organized plan of action.

Stories of displaced hurricane victims persisted in the *Times*' coverage of the storm. As the second week of news coverage after the storm came to an end, the *Times* posted several stories about FEMA's director, Michael Brown, and his lack of initiative in Katrina response efforts.

On September 11, 2005, the *Times* posted an article in the National section titled "FEMA Chief Was Recalled After High-Level Meeting." In this article, the *Times* conveyed how Brown was unaware of conditions in the Gulf Coast after Katrina, which ultimately, delayed response

efforts. Also, this article revealed that the Department of Homeland Security decided to remove Brown from day-to-day management of disaster, but he would still remain director of the agency. The article went on to blame Brown for the federal government's inefficient response plans, and detailed that Brown's removal from Katrina management was welcomed in Washington. The article stated:

Mr. Brown's removal was welcomed by many Republicans, perhaps in hopes that it would enable Mr. Bush's allies to argue that eventually the White House had gotten the message. Senator Trent Lott, Republican of Mississippi, said that Mr. Brown had been acting 'like a private instead of a general' and that FEMA had shown itself to be 'overwhelmed, undermanned and not capable of doing its job'.

While this statement validated the disapproval of Brown's management of hurricane relief, it also blamed Brown for FEMA's ineffective response to Hurricane Katrina. After this article, the *Times* posted several articles that singled out Brown and his actions during hurricane relief efforts.

On September 13, 2005, the *Times* posted an article in the National section that revealed Brown's resignation from his directorship of FEMA. Brown stated:

The press was too focused on what did we do, what didn't we do, the whole blame game. I wanted to take that factor out of the equation, so that the people at FEMA, who are some of the most hardworking, dedicated civil servants I have ever met, could just go do their job.

Brown conveyed that criticism and the press's *blame game* were distractions to the agency's implementation of successful relief efforts. He felt that his removal would reduce criticism of the agency and its efforts. After Brown's resignation was reported, there was a shift in tone and theme of the articles.

Beginning on September 13, 2005, the *Times* posted an article that detailed how several dead bodies remained uncovered and unidentified in New Orleans. The story detailed how one body remained on the street of New Orleans for nearly two weeks after the Hurricane. Based on

the context of this article, the *Times* conveyed that even after the resignation of Brown and hopes of a revitalized relief effort, delays persisted in the retrievals of deceased hurricane victims and cleanup of damaged areas.

On September 15, 2005, the *Times* posted an article that began a thematic trend of reconstruction, renewal, and revitalization. As articles conveyed what reconstruction initiatives were developed, the *Times* also detailed how hurricane victims began to rebuild and revitalize their damaged communities. The article stated:

In the most far-flung hamlets throughout the devastated regions of Mississippi and Louisiana, thousands of residents neither waited for government nor lamented its absence after the hurricane. They put on their boots, pulled out their tarps and chain saws and got busy.

This statement validated resiliency of some hurricane victims, and also highlighted that other hurricane victims were incapable of rebuilding and solely reliant on federal governmental aid.

On September 16, 2005, the *Times* posted an article that reported President Bush's speech in New Orleans, which detailed his plans for reconstruction in the Gulf Coast. The article stated that the President's plan would allow state government's to decide how to rebuild. President Bush stated, "That is our vision of the future, in this city and beyond: We will not just rebuild, we will rebuild higher and better." In this statement, President Bush promised to rebuild damaged areas, but he promised to *rebuild higher and better*. The use of the words *higher* and *better* implied that Katrina afforded damaged cities an opportunity to rebuild, which might not have been an option before Katrina. His choice of language created a more positive spirit and tone about Katrina among victims and non-victims.

Congruent with the *Times*' emphasis on reconstruction, an article was posted on September 16, 2005 in the National section that detailed dilemmas in reconstruction in the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans, Louisiana. The article explained how the LNW was built on

marshlands, and therefore, was always at risk of severe flood damage. The article also interviewed a civil engineer who discussed his perspective on rebuilding the LNW. He stated, “If it was rundown and rickety before the storm, it’s not worth fixing. It’s a replacement.” This statement validated the lack of concrete plans to reconstruct vulnerable communities. The article concluded with a recommendation from a professor of geography at Louisiana State University recommending that the city should not attempt to rebuild in the LNW. Although the article mentioned that some community leaders vowed to rebuild communities in the LNW, it did not address who populated the LNW, or provide prescriptions for where this population would relocate, if the neighborhoods were not rebuilt.

Stories of reconstruction and renewal continued, but issues of race and class were incorporated into articles as well. On September 17, 2005, the *Times* posted an article that described feelings of neglect among middle-class hurricane victims. The article detailed how certain victims thought they received less attention than others because news reports mainly focused on victims who were “most destitute.” The article stated:

...Many of those who had the resources to evacuate New Orleans and other parts of the Gulf Coast say their plight has gone largely unnoticed-that they have been left on their own and are frustrated by what they feel is government neglect.

Although the article emphasized lack of governmental aid to specific populations, this article also highlighted class and entitlement issues among victims. As Katrina’s story continued in the *Times*, articles focused on levee construction, neglect, and failures. Articles detailed how levees were never adequately prepared for a Category 3 storm, and funding was low for levee construction. In these articles, the *Times* often conveyed a blame game between local, state and federal officials. For example, in one article posted on September 21, 2005 in the National section, local and federal officials stated that, “upgrading the flood control system never became

a priority in Washington.” Local and federal officials held Washington accountable for the initiation and implementation of levee repairs, and therefore reduced their levels of responsibility.

In the last two weeks of September, articles about Katrina detailed cultural losses from the storm, such as the dispersal of musicians and Creole/Cajun populations. Articles addressed how Gulf Coast residents, specifically in New Orleans, feared that their cultural traditions and history were lost with the storm. Articles near the end of September also described how many victims were still waiting on federal assistance for housing and job relocation. On September 30, 2005, the *Times* posted an article that described the slow process of the federal government’s temporary housing plans. The article stated that FEMA signed contracts for more than 120,000 trailers and mobile homes, but only 109 families were actually living in the homes. While the article conveyed FEMA’s laggard temporary housing process, the article also provided information as to why trailers were not a good solution. Therefore, the *Times* acknowledged FEMA’s plan, and provided justification as to why federal government should not commit large sums of money on trailers, that have the potential to be problematic. The article also emphasized the necessity for displaced hurricane victims to establish homes and rebuild, which also reinforced personal accountability for reconstruction of lives and communities.

An article posted on October 1, 2005 in the New York Region section told the story of one New Orleans hurricane victim who ended up in Queens, NY. The victim stated, “I’ve been going from city to city so long, but now I got to find myself. I have faith and my faith is strong, but I’m lost.” The victim’s use of the word *lost* represented her physical displacement, as well as her emotional detachment from her home. On October 6, 2005, the *Times* posted an article in the Business section titled, “When Disasters Act as Accelerators of Change.” The article addressed

how President Bush promised he would do whatever it took to rebuild the Gulf Coast. The article revealed that the final cost for hurricane relief was expected to top 100 billion dollars. However, the article conveyed how hurricane victims, such as the displaced New Orleans victim from the previous article would never see those funds. The article stated that, “federal spending is aimed not at ‘rebuilding lives’ but at ‘rebuilding communities.’” The *Times* reinforced government’s focus on the reconstruction of local businesses and economies, rather than efforts to renew spirits and provide emotional and physical stability among hurricane victims.

On October 20, 2005, the *Times* posted an article in the National section that described reconstruction in a different context. Instead of focusing on the reconstruction in the Gulf Coast, this article detailed the reconstruction of FEMA. The article stated:

Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff told House investigators on Wednesday that after a “crash course” in disaster, he was prepared to rebuild [FEMA] so that it would never again prove so inadequate in its response to catastrophes like Hurricane Katrina.

This was the first article in which FEMA recognized its response plan was flawed, and the agency’s problems stemmed from within the organization. Local and regional agencies were not blamed, or mentioned in the article. Therefore, the *Times* conveyed that FEMA finally took responsibility for delayed response plans. However, similar to earlier articles, Mr. Chertoff blamed former director, Michael Brown, for initial failures in FEMA’s response plans.

Similar to FEMA’s recognition of flaws within the organization, an article on October 21, 2005 in the National section revealed how Brown did not act on warnings from local FEMA representatives in New Orleans. The article revealed that one FEMA representative, by chance, was present in New Orleans before Katrina. After Katrina made landfall and conditions worsened in New Orleans, the FEMA representative sent urgent messages to Brown. The article revealed that Brown’s aide responded to those messages and said, “It is very important that time

is allowed for Mr. Brown to eat dinner.” While the article criticized FEMA’s leadership during the crisis, the *Times* contributed to FEMA’s efforts to individualize the crisis. This article culminated how the *Times* conveyed Michael Brown as FEMA’s problem, and the main reason for delayed rescue and relief efforts.

In the last week of October, articles continued to tell stories of displaced victims, and detailed plans to rebuild damaged areas. The cost of reconstruction remained a major theme, as well as how damaged areas would regain its cultural significance. Lastly, the narrative ended with articles that conveyed feelings of despair among hurricane victims, especially in New Orleans, because there was a lack of government aid, and concrete plans on how lives would continue after the storm.

During the beginning of Katrina’s narrative, stories of damages to the national economy and stories that conveyed confusion and loss of control immediately after Katrina were dominant. There were some articles that detailed victims’ suffering, losses, and displacement after the hurricane, as well as difficulty and successes with hurricane rescue missions. However, in majority of the articles, Katrina’s effect on the economy was an implicit theme. Once the *Times* reported Brown’s resignation, the tone of the narrative shifted. After Brown’s resignation, articles about reconstruction and renewal were dominant. Near the end of September, the number of articles posted about Katrina decreased. Articles that were posted after September 30 described the government’s spending patterns for hurricane relief. Articles also conveyed how hurricane victims remained stranded after Katrina, and victims’ skepticism towards the federal government and reconstruction plans.

The intent of this study was to examine the emergence of Katrina’s story in the *Times* and the evolution of FEMA’s crisis response strategies, and ultimately recognize consistent patterns

in both sets of data. I proposed that immediately after Katrina, FEMA used distance strategies to weaken the link between the organization and the crisis. As the *Times* reported accounts of death and suffering from the storm, and criticized FEMA for its delayed response plane, I expected the agency's news releases would convey mortification strategies to rectify the crisis. I also intended to establish a link between the narrative and the evolution of FEMA's crisis response strategies. However, my analyses did not support my research expectations. FEMA's news releases conveyed that the agency's response strategies evolved from distance and mortification to mortification and ingratiation. Also, Katrina's narrative did not emerge in accordance with Stock's (2007) definition of disaster narratives. Although the date of Michael Brown's resignation served as a catalyst for shift in tone for FEMA's external news releases and the *Times* articles, the thematic and conceptual shifts were not in accordance with my research expectations.

In the next section, I interpret my analysis in relation to narrative theory and Coombs' prescription for effective crisis response strategies after a natural disaster. More specifically, I describe the consistencies in patterns of tone and context in FEMA's news releases and concomitant *Times* news articles.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATION

The Times' Story

Both Fisher (1987) and Lule (2002) are in agreement that narratives are best understood when they are told in a logical sequence with a beginning, middle, and end. Within each story, Fisher (1987) stated that there are consistent characters, conflicts, and themes throughout the story. Disaster narratives are told in a specific order that ignites action among publics. In phase 3 of my analysis, I attempted to identify a beginning, middle, and end of Katrina's disaster narrative. However, the thematic ordering of my initial categories was a precursor for the incoherence of Katrina's disaster coverage. Also, in contrast to Fisher's (1987) definition of a good story, the characters and conflict were not consistent throughout the disaster narrative in the two-month time period.

Stock (2007) stated that the beginning of a disaster narrative should include majority stories of death and suffering to convey the magnitude of the disaster. The *Times* posted several articles that described conditions in the Gulf Coast post-Katrina. However, the language used to label hurricane victims and detail relief efforts was inconsistent and illuminative of their assumptions about black and lower class victims. The *Times* frequently used the word *refugee* to describe hurricane victims. A *refugee* is a person who flees to safety, most often to another country. Most Katrina victims were U.S. citizens, and did not flee from another country to seek safety. However, the *Times* used this term throughout the first six weeks of the narrative. The *Times* often used clauses such as *Gulf coast residents that ignored evacuation orders*, to explain

why an abundance of residents needed to be rescued after the storm. Here, the *Times* worked to increase personal responsibility for victims, and weakened the responsibility for hurricane relief on governmental agencies.

Also, stories of survival were conveyed in the beginning of the narrative, which is not in accordance with Stock's (2007) definition of a disaster narrative. These stories conveyed resiliency among hurricane victims, which implied that hurricane victims were capable of rebuilding their lives and communities with minimal governmental assistance. Again, the *Times* emphasized the residents' responsibilities and capabilities to reconstruct damaged property and lives after the storm, which ultimately mitigated the government's role in hurricane relief.

Stock (2007) postulated that the middle of the narrative usually consisted of stories of heroism and survival to ignite action. In contrast to Stock's (2007) prescription, after the *Times* reported the resignation of Michael Brown, news articles focused on reconstruction and renewal only after the first two weeks of the hurricane. In this stage of Katrina's story, recommendations for reconstruction from local and national governments persisted in the news articles. In this time period, articles described the cost of reconstruction, and what strategies were necessary to rebuild damaged areas, and also repair damaged images, such as FEMA, and the Bush administration.

Stories of reconstruction, and concerns about damaged areas dominated in October. Accusations of neglect within local police departments, engineers, and national officials also surfaced. In mid-October, reconstruction stories often were not germane to the Gulf Coast region. Reconstruction narratives mostly consisted of stories that focused on rebuilding the oil industry and plans for energy conservation. Reconstruction narratives also included the stabilization of national economy.

Based on the thematic ordering within *Times* articles, Katrina's story was not conveyed in accordance with Stock's (2007) definition of a disaster narrative. Therefore, there was not a defined beginning, middle, and end of Katrina's disaster narrative. Also, the characters and conflicts shifted throughout the entire narrative. Early in the narrative, the *Times* focused on human death and suffering, there was an emphasis on Katrina's economic impact on the national economy. Therefore, the characters were consumers, stock investors and political officials, and the conflict was Katrina's economic impact. As the story continued, there was a shift in the story. The characters were hurricane victims and the conflict was Michael Brown, which the *Times* conveyed as largely responsible for delays in federal responses. As the narrative ends, economic themes reemerged. At this time, the main characters of the story were local officials, and the conflict was the cost of reconstruction in the Gulf Coast region.

Also, as reconstruction narratives and issues of entitlement emerged, lower class hurricane victims became the conflict, and the main characters were the engineers and middle-class victims. Although, lack of governmental assistance was a reoccurring theme in the narrative, the government's lack of resources was not a consistent conflict, nor was the actual hurricane. There was not a consistent emphasis on hurricane victims throughout Katrina's narrative. Although victims were emphasized within stories, they were considered either conflicts or main characters, often times based on race/and or class. Therefore, while Katrina's story was not in accordance with Stock's (2007) ordering of a disaster narrative, it was also not in accordance with Fisher's (1987) definition of a good narrative.

Grounded theory stated the last level of coding should identify a core category that unifies all smaller or subcategories. As stated earlier, the *Times* posted several articles early in Katrina's narrative about Katrina's impact on national economy. As the story continued,

reconstruction plans were debated because of costs. FEMA's spending on temporary housing was ridiculed in the paper, because of its effect on the national budget. Articles that told stories of displaced victims often conveyed how local economies were affected by the plight of hurricane victims. Even articles that focused on the arts and music of the Gulf Coast region had implicit themes of economic impact, because in some places, entertainment stimulated the local economy. Also, issues of race and class fall under this category.

Although, only a few articles explicitly conveyed issues of race and class during relief efforts, the storm's economic impact on the Gulf Coast exposed inherent racial and socioeconomic divides, specifically in New Orleans. Although *the Times* exposed racial and socioeconomic divides, it did not challenge or explore why these divides persisted in the Gulf Coast. Here, the *Times* did not ask or seek to find answers to critical questions about race and class. More specifically, the *Times* did not critically examine or investigate how race and class was intertwined with how Katrina's story was conveyed in the news, and influential on initial hurricane response strategies.

Crisis Response Evolution

Coombs (1995) stated that damage is a central feature in the implementation of effective and appropriate crisis response strategies. If there are severe damages, publics are more likely to ascribe responsibility to the organization (Coombs, 1995). Therefore, because Katrina caused devastating damage throughout the Gulf Coast, FEMA was ascribed more responsibility. Coombs (1995) stated that mortification, and more specifically, rectification strategies are most effective when there are severe damages. However, as my analysis revealed, FEMA's messages did not use rectification as a dominant response strategy.

Initially, FEMA's external news releases conveyed distance and mortification strategies. During this time period, there were consistencies between conceptual indicators, language, and tone of *Times* articles. While FEMA's news releases used distance strategies to weaken the link between the crisis and the agency, and used specific language that emphasized personal responsibility among hurricane victims, the *Times* articles also used language that called attention to hurricane victims that *chose* to remain even after evacuation orders. Here, the *Times* articles and FEMA's news releases worked to justify delayed response effort and emphasize personal accountability, which ultimately lessened the amount of responsibility on government officials and organizations, like FEMA, for hurricane relief and recovery plans.

Prior to Brown's resignation, FEMA's news releases primarily conveyed remediation strategies. FEMA willingly offered monetary contributions, provided disaster recovery centers, and instructions on registering for disaster assistance to reduce negative feelings about the agency immediately after Katrina. However, after Brown's resignation, FEMA's news releases conveyed ingratiation and mortification strategies.

Coombs (1995) stated that ingratiation strategies are most effective for organizations with positive performance history. Roberts (2006) stated that since FEMA's inception, there have been issues of mismanagement and lack of resources in response to natural disasters. However, FEMA's news releases often conveyed ingratiation strategies as the primary response strategy, which worked to increase positive feelings towards the organization, and emphasize positive aspects of the agency, in spite of delayed hurricane response plans.

Similar to the shift in response strategies in FEMA's external news releases after Brown's resignation, there was also a shift in tone in the *Times* articles. After Brown's resignation, the *Times* seemed to individualize the crisis by singling out Brown's failures as

director, and not challenging the agency's failures. *Times* articles also emphasized resiliency among Gulf Coast residents, and at this point in Katrina's initial aftermath, it seemed that FEMA and the *Times* had the same agenda, restore FEMA's image.

In October, news releases continued to convey ingratiation strategies, but there were a few indicators of rectification strategies. Here, FEMA was in accordance with Coombs'(1995) prescription for crisis management of acts of nature with severe damage. However, it is important to note that FEMA's news releases did not convey rectification strategies as a dominant strategy.

As external news releases conveyed ingratiation and mortification strategies, *Times* articles told stories of reconstruction and rebuilding of Gulf Coast communities. News releases and articles emphasized rebuilding communities, not lives. Economic stabilization in the Gulf Coast was emphasized in releases and articles throughout October. News releases focused more on revitalization of local economic infrastructure than *Times* articles. However, economic stability and contributions remained a dominant theme in the releases and articles.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Instead of establishing a link between news releases and news articles that conveyed a shift in crisis response strategies relative to the emergence of Katrina's narrative, this study identified consistencies in language, tone, and themes within news articles and news releases. More importantly, based on the similar patterns of language and tone in articles and external press releases, this study revealed that after Katrina, the functions of public relations and journalism were extremely similar—both emphasized Katrina's effects on national and local economies, while ignoring inherent social division based on race and class.

Overall FEMA's external news releases and *Times* articles mainly conveyed stories and messages that weakened the link between the government and Katrina, called attention to personal accountability, and individualized the crisis. Themes of economic impact were also dominant in news releases and *Times* articles. Although articles and messages in news releases should have emphasized issues of race and class that are undeniably interconnected to economic impact, this was not the case. Articles and releases detailed Katrina's impact on national economy, and intentionally did not explore historical patterns of unequal opportunity in the Gulf Coast. This validates that discussions on race and class remain taboo in American society, and the *Times*, like American society, is economically driven.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study's findings were not consistent with my expectations, it did raise several questions, areas of concentration, and tips for more effective future research on news

coverage and issued news releases after natural disasters. This study analyzed online *Times* coverage because it was conveniently available on *The New York Times* website. However, because articles were printed from the online site, the specific location of the article in the newspaper was not identified. The newspaper section was identified, but the placement of the article on the page or within the section was not. If this information were available, it would have added another layer of analysis to this study. Placement and location of the articles could have provided access to the paper's prioritization of articles. If newspapers continue to post more articles online, and print versions of papers become obsolete, this could alter the methodological guide for textual analyses of print news articles.

Similar to the lack of information on placement of articles in the newspaper, there was a lack of information on the time of release on news releases from FEMA's press room archives. There were multiple news releases issued each day within the two-month time period, the time of release was not posted. It was assumed that the news releases were posted in the order in which they appeared, but the exact time of release would have contributed to the understanding of the specific order and overall evolution of FEMA's crisis response strategies.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this study contribute to future research on crisis communication, the understanding of narratives in the news, and the intersection of the economy, race and class. Based on FEMA's evolution of crisis response strategies, future research in crisis communication should explore the implications of the use of specific language in organizational external messages. While FEMA attempted to convey that monetary contributions and availability of evacuation centers were in place to aid victims, it did not address rebuilding hurricane victims' lives, or convey empathy for hurricane victims. Although their job was to manage the hurricane relief, a more empathetic tone that identified with hurricane victims could

have reduced criticism of the agency, and worked to regain trust among hurricane victims, and generate positive attitudes toward the agency among non-victims.

Katrina's disaster narrative did not emerge through the traditional archetype. Based on the dominance of themes on Katrina's economic impact and lack of coverage on the intersection of race and class, news reporters must be challenged to ask critical questions.

Future research on Katrina's news coverage should explore how these stories influenced the audience's understanding of Katrina as a natural disaster. This research should specifically explore how non-victims interpreted Katrina's story in print news coverage. Because narratives work to establish mutual understanding through storytelling, what kinds of interpretations did the *Times* elicit immediately after Katrina?

Future research should also explore how hurricane victims along the Gulf Coast interpret Katrina's disaster narrative in news media. Could they identify with the stories in the *Times*? Did victims internalize these stories, and how did it affect their emotional and physical stability after the hurricane? This research will contribute to how stories are told and understood among various audiences. Also, it will contribute to the awareness of the intentionality of the use of specific language and context in narratives, and their implications on the comprehension of the stories told in print news.

“Sometimes I wish they'd ask for my wisdom more often-there are so many things I could tell them; things I wish they would change.”

-Lois Lowry, *The Giver*

As a student with a public relations background, I somewhat expected FEMA's releases to bolster its image and weaken the link between the agency and relief efforts in its external news releases. However, I was disappointed at the use of language and tone of the *Times* articles. The

articles' emphasis on personal accountability, and the individualization of the crisis made me wonder why I ever considered the *New York Times* a liberal paper. While articles detailed the death and destruction after Katrina, Katrina's economic impact dominated *Times* coverage. Maybe the *Times* is the "last great newspaper," because newspapers are supposed to objectively reflect the society in which we live, and in this case, the *Times* articles did reflect the economically driven, individualistic society we live in today.

In August 2005, my cousin became a Katrina evacuee, and in May 2009, my entire family traveled to New Orleans for her graduation from Xavier University. My cousin, who was once heartbroken from her forced relocation to Washington, D.C. graduated from Xavier with honors in four years. At the ceremony, the school projected a short film that showed buildings that were destroyed during Katrina and students telling their stories of evacuation and survival during Katrina. My cousin's graduating class was labeled the "Katrina Class," because these students weathered the storm, and did not give up on New Orleans, or their institution. These students returned to New Orleans in January 2006 and rebuilt their community, and their lives.

Unfortunately, outside of those school walls, it was a different story for many Gulf Coast residents. Four years after Katrina, dilapidated buildings lined the streets in the Lower Ninth Ward. Thousands of Katrina evacuees remained scattered across the country, and unable to return to their Gulf Coast residences. If the newspaper did not ask the critical questions about these victims, who should? Whose job was it to tell their stories? I am not a reporter, and I am not a journalist. However, I am a researcher and activist, and I will tell their stories.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CATEGORIES AND EXAMPLES OF FEMA'S EXTERNAL NEWS RELEASES

Title of Category	# of Releases	Example
Contact Information	23	“A toll-free application telephone number is operational for those who suffered injury or property damage...”
Housing Assistance	44	“After insurance one of the major sources of assistance will come from FEMA’s Individuals and Household Program which provides temporary help in the form of alternative housing...”
Relief Updates	232	“As of early August 29, approximately 52,000 people were in 240 shelters in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and Texas with the majority in the New Orleans Superdome. Strategic housing planning is underway...”/”Michael D. Brown...warned people who suffered damages from Hurricane Katrina to be extremely careful when hiring...”
State of Emergency	46	“...Michael D. Brown, ...announced today that federal disaster aid has been made available to Arkansas to supplement its efforts to assist evacuees struck by Hurricane Katrina.”
Disaster Recovery Centers	88	“State and federal officials have opened a new Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) in Wilkinson County.”

APPENDIX B

CATEGORIES AND EXAMPLES FOR *NEW YORK TIMES* ARTICLES

Title of Category	# of Articles	Example
Economic Impact	115	“The airline industry felt the brunt of Hurricane Katrina yesterday, ... Wall Street feared that the financial problems of the sickest airlines could grown worse.”
Destruction	50	“Residents and officials of this city...could hardly find the words to describe the devastation: roughly 50 people dead...”
Reconstruction	107	“President Bush is to pledge...that the federal government will provide housing assistance to victims...and also help reimburse the states for costs they have absorbed in taking in evacuees...”
Relief	100	“The government is beginning what urban planners are calling one of the biggest bursts of federal housing development in the United States history.”
Health	28	“The officials said they were particularly worried about outbreaks of disease spread through sewage contamination of drinking water, soiled food, insects, and bites from snakes and other animals.”
Law Enforcement/Crime	19	“...looters brazenly ripped open gates and ransacked stores for food, clothing, television sets, computers, jewelry, and guns, often in full view of helpless law-enforcement officials.”
Lifestyle	87	“The cheer...echoed through all ends of the shelter when the Saints beat the Carolina Panthers, 23-20. Hurricane Katrina survivors sprinted up and down a hallway filled with television sets...”
Politics	44	“But the president in contrast, prides himself as a crisis manager...The next few weeks will determine whether he can handle several challenges at once, in the chaos of Iraq and the humanitarian and economic fallout along the Gulf Coast.”
Death	29	“They took nearly two weeks to do it, making their way...to the worn white house at 4724 Laurel St. Mr. Jackson’s body had been laid out on the front-porch bench.”
Race and Class	20	“And though the word “refugee” is offensive to some...it conveys a fundamental truth: these are people who will be unable to return home for months, possibly years.”