THESIS

DISRUPTING THE NATIONAL GAPER’S BLOCK:
AN ANALYSIS OF TIME MAGAZINE’S FRAMING OF HURRICANE KATRINA

Submitted by
Toni-Lee Alice Viney
Department of Communication Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado
Summer 2008
ABSTRACT OF THESIS

DISRUPTING THE NATIONAL GAPER’S BLOCK:

AN ANALYSIS OF TIME MAGAZINE’S FRAMING OF HURRICANE KATRINA

With crises, the media’s initial reaction is often impulsive. When such impulses are disseminated to a world audience, they have enormous implications for those directly affected and those who are conditioned to see a crisis as a simple dramatization. The world becomes the audience when a crisis occurs and the media wields the power to construct the “reality” of an event. News media frames of national crises, then, are significant because they shape public memory of “what happened.” In this thesis I analyze five New Orleans/Katrina cover story issues of Time Magazine, including September 12, 2005, September 19, 2005, October 3, 2005, November 28, 2005, and August 13, 2007.

This study seeks to understand how the news media framed Hurricane Katrina and the implications of that framing. By studying the media coverage of Hurricane Katrina both immediately after the crisis and throughout the following two year span, I can compare news media framing of crisis in its initial form with news media framing of crisis over time. I contend that Time Magazine relied on what I theorize to be a quasi-tragic frame, which ultimately contributed to Katrina fatigue. I determined that the presence of certain frames and absence of others offers a profound explanation into how New Orleans was phased out.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document was by far a team effort even for those who weren’t aware they were on “the team.” I am so grateful to everyone who has guided me along the way. The journey has been incredible and I am honored to have this experience. Thank you to everyone who has helped to disrupt my worldview!

Dr. Brian Ott, without your encouragement and flexibility I would have never completed this project. I appreciate you always taking the time to talk with me and for your genuine concern for my future. The knowledge I have gained from your classes has challenged me to approach texts in a more creative, meaningful way. I feel I have gained the most from graduate school through discussions in your classes and in your office. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with you on this project. Thank you for being a big part of my experience at CSU!

Dr. Eric Aoki, you always had a friendly face and were eager to talk through ideas with me. I appreciate your willingness to chat and your enthusiasm for this project. Thank you for your invaluable support and friendship!

Dr. Lori Peek, your passion for this topic was always reenergizing. Your research on Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans is an inspiration for me to see how research can make an impact on others’ lives. It was a true pleasure working with you!

Thank you Dr. Jody Roy for always being willing to answer my many questions and introducing the possibility of graduate school to me. Your guidance and lectures
have shaped me into a more curious and caring person. I am deeply grateful to have had you as a mentor.

To Alicia Ernest, Tara Hargrove, and Allison Burr-Miller, my study buddies. Allison, you always had wonderful ideas that helped me to better organize my thoughts. Thank you for your support and unending confidence in me. Tara, it has been great getting to know you and your family. I have really appreciated your friendship through this process. Alicia, thank you for not taking me seriously and always offering your help. Mostly thank you for helping me to enjoy graduate school. I appreciate you holding me accountable. I absolutely couldn’t have made it through without you!

My family, thank you for always being there for me. I never imagined I would attend graduate school and you all gave me the confidence to succeed. The pack (Mom, Grandma, Tante, Cindy), you all have been so great in keeping my spirits high. I have enjoyed our many road trips and found that holding onto those memories and looking forward to those moments were vital to keeping me happy. Mom, you were so influential in pushing me to exceed expectations. Thank you for always listening to me talk endlessly about theory and New Orleans-Katrina. Especially thank you for always encouraging me to do my best and keep on keeping on. Dan, you were always there for me during the stress. The graduate school schedule is not always easy to keep up with when you work full time. Thanks for staying up late, waiting for me to eat dinner, always understanding, and for loving me!

THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!!!
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction
- Introduction .................................................................................. 1
- Review of Literature ..................................................................... 5
- Defining Crisis ............................................................................. 6
- News as Ritual: Popular Conventions ........................................... 7
- Visual Rhetoric ............................................................................ 12
- Hurricane Katrina .......................................................................... 14
- Symbolic Framing ........................................................................ 19
- Methodology ................................................................................. 23
- Overview of Chapters ................................................................... 24

Chapter 2: The Quasi-Tragic Frame: Initial *Time* Magazine Framing of Hurricane Katrina
- Prominent Frames ......................................................................... 27
- Failure ......................................................................................... 28
- Strategy ....................................................................................... 30
- Chaos .......................................................................................... 32
- Control Meets Chaos .................................................................... 35
- Death and Rebirth ........................................................................ 44
- Support in Desperate Times ......................................................... 48
- Characterizing the Quasi-Tragic ................................................... 53

Chapter 3: *Time* Magazine’s “Heroic” Return: “New Orleans Fatigue” and What the Frames of the Final Three *Time* Covers Say About Crisis Rhetoric
- October 3, 2005: Katrina’s Frame .................................................. 58
- Katrina: Offering Creative Support .............................................. 59
- Rita: The Successful Disaster ......................................................... 61
- November 28, 2005: A Liminal New Orleans .............................. 64
- Liminality .................................................................................... 64
Shame..................................................................................67
Failure..................................................................................70
Determined Struggle.............................................................72
Support..................................................................................75
August 13, 2007: Doom and Shame.....................................77
Imminent Doom....................................................................78
Shame..................................................................................81
Compassion (Media as the Savior).......................................84
Failure..................................................................................86
Pulling It All Together..........................................................91

Chapter 4: Conclusion
The Sublime.........................................................................96
Apocalyptic Spectacle..........................................................99
Framing Katrina.....................................................................101
Reflections............................................................................106
Limitations...........................................................................108
Future Directions...................................................................109

References...........................................................................111

Notes....................................................................................122
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

At the time, flipping through the pages of a news magazine was depressing. Words like *tragedy, failure, fiasco, devastation, catastrophe, shame, nightmare, anguish, despair, dangers, disgrace,* and *deadly* littered the pages of *Time* Magazine. These terms would come to play a central role in the media framing of Hurricane Katrina, which had struck the Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005. Even after the storm was over, the ‘crisis’ of Hurricane Katrina would remain in the news for weeks, months, and even years.

In the United States, the news media deliver a steady diet of crises, scandals, and fear. During these moments, I get butterflies—the good kind. At the risk of sounding callous, crises thrill me. I recognize that this is a privileged stance, as I am not the one in the midst of civil war, genocide, or a hurricane and flood. The drama of a “good” crisis generates an amazing and unexplainable feeling within me. The experience of watching a mediated crisis is similar to participating in a gaper’s block, a term used to describe a phenomenon that often occurs after an accident on a highway. During such events, drivers frequently slow down or stop to stare at the scene, causing a significant, but momentary, traffic jam even though the accident may not be occluding traffic. This analogy references that passersby (or readers of *Time*) take pleasure in the spectacle for a
brief moment and then spend the remainder of their day trying to forget about the tragic incident.

Hurricane Katrina became a national gaper’s block. The nation stopped to stare at the spectacle for a few weeks and then spent the next two years trying to forget about the tragedy. In some ways, I feel ashamed for participating in a national gaper’s block, but as an underlying argument throughout this work, I believe the media takes advantage of society’s love for drama and spectacle. This is not to say that I am not at fault for my love of crises, but instead that media framing of them contributes to this problematic reaction. But I have gotten ahead of myself. The problematization of my love for crises and the media’s manipulation of that love are a matter for the conclusion.

For now, let us return to September 2006, one year following Katrina. No longer did we see so many “devil terms”\(^1\) describing the hurricane. Instead, the mediated frame depicted a world where life was looking up – it had to if U.S. Americans were going to feel confident in their country once again. Certainly, there were still messages of failure, but for the most part, the nation had persevered. Words like *misconceptions, hopes, optimistic, change, heal,* and *copes* appeared on the airwaves and pages of a variety of mediums. The U.S. honored, remembered, reflected on the catastrophe, and moved on. The mediated frame presented a new image of Katrina, this time bringing closure to a nation formerly fraught with tragedy.

While Hurricane Katrina affected a significant portion of the Gulf Coast region of the United States, I have chosen to focus my attention on the media coverage of New Orleans partly because the media spotlighted this region, and partly because New Orleans engenders unique cultural issues surrounding race, class, and gender. Furthermore,
before the storm New Orleans was a popular tourist attraction with an exotic national profile. Many cities along the Gulf region of the United States were damaged considerably by the Category 4 hurricane, which struck land with winds up to 140 miles per hour (Knauer, 2005, p. 3). However, New Orleans endured a second blow when their levee system, which protected the city from the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain, failed, leaving much of the city under water. As a result, eighty percent of the city was flooded, evicting 1.3 million people from their homes, while the rancid stench of gasoline, sludge, sewage and decaying bodies grew (p. 7). Many officials acknowledged the disaster as one of the worst in United States history. Jan Egeland, the United Nations’ Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, described the situation as “one of the most destructive natural disasters ever measured in the amount of homes destroyed, people affected, [and] people displaced” (quoted in Seper, 2005, p. A01).

Many people, some by choice, most by circumstance, remained in the city during the storm and the days immediately following. Officials estimated that of 500,000 citizens, twenty percent did not leave the city before Hurricane Katrina hit and afterwards were consequently trapped without many essentials, including power, food and drinking water (Knauer, 2005, p. 8). For those who remained in the city, crime and disease quickly became more problematic than the floodwaters (at least according to media reports). In the weeks that followed, the government led a questionable emergency response effort, prompting the media to interrogate whether enough was being done to aid those displaced by the storm.
The crisis was not simply a one day event that continued to be talked about in the media, but rather a yearlong (and more) affair. Because this affair began as a natural disaster and later raised concerns about societal issues, governmental responsibilities, and structural matters, it provides a unique case for analyzing news media framing. With crises, the media’s initial reaction is often impulsive. When such impulses are disseminated to a world audience, they have enormous implications for those directly affected and those who are conditioned, like myself, to see a crisis as a simple dramatization. Studying media framing of crises is useful because the media wields the power to construct the “reality” of an event. The world becomes the audience when a crisis occurs. News media frames of national crises, then, are significant because they shape public memory of “what happened.”

My purpose in this study is to understand how *Time* Magazine framed Hurricane Katrina and the implications of that framing. Toward that end, I analyze *Time*’s five cover stories which provide insight into what readers confronted as most significant stories. Through their cover stories *Time* communicates which news story is the most important in a given week. Cover stories direct readers’ attention toward the one thing they need to know to stay informed. With this in mind, I propose the following three research questions:

Q1: What was *Time* Magazine’s framing of Hurricane Katrina in the two cover story issues immediately following the storm (September 12, 2005, September 19, 2005)?

Q2: What was *Time* Magazine’s framing of Hurricane Katrina in the remaining three cover story issues (October 3, 2005, November 28, 2005, August 13, 2007)?
Q3: What are the implications of *Time* Magazine’s framing of Hurricane Katrina during the aforementioned periods?

In addressing these three questions, I aim to contribute to existing communication scholarship by illuminating the way the media reports crises. I contend that *Time* Magazine relied on what I theorize to be a quasi-tragic frame, which ultimately contributed to Katrina fatigue. With lives at stake, it is necessary to teach others to be critical observers of how the media is shaping “reality,” particularly at times of crisis. A mediated “reality” affects how citizens respond to a crisis and when they deem the crisis is over. This study will provide a foundation for future research to explore news media framing of crises. By studying the media coverage of Hurricane Katrina both immediately after the crisis and throughout the following two year span, I can compare news media framing of crisis in its initial form with news media framing of crisis over time. These factors tell us a lot about how public communication creates a sense of purpose and fosters a sense of closure. While there has already been much written by scholars on the subject of Hurricane Katrina, my purpose goes beyond the current research to understand more about the intricacies of what this crisis tells us about the construction of realities through public communication.

**Review of Literature**

I have engaged the principal scholarly literatures that relate to the concerns of this paper. I have organized this section into five main parts that highlight ongoing themes within the literature: defining crisis, news as ritual, Hurricane Katrina, symbolic framing, and visual rhetoric. In each section, I have reviewed the key essays that most directly bear on my research questions.
Defining Crisis

The first step in defining “crisis” is to distinguish it from “disasters” since the terms _crisis_ and _disaster_ are often misused. Fritz (1961) states, “A disaster is defined as a basic disruption of the social context within which individuals and groups function, or a radical departure from the pattern of normal expectations” (p. 655). An event is not a disaster unless it disrupts the central functioning mechanisms of a society. Fritz explains that “this definition centers on large-scale systems and on matters of _biological survival_ (subsistence, shelter, health); _order_ (division of labor, authority patterns, cultural norms, social roles); _meaning_ (values, shared definitions of reality, communication mechanisms); and _motivation_ within those systems” (pp. 655-656). These characteristics form Fritz’s definition of a disaster.

A crisis, on the other hand, is an experience of trauma which necessitates decisive change. Fishman (1999) outlines five characteristics of crisis. The first characteristic of a crisis is that “an unpredictable event occurs” (p. 347). Even though technology exists to provide a warning for a hurricane, for instance, “the scope or severity of their impact remains completely unpredictable” (p. 347). The second characteristic centers in on values. Fishman explains, “Important values for an individual or institution must be threatened in order for a crisis communication situation to exist” (p. 347). In the case of Hurricane Katrina, the public called societal values regarding class and race into question when these issues surfaced through the media. This issue raises a third characteristic: “the ‘intention’ of an actor or an organization plays a minor, if negligible role in analyzing a crisis communication situation” (p. 348). This characteristic focuses in on questions of what responsible agents should have done to prevent the severity of the
crisis. It also begins to place blame on those considered responsible for the crisis. In the case of Hurricane Katrina, the focus was on governmental actors. The fourth characteristic concerns the issue of time. Fishman states, “A crisis communication occurrence represents a time-sensitive situation” (p. 348). In essence, crises require an immediate response. The fifth, and final, characteristic that Fishman coins is:

A crisis communication situation involves a dynamic or multi-dimensional set of relationships with a rapidly-changing environment. Effective communication is essential to maintaining a positive relationship with key stakeholders such as employees, customers, suppliers, and shareholders. (p. 348)

These characteristics constitute the basic definition of crisis. In sum, a crisis is similar to a disaster in its focus on meaning and values. Both impact society through their affect on social values. However, a crisis differs from a disaster in its heightened level of unpredictability and focus on necessitating an immediate response. The events surrounding Hurricane Katrina clearly fit into this definition of a crisis.

*News as Ritual: Popular Conventions*

As Bennett (1988) poignantly stated, “There is no political reality apart from news reality” (p. 73). To put it simply, the news matters, and, thus, the conventions directing news organizations are significant in affecting the world’s “reality.” This section offers a systematic review of the literature relating to the news as ritual in an effort to establish a basis for approaching the text of the media as a ritual. Couldry (2003) defines media rituals as “formalized actions organized around key media-related categories and boundaries, whose performance frames, or suggests a connection with,
wider media-related values” (p. 29). He points out that what makes something a media ritual is the formal processes functioning in a given situation (p. 29).

The ritualistic tendencies of the media position these organizations as maintaining a central role in society. Riegert and Olsson (2007) explain, “The media’s role has to do with the maintenance of society through time, representing shared beliefs, understandings, and emotions, whether in celebration or in mourning” (p. 144). The media’s presence at the center of society impacts the way in which the public interprets events. Reigert and Olsson contend, the media serve a “ritual function of bringing people and institutions together in a common space and place, a common ‘here and now’” (p. 145). The authors take the ritual function one step further, to demonstrate that media rituals “reinforce and legitimize the status of media institutions as being at the centre of society” (p. 146). How, then, does a spontaneous event like a crisis fit into the ritualistic tendencies of the media?

It would seem that the news media follow a stable cycle until a crisis occurs. At that moment the news media’s ritual appears interrupted. Riegert and Olsson (2007) name these moments, “disaster marathons,” in which the standard schedule is interrupted by an unplanned event (p. 146). While these stories part from normal media routines, “instead of being viewed as a transgression of journalistic norms, their engagement with the event reinforces the legitimacy of journalists as central actors in the mediation of truth” (p. 147). Generally, “the crisis is presented in short narratives and in visual modes that preempt lengthy, reasoned discussions of what has happened and why, and of what the authorities’ options are in responding” (Brummett, 1991, p. 4). Crises remind the public of the media’s importance in dictating public reality. These events reinforce
journalistic rules and position the media as the central authority in healing society’s wounds.

Coman (2005) expands on this notion of the reinforcement of the media’s authority through ritualizing:

Ritualization is one of the most powerful instruments for promoting journalistic authority. In fact, it gives journalists the opportunity to exert total control over the process of variant reality construction and, through it, to acquire the legitimacy inherent to this position.” (p. 51)

Through ritual, journalists firmly establish their position as determining “reality” (p. 51). They solidify their place at the center of society through taking on the role of an omniscient force delineating life events. Journalists determine what is newsworthy and, thus, affect whether the public should award attention to events. Through the ritual of crisis news reporting, journalists break the everyday routine and turn viewers’ attention toward a new one, that of crisis journalism.

Crises necessitate that journalists, more than ever, justify their existence. McManus (1994) affirms that news is a competition (p. 26). During a crisis, journalists position themselves in the midst of intensified competition, rushing to beat deadlines and report on extreme situations. Journalists are working within a framework which McManus defines as “market-driven journalism.” In other words the public acts as a customer, the news itself as a product, and the circulation as a market (p. 1). This fundamental shift in journalism as market-driven reaffirms the importance of meeting ritual expectations, including when the ritual involves a crisis.
Ritual also manifests within daily actions of journalists. Bennett (1988) elaborates on this scenario, “It is increasingly clear that the everyday work routines of the media bias the news in favor of official views without really intending to do so” (p. 105). Bennett refers specifically to daily work routines impacting the normalization, dramatization, and fragmentation of the news (p. 105). The news routinely “magnifies all the factors affecting the acceptance of normalized political messages” (p. 81). Bennett identifies three factors beginning with the news’ tendency to “emphasiz[e] style over content,” which effectually “exaggerates the drama and distinctiveness of old messages” (p. 81). Secondly, he explains that “by reporting dramatized and stylized political performances as though they represented the real motives and issues at stake in political situations, the news promotes the acceptance of often distorted symbolic versions of events” (p. 81). These distortions influence the public to react to events in strange ways – often not taking events as seriously as the situation might generally compel. Finally, Bennett maintains that “by implicitly endorsing official views and closing off the presentation of alternative information, the news enhances the psychological appeal of official meaning while undermining the appeal of alternative perspectives” (p. 81). This third factor values (and often contributes to) an uncritical audience.

The ritualistic tendencies contribute to a society that values the direct dissemination of information, without question. Bennett (1988) elaborates on this effect: Since people are creatures that seek meaning in their lives, the domination of political communication by a narrow range of political meaning encourages many people to accept official messages rather than settle for the doubt, anxiety, and
social disapproval associated with the search for meaning outside mainstream channels of information. (p. 80)

Fighting the status quo is taxing. It is simply easier to accept things the way they are and become an apathetic auditor. The conventions that lead to the creation of news praise this response. In many situations “the frequent absence of feedback or commentary in the news can make the ridiculous appear to be acceptable, if not sublime” (p. 81). Bennett’s statement becomes clear in the context of Katrina where Time’s coverage included articles that took the form of what appeared to be feedback or commentary.

Bennett (1988) is quite critical of the consequences of these conventions with political action. He remarks:

“The political world becomes a caricature drawn out of unrealistic stereotypes, predictable political postures, and superficial images. The same unworkable solutions are recycled in melodramatic efforts to ‘solve’ chronic problems. People come to accept the existence of problems like poverty, crime, delinquency, war, and political apathy as facts of life rather than as the tragic results of the concentration of political power, the exploitative nature of economic relations, and the cynical uses of political communication.” (p. 96)

These consequences are precisely what I hope to delve into with this project, potentially uncovering the frames that support the conventional structure of the news. Bennett’s statement draws attention to the significance of analyzing this structure and its conventions. Because “reality” of most crises can only exist to the majority of the public through the media, news conventions wield great power in political responses. Bennett remarks, “To some extent the poverty of political representation is disguised by the
distance of political events from people’s lives, combined with the intimacy and immediacy with which those events are represented by symbols in the news” (p. 80). In analyzing the frames employed to form news stories in Time, I anticipate breaking down the disguise, if ever so slightly, because a disruption would directly impact society in a meaningful way. After all, a disruption causes people to stop and question what they consider to be “normal.”

Visual Rhetoric

In addition to news conventions, visual elements generate a large influence on the overall message of the news. “Any text will hail an audience, but one source of a photograph’s power is that its lines of interpellation can be a direct imitation of face-to-face interaction” (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007, p. 142). Time Magazine, as well as most mass media outlets, relies heavily on visual images to disseminate information, likely because it does resemble a face-to-face interaction. Indeed, visual components are often more influential than words. Messaris and Abraham (2001) argue this point:

Viewers may be less aware of the process of framing when it occurs visually than when it takes place through words. Consequently, visual images may have the capacity of conveying messages that would meet with greater resistance if put in words, but which are received more readily in visual form. (p. 225)

For instance, only presenting images of White men rescuing Blacks and women is likely not going to incite anger with most of Time’s readers; whereas stating what the image implied – that most Blacks and women were helpless, while most White men were heroic – probably would render some critical reactions. Visual rhetoric garners even more influence when the media calls certain images “news.”
Within the news media, images have profound political consequences because in calling an image “news,” it is sanctioned as official, objective “reality.” Bennett (1988) explains, “The salience, credibility, and image effects of political symbols depend on how those symbols are reported as news” (p. 83). In reporting crises, images that further the notion that White men are heroes and Blacks and women are helpless, for example, become sanctioned reality. Shaping “reality” after a crisis—or after a loss of control—requires a thorough review of what images to sanction. “Whatever the reason for loss of control, the political imperative is to once again contain reality behind a screen of politically advantageous images” (p. 88). Those images tend to rely on old narrative structures that often emphasize social stereotypes.

Aside from presenting advantageous images, “the [remaining] goals of image making are fairly straightforward: Select a theme or message to spark the imagination; make sure that the chosen message dominates communication about the matter at hand; and surround the message with the trappings of credibility” (Bennett, 1988, p. 78). These basic journalistic principles concerning images help regain political control over how an event is perceived and, thus, how people react to a situation. At the center of image making, the media must maintain credibility. The habitual way of maintaining credibility is through relying on old narratives, sustaining narrative fidelity for readers through recognizable themes and gestures from past events.

Ultimately, “the press photograph is a message. Considered overall this message is formed by a source of emission, a channel of transmission and a point of reception” (Barthes, 1977, p. 15). Image making is an intensely politicized process even though the image would suggest otherwise. Barthes maintains that “the photograph can in some
sense elude history (despite the evolution of the techniques and ambitions of the photographic art) and represent a ‘flat’ anthropological fact (p. 45). Instead, images are highly subjective and “practices of looking are intimately tied to ideology” (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 21). Their characteristic of having an ideological nature necessitates that images are also culture bound.

As a cultural creation, images are often utilized to praise cultural values. Michael Griffin (1999) explains that images are “celebrated on a more abstract plane as broader symbols of national valor, human courage, inconceivable inhumanity, or senseless loss” (p. 131). People are easily able to identify with these values through the emotions captured through the image. Hariman and Lucaites (2007) note the emotional act of images: “The photo’s combination of emotional display and visual interpellation creates a strong sense of moral crisis, a point at which the audience must decide where it stands” (p. 143). The intensity of emotion within images adds rhetorical richness to texts, resulting in added power within the overall meaning of a text.

Hurricane Katrina

Hurricane Katrina provided researchers across the academy with numerous questions and issues to address, some of which added to understanding news rituals. From economic and political to sociological and rhetorical, the options for research were numerous. A significant portion of the literature focused on inequalities, often criticizing society, government, and media. Through my review of the literature, I have chosen to focus on several prominent themes. These themes address media constructions around issues of race, class, and gender.
Researchers agree that the media greatly influenced the public’s assumptions relating to Hurricane Katrina (Gawronski et. al., 2006; Kasinitz, 2006; Littlefield & Quenette, 2007; Sommers et. al., 2006; Tierney et. al., 2006; Young, 2006, Hilton-Morrow, 2006). Because of the sheer volume of mediated information throughout the weeks following Hurricane Katrina, research often focuses on one medium. Dynes and Rodriguez (2006), for instance, were primarily interested in television. They pointed out that “for most of us, the reality of the storm came through TV networks” (p. 2). The authors explained the central role of television in the Katrina disaster, stating, “television constructed the frame of meaning to which audiences and decision-makers came to understand Katrina” (p. 2). Within the context of television, they discovered several framing themes, which they identified as “finding damage, finding death, finding help, finding authority and finding the bad guys” (p. 3). From these themes, the authors criticized the media for irresponsibly covering “rumors and inaccurate assumptions” (p. 9). My research will expand upon these conclusions, looking beyond the immediate coverage to the way a mediated “reality” of Hurricane Katrina was (re)framed by the media over time.

Adopting a different focus than Dynes and Rodriguez, Gawronski, Olson, and Carvalho (2006) illustrated how print media, specifically newspapers, constructed Hurricane Katrina as a disaster. They demonstrated that stand alone natural occurrences are not really disasters because those “earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, flooding, or even wildfires must interact with social systems and human vulnerability to become ‘disasters’” (p. 444). This point reinforces the significance of the news media’s framing of crises. After examining a variety of newspapers from diverse
regions of the world, their findings highlighted what they referred to as a “postdisaster rule” (p. 454). In outlining this rule, they explained “the farther a media outlet is from the arena where mitigation and land use decisions are made, the more willing it is to question dominant growth models and raise fundamental wisdom failure questions” (p. 454). Gawronski et. al. also found the opposite to be true. This finding is important to my research because it introduces some advantages about choosing the most popular national magazines to analyze. As a national magazine, *Time* is the most willing of national media to produce “wisdom failure questions” (p. 454). With this rule in mind, my research will not only be able to confirm or contest this finding, it will also be able to assess whether the magazines become less or more critical as coverage of a crisis develops.

In a similar study of the news media’s impact on perceptions of the crisis, Littlefield and Quenette (2007) selected 52 articles from the *New York Times* and the *Times-Picayune* to analyze how the media framed the response effort. One of their conclusions, which speaks directly to my concerns, is “that the media implicitly have the ability to create a view of reality reflecting their perspective” (p. 43). In addition, they found that the media played a central role in how the public critiqued the management of the response to the crisis (p. 42). These conclusions indicate the influential power of mediated discourses. Littlefield and Quenette’s findings, as well as the findings of other scholars cited here, support the assumption that the news media shaped the way the public viewed the crisis. The purpose of my research is to go beyond these observations and determine how the news media framed the crisis.
In particular, the news media shaped the public’s understanding of race, class, and gender. Many scholars have been critical of stereotypical representations of individuals affected by Hurricane Katrina and have demonstrated the presence of racism, sexism, and classism before and after the storm (Adams et. al., 2006; Allen, 2007; Belle, 2006; Bobo, 2006; Breunlin & Regis, 2006; Cole, 2005; Gault et. al., 2005; Williams, 2006; Ransby, 2006; Austin & Miles, 2006).

Austin and Miles (2006) distinguished two conflicting realities concerning race. They concluded that for Whites, race was not an important component of the crisis. After conducting interviews with both Blacks and Whites, they found that “with only one exception, white respondents believed that race had nothing to do with the failures of the rescue, recovery, and relief efforts” (p. 165). Austin and Miles also noted, “The lone white dissenter is married to a black woman” (p. 165). While the purpose of their study did not concern the media, the subjects interviewed developed their perceptions of race through the media.

These findings are similar to Adams, O’Brien and Nelson’s (2006) conclusions in their study of the differences in racial perceptions of Hurricane Katrina. Through their research, the authors found “people identified with historically oppressed groups are more likely than people identified with dominant groups to perceive racism in everyday, North American society” (p. 218). I highlight both the findings from Austin and Miles and Adams et. al. because the messages produced by a predominantly White media are problematic, especially, in the case of Hurricane Katrina, since those messages are about predominantly Black victims. The concerns of these authors foreshadow some of my
own concerns about mediated framing of crises, broadly, and Hurricane Katrina, specifically. Through my research, I will continue probing these concerns.

In addition to research on race, the subject of economic inequality has also been undertaken by a number of academics. Young’s (2006) research showed that “the image of the low-income African Americans left in New Orleans in the days immediately after the landfall of Hurricane Katrina was that of an underclass gone wild” (p. 207). Young urged scholars to assess “the extent to which Americans frame different understandings and interpretations of the Black American urban poor” (p. 211). Since most of the United States’ population did not experience the hurricane firsthand, I propose to look at media framing to begin to piece together a response to Young’s call for study. Indeed, through the media, we can start to see how reality is constructed for the public.

A final, although less frequently discussed, issue is the subject of gender as it relates to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Ransby (2006) wrote about the experiences of Black women who faced Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. Ransby was concerned that voices, specifically Black women’s voices, were not being heard. She explained, “what does not often get added is that by most accounts those hardest hit and least able to rebound from it were also women: poor Black women” (pp. 215-216). To combat the lack of recognition of this group of people, Ransby praised the efforts of others to document these experiences through first-hand interviews. While my research does not seek to document experiences in such a direct manner, it will contribute to our understanding of gender in the news media coverage of Hurricane Katrina.
Symbolic Framing

The framing of the news greatly “shapes the priorities Americans attach to various national problems and the standards they apply to the performance of their government and the qualifications of their leaders” (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987, p. 119). After events like Hurricane Katrina the news becomes the mechanism for framing the situation as a crisis. Thus, the frames selected to describe an event contribute to the power of news which “appears to rest not on persuasion but on commanding the public’s attention (agenda-setting) and defining criteria underlying the public’s judgments (priming)” (p. 117).

Ultimately, framing influences citizens’ reactions to events described through the news media. For auditors, these frames are significant in “altering the criteria used to evaluate politicians and shaping assessments of governmental effectiveness and responsiveness” (Shah et. al., 2001, p. 227). Because framing influences “the issue interpretations and electoral decision-making strategies of citizens” (p. 239) it can provide a valuable lens for viewing how the news functions as a persuasive vehicle. It offers a glimpse into the heart of how the news functions.

I have selected three key figures, including Kenneth Burke (1959), Erving Goffman (1974), and Norman Fairclough (1995), to demonstrate the concept of frame analysis. Dramaturgical critic, Kenneth Burke, wrote frequently about the concept of framing. He applied common notions of act, scene, agent, agency and purpose to communication, theorizing the tragic and comic frames. The media employs these frames regularly, especially when addressing matters of crisis. Burke speaks directly to crisis communication by reaffirming that “conflicts are bridged symbolically” (p. 28). In
other words, media frames offer symbolic categories (or terministic screens) through which people view the world.

Burke (1959) identified two common frames: the comic and tragic. Within the comic frame, rhetors are self-reflexive and social problems are depicted as part of the human condition, rather than specific to an individual. Burke describes this frame as ambivalent, explaining:

It is neither wholly euphemistic, nor wholly debunking—hence it provides the charitable attitude towards people that is required for purposes of persuasion and cooperation, but at the same time maintains our shrewdness concerning the simplicities of “cashing in.” (p. 167)

This ambivalence strikes a balance between acting in the world and always questioning the motives and outcomes of our actions. In essence, the comic frame allows “people to be observers of themselves, while acting” (p. 171). Burke fondly refers to this notion of being self-reflexive as “maximum consciousness” (p. 171).

On the other hand, the tragic frame does not encourage a self-reflexive outlook. Most political speech and news commentary is tragic in nature even though the tragic frame lends itself to reaffirming the status quo. In their research of news coverage of the Matthew Shepard murder, Ott and Aoki (2002) warned that the tragic frame “aggressively perpetuates the status quo” (p. 496), while the comic frame stresses “humility (the recognition that we are all sometimes wrong) over humiliation (the desire to victimize others)” (p. 497). Within the tragic frame, scapegoating and victimization frequently occur. Rhetors who communicate tragically do not acknowledge that social problems are part of the human condition. Instead, social problems are attributed
(through the scapegoating process) to individuals (who are quickly dubbed as an “Other”). In the tragic frame, the status quo is reaffirmed, and the “Other” is always positioned as outside the system. Framing the “Other” in this fashion leads to dehumanizing discourses.

Goffman (1974) adopted a similar approach to analyzing the world and what he called the “organization of experience” (p. 11). Goffman concerned himself with two interconnected aims. The first aim was centered on one basic question: “What is it that’s going on here?” (p. 8). The second aim was “to try to isolate some of the basic frameworks of understanding available in our society for making sense out of events and to analyze the special vulnerabilities to which these frames of reference are subject” (p. 10). These aims are central to determining what questions frame analysis seeks to ask.

Before those questions can be proposed, however, I must highlight some important terms which Goffman (1974) coined. The first, “primary framework . . . is seen as rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful” (p. 21). Essentially, primary frameworks are employed to make sense of communication. In illustrating this concept, Goffman distinguishes between two types of primary frameworks: “natural” and “social.” The former identifies “occurrences seen as undirected, unoriented, unanimated, unguided, ‘purely physical’” (p. 22). In this realm, occurrences are clean and unscathed. Primary social frameworks are located on a different level. Unlike primary natural frameworks, they “[provide] background understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim, and controlling effort of an intelligence, a live agency, the chief one being the human being” (p. 22). These two types of primary frameworks are central to discussing media framing of Hurricane
Katrina since both frameworks were involved heavily in the coverage of the crisis. These terms also address Goffman’s central question, “What is it that’s going on here?” The answer is “an event or deed described within some primary framework” (p. 25). In following Goffman’s lead, I will consider both primary natural and social frameworks when examining coverage of Hurricane Katrina.

Fairclough (1995) takes a slightly different approach than Goffman (1974). He is concerned with “common sense” or “orderliness”—“the feeling of participants in [an interaction] . . . that things are as they should be” (p. 28). Fairclough also defines a social institution as “an apparatus of verbal interaction, or an ‘order of discourse’” (p. 38). In this regard, he is similar to Goffman who wonders about the organization of experience. But Fairclough’s approach differs from Goffman’s in its explicit emphasis on discourse. In addition, he added an ideological twist to the conversation, warning, “Naturalization gives to particular ideological representations the status of common sense, and thereby makes them opaque, i.e. no longer visible as ideologies” (p. 42).

In applying this concern to the study of news, Fairclough (1995) brings up several implications regarding ideology. First, he found that “newsgivers have come to adopt the position of mediators” (p. 62). This position frames news itself “as very much a conceptual and ideational business, a matter of statements, claims, beliefs, positions – rather than feelings, circumstances, qualities of social and interpersonal relationships, and so forth” (p. 64). Second, Fairclough determined that “access to the media is most open to socially dominant sectors, both as ‘reliable sources’ and as ‘accessed’ voices’ appearing in represented discourse and interviews” (pp. 62-63). As a consequence, “the social function of the media . . . is to reproduce existing asymmetrical power
relationships by putting across the voices of the powerful as if they were the voices of ‘common sense’” (p. 63). These conclusions offer a compelling framework for understanding the implications of news media framing of Hurricane Katrina because of the links to race, class, and gender in this crisis.

Methodology

The aforementioned research affirms the idea that media affects viewers/readers’ perception of the world. This study builds upon that basic assumption by exploring how the news media framed a significant national crisis. It also examines general influence of the media impact on defining “reality” surrounding a crisis.

Toward these ends, I propose to look specifically at print media. I chose to use a newsweekly to represent print media because it attracts a large audience. I selected *Time* Magazine because it is the most popular newsweekly in the United States with a readership of 21,431,000 (*Time*, 2006, Audience Profile section). I will analyze the following issues of *Time* Magazines: September 12, 2005, September 19, 2005, October 3, 2005, November 28, 2005, and August 13, 2007. These issues were chosen because they constitute the five cover story issues devoted to New Orleans-Katrina. I explore the articles, pictures, and captions for all material related to Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans in order to get a complete sense of how *Time* Magazine framed the crisis.

More specifically, I apply the concept of framing because it is a crucial lens for evaluating media coverage, effectually uncovering an array of implications. I consider the theoretical dimensions of Burke, Goffman, and Fairclough because their work significantly covers both what framing is and its implications for our world. Taken together these theorists provide a well-rounded understanding of frame analysis from
which I will take several of their key contributions as a starting point for categorizing news media frames into meaningful groups. For instance, I will utilize Burke’s notion of comic and tragic frames, Goffman’s concept of primary frameworks, and Fairclough’s notion of orderliness to begin categorizing the content from the newsweeklies. From here I will determine what other frames are dominant in the chosen newsweeklies. To guide my research in determining other dominant frames, I will look to the works of Iyengar & Kinder (1987), Iyengar (1991), Brummett (1991, 2003), Gans (1979), and Bennett (1988). Whereas, Burke, Goffman, and Fairclough offer a broad definition of framing, these key figures will be useful in supplementing the concept of framing with an understanding of specific news formulas and conventions.

Overview of Chapters

In the following chapter, I will analyze the ways the print media framed the coverage of Hurricane Katrina immediately following the storm (September 12, 2005, September 19, 2005), and assess how the framing affects the reality of the crisis.

In the third chapter, I investigate the ways that *Time* framed the coverage of Hurricane Katrina in the remaining three cover story issues (October 3, 2005, November 28, 2005, August 13, 2007). Specifically, I am interested in discovering the ways in which the media altered their framing of the crisis to help the public find closure. This project will investigate how this shift in framing affected the way the nation reads about the rebuilding New Orleans.

In the fourth chapter, I consider the implications of this study to crisis/disaster research, feminist scholarship, and studies of race and class. Furthermore, I will investigate how various cultural groups were represented, and discuss the central role
media framing has in defining crises. In addition, I will consider the limitations of my study and propose new directions for related research. Finally, I will reflect upon the impact of this study on the field of communication.
CHAPTER 2: THE QUASI-TRAGIC FRAME: INITIAL TIME MAGAZINE FRAMING OF HURRICANE KATRINA

My heart goes out to her. I can only imagine how she must feel. Screaming in anguish for help, her hands clutch a chair almost completely immersed under water. Her grip looks unwavering as if her ability to hold on is a matter of life or death. Below her, seated in the chair, is an older Black woman with graying black hair. Dressed in her night gown, she looks to have been caught off guard. She does not seem as desperate as the younger Black woman. Instead, the situation seems worse for her; she appears as if she has already given up. The two of them are wading through water, alone. I stare a bit longer to take it all in.

. . . almost unwillingly, my gaze turns . . .

I peer into the eyes of a Black woman who has been struck by something devastating and tragic. She grasps her face with weathered hands. Her watery eyes are focused intensely upon something unnatural—something only she can see. She watches, unable to comprehend what has happened. While she does not share what she is seeing, I still feel her pain.

The scenarios described above appeared as images on the covers of the September 12, 2005 and September 19, 2005 issues of Time Magazine (Flynn, 2005; Bowmer,
2005). Both images were taken in the midst of a crisis. Hurricane Katrina had struck the Gulf Coast just fifteen days before the first issue was put to press. Both images contain a brief message. In the first issue, the image is perfectly centered on the cover. Surrounded by it is a stark black background. The words on the cover read, “SPECIAL REPORT: AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY.” Expressing a similar sentiment, the image on the September 19 issue is larger, covering most of the page although it is still just as dark as the other issue’s cover. The words listed are centered over the woman’s face. They read, “SYSTEM FAILURE: An investigation into what went so wrong in New Orleans.”

Just as my introduction frames the content of this chapter, the images and brief words on the covers of these two newsweeklies frame the content of the articles and images inside. In this chapter, I analyze the Time Magazine news coverage in the newsweekly’s first two issues after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast. I proceed with a cluster analysis, highlighting a variety of prominent mini-frames and their themes, including failure, strategy, chaos, control, death, rebirth, and support. I contend that these frames combine to create, what I name, the quasi-tragic frame, a concept which I will address after discussing the prominent frames. Ultimately, I maintain that the quasi-tragic frame dramatizes the crisis and exploits the victims.

Prominent Frames

Frames are symbolic categories through which people view the world. Burke (1941) argued that through frames “we derive our vocabularies for the charting of human motives” (p. 92). Thus, different frames inspire different effects, functioning to further cooperation or hatred, for example. Either way, they never represent a “true reality.” This sentiment seems to be what Burke implied when he stated, “The mind, being formed
by language, is formed by a *public grammar*” (p. 341). Because “reality” is structured through terministic screens, frames have the capacity to illuminate our biases, fears, strengths, and weaknesses as a society.

I have divided this section into seven mini-frames and its corresponding themes: failure, strategy, chaos, control, death, rebirth, and support. In many instances these frames overlap. However, I have chosen to discuss them in isolation in order to discern the intricacies of each frame.

*Failure*

Two basic questions guided the frame of failure: “what should we have done?” and “what can we do now?” To answer these questions, journalists turned to the experts’ warnings from before the crisis struck. In the case of Katrina, journalists showed that a hurricane was foreseen and that the structural state of the levees was unprepared to withstand a severe hurricane like Katrina. One article demonstrated this point in referencing the failures of President Bush to act before the crisis occurred, noting that Bush “said that he didn’t ‘think anybody expected’ the New Orleans levees to give way, though that very possibility had been forecast for years” (Cooper, 2005, p. 51). The sarcastic tone of the article heightened the frame of failure by displaying Bush’s reasoning to make him seem out of touch with “reality,” despite the massive hurricane wake up call. The article suggested that the ultimate failure was Bush’s decision to ignore the warnings and the crisis itself. *Time* positioned readers to be blameless while also empowered for criticizing governmental wrongdoings.

The newsweekly was saturated with the frame of failure which encouraged readers to scapegoat, while feeling noble for doing so. Burke (1941) aligns the concept
of scapegoating alongside the tragic frame. In his essay “The Rhetoric of Hitler’s ‘Battle,’” Burke alludes to the notion that scapegoating furthers hate (p. 197). As a society, we create scapegoats to function as a release of culpability. Burke explains that the scapegoat functions as a “vessel of vicarious atonement” (p. 407). Moreover, Burke identifies the scapegoat as “the ‘essence’ of evil, the principle of the discord felt by those who are to be purified by the sacrifice” (p. 407). For readers, governmental officials served as the obvious scapegoat.

In directing readers toward this conclusion, the newsweekly littered its pages with past warnings of an inevitable Katrina. Many articles focused on predictions of devastation caused by a poorly constructed levee system. One article described how experts predicted New Orleans’ levees would give way and discussed rooftop rescues while 80% of the city would be left underwater (Ripley, 2005, p. 54). In comparing this prediction with the actual effects of Katrina, the article indirectly asked why the warnings went unheeded since the predictions were astonishingly accurate. The answer directed readers to the frame of failure. The newsweekly situated readers with the experts who warned of an inevitable crisis.

Another section of the newsweekly presented a structural image of New Orleans to demonstrate systematically how the crisis was magnified by structural carelessness (Gabel, Tweeten, Dell, 2005, pp. 62-63). Understanding the structure of New Orleans’ levee system would seem complicated, but the image was simplistic, with clear labels and explanations. The newsweekly encouraged readers to interrogate why they could comprehend the seriousness of pre-crisis expert warnings, while governmental officials could not. The newsweekly amplified readers’ status from average citizen to structural
expert. The arrogance resulting from the image functioned to further a frame of failure with expert-status readers eager to blame ignorant governmental officials.

It is not uncommon for articles to address the failures of government officials (Lamarque, 2005, pp. 34-35). A string of articles analyzed the failures of the Mayor of New Orleans, Governor of Louisiana, FEMA Director, and the Secretary of Homeland Security (Caplan, 2005, p. 21; Carney, 2005, pp. 40-41; Ripley, 2005, pp. 36-38; Thompson, 2005, pp. 39-40; Tumulty, 2005, pp. 38-39). Each of these individuals was depicted as failing the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Even President Bush was not excluded from the presentation of failures. Articles addressed how Bush failed the people of New Orleans and what he should have done differently as a leader (Cooper, 2005, p. 51; Ripley, 2005, pp. 54-59; Allen, 2005, pp. 42-45). In this case, the White male individual is portrayed as corrupt and incapable. This portrayal specified the ideal hero to be an average American (White male) leader. By depicting the ideal hero as an average American leader, Time enticed readers to identify with the common person.

The newsweekly’s exposé-style also promoted the frame of failure. Time covered the crisis as if it could have been prevented, situating articles within a blame game. It is safe to say that in answering the first question, “what should we have done?” journalists uncovered a foreseen crisis that was never attended to, but should have been. While the coverage invited readers to react critically, it often encouraged the scapegoating process. Strategy

The second guiding question focused on “what can we do now?” In attending to this question, journalists presented structural, pragmatic concerns as well as cultural, value-focused issues. The articles and images were situated within a frame of strategy.
This frame appeared within the newsweekly as a solution to the frame of failure. In getting at the pragmatic concerns, journalists provided advice for ways to rebuild New Orleans so that the failures of Hurricane Katrina could be avoided in the future. For example, one article suggested how hospital parking could be redesigned to be located on lower floors so that future flooding would not reach patients (Lacayo, 2005, p. 68). The magazine was inundated with journalists’ suggestions for rebuilding the city. Another article recommended that we should be “nurturing back to health the genuine and distinctive neighborhoods that serve as an incubator for the city’s music and food and funkiness” (Isaacson, 2005, p. 71). While both quotations pinpointed distinct issues of concern, the focus was on a strategy for rebuilding in the future. Yet another article posed the question of “what will it take to disinfect the city?” (Cloud, 2005, p. 54).

Consistently, the articles in *Time* attended to the “what can we do now” question. In doing so, reporting drove the frame forward to focus on how things should be resolved in the future. The pairing of the frame of strategy with the frame of failure contributed to reader arrogance that they had nothing to do with the problem but everything to do with the solution. In discussing strategy as a prominent frame during political campaigns, Jamieson (1992) remarks that election coverage is so focused on strategy that “sometimes the critic/consultant appears to be running a school for aspiring campaign consultants” (p. 174). In glancing through the pages of the newsweekly, *Time* readers were likely to notice a similar trend in crisis reporting. Journalists seemed to be preparing readers for a career as city planners.

Recall that this second guiding question within the newsweekly included the pronoun “we.” As previously demonstrated, the key to the second question is that the
reader is a part of the solution. Ultimately, s/he is part of the frame. This is certainly not the case with the frame of failure where readers were simply reacting to the crisis through the frame. However, with the frame of strategy, readers were invited to be much more involved with the tragedy. For instance, one article suggested what the reader could do to help, listing contact information for popular organizations, including the American Red Cross and Habitat for Humanity (Editorial Staff, 2005, p. 6). Another article positioned Time Magazine’s September 12 issue as positively affecting American giving toward Katrina victims:

On this page last week, we pointed out ways to aid the Katrina relief effort through groups like the Red Cross. So far, Americans have donated at least $670 million, according to the Chronicle of Philanthropy, far outpacing the levels of giving after both 9/11 and the Asian tsunami. (Kelly, 2005, p. 6)

Journalists position readers as affected by the crisis, part of the frame, and, thus, obligated to take part in the solution. This alignment can act as a powerful strategy to maintain readers’ interest in the crisis. However, in allowing Time Magazine to be the prevailing force of a select public interest, the victims of Katrina appeared dependent on the editors’ decision to continue focusing on the crisis. With this rhetoric and the emergence of another popular news story, the Katrina crisis may be phased out and eventually disappear from the public eye.

Chaos

Chaos surfaces repeatedly as a frame within the newsweekly. Through this frame the curtain rises to expose a metaphoric stage of doom and destruction, a bold reminder of nature’s power and humankind’s fragile existence. The frame of chaos functioned as
the backbone for all other frames. Without the frame of chaos the other frames would seem less significant. For example, the frame of failure would not be as intense if the problem did not seem as severe. This is just one way in which these frames relied on one another. Several themes were present that contribute to the chaotic frame, including the juxtaposition of the pre-crisis scene with the crisis scene, nostalgic descriptions, and the option to begin to return to a frame of control.

Frequently, the crisis scene was juxtaposed with the pre-crisis scene, resulting in a heightened chaotic frame. Before capturing the crisis scene in New Orleans, the press described the scene of New Orleans from before the storm. Articles began describing the pre-crisis setting by pinpointing the city’s roots. One article depicted this scene, explaining that New Orleans is “a city built by rumrunners and slave traders and pirates [that] was never going to play by anyone’s rules or plan for the future” (Gibbs, 2005, p. 44). This nostalgic description glorified New Orleans as America’s free-spirited city, far from crisis. These descriptions revered the city’s unique inhabitants as people who lived in the moment and even wavered on the border between chaos and control. This erotic, ambiguous role helped to position the city as “the Big Easy.” Nostalgic New Orleans is an ideal model to compare post-Katrina New Orleans because it depicts the city as a “fun-loving” place where visitors can let loose and enjoy life, while oftentimes wavering on the edge between chaos and order (the same role that the inhabitants of the city assumed many years back). In using this glorified image of New Orleans, the newsweekly caused the frame of (complete) chaos to seem out of place. By doing so the newsweekly encouraged readers to return to the frame of failure in order to understand this new “reality.” Consequently, readers were directed toward a tragic frame.
In glorifying the city’s pre-crisis scene, one article referenced the cultural impact of New Orleans. The article reminisced about people who “produced an original cuisine, an original architecture, vibrant communal ceremonies and an original art form: jazz” (p. 84). This quotation captured a positive image of New Orleans that when paired with a description of the city post-Katrina, caused New Orleans to seem undeserving of such a crisis. This tendency to describe the setting before the crisis set the stage for describing a heightened chaotic scene. In comparing these two extremes, journalists pragmatically made a compelling argument for why their story was a crisis story. Most articles found within the pages of the magazines furthered an image of a city in ruins. One article described the scene by referencing “abandoned houses,” “a wasteland of drowned power lines,” “the smell of bloated bodies and swamp rot,” and a “putrid mix of chemicals and corpses” (Booth Thomas, Padgett, 2005, p. 49). As these quotations indicate, the descriptions of the crisis scene were formulated to shock and produce a bold chaotic image.

In addition to the news articles that depicted the scene in stark terms, a prevalent feature in describing the crisis scene were sections of two-page photo spreads with brief captions. Nothing seemed off limits to display in the magazine. Many photos were included that showed bloated bodies floating down the streets of New Orleans or near death individuals cast aside (Dworzak, 2005, pp. 30-31; Klein, 2005, p. 27; Laforet, pp. 53-52; Nielsen, 2005, pp. 42-43; Sullivan, 2005, p. 59). The photos also highlighted a city in ruins, depicting rundown neighborhoods and obliterated buildings (Ainsworth, 2005, pp. 40-41; Bouaphanh, 2005, pp. 36-37; Pool, 2005, pp. 30-31; Pool, 2005, pp. 34-35). The crisis scene was brought together stunningly by these large images of
destruction. By providing simple but intense images, journalists presented the story within a frame of chaos. However, without the references to a pre-crisis New Orleans, these images and articles would lack depth and purpose.

Within the frame of chaos, the newsweekly urged readers to return to a frame of control. Journalists embraced titles like *Rebuilding a Dream* (Lacayo, 2005, p. 65), and *Saving America’s Soul Kitchen* (Marsalis, 2005, p. 84), and fondly referred to New Orleans as the “Big Easy.” This call for a return to a frame of control appeared immediately within *Time*, even within the first issue released after the hurricane. Before officials were able to comprehend the extent of the damage caused by Katrina, journalists were pointing the public toward resolve. Certainly the public would need to find resolve after such a catastrophic tragedy; however, finding resolve too quickly could mean a loss of interest in the recovery process.

*Control Meets Chaos*

In speaking about the concept of control, Burke (1959) maintained, “To control a bad situation, you seek either to eradicate the evil or to channelize the evil” (p. 236). In most cases *Time* channelized the evil (or in words more fitting of this context, the chaotic ends of the situation) by exploiting race, gender, and class struggles. Consistent themes appeared with who the newsweekly depicted repeatedly as in control of the situation and who seemed to be contributing more to the crisis. The positioning of control in *Time*’s coverage revealed the noxious potential of the frame of control to reaffirm racial, gender and class stereotypes.

The newsweekly produced race by consistently presenting an image of Whites and Blacks as either in control or out of control. The newsweekly constructed an image
of Blacks as in crisis by portraying Black individuals as helpless and White individuals as in control. Rome (2004) traces this attitude of viewing Blacks as inferior back to slavery. He explains, “the rationale for the precept of inferiority was this: blacks, for reasons of physiology, culture, behavior, and even religion, were something less than fully human and were therefore inferior to whites” (p. 22). This obscene historical attitude continued to surface in mediated representations of Blacks. Picturing Blacks as inactive was a common portrayal in the newsweekly. In one instance where a Black man was depicted in what could be read as a position of control (a firefighter), he was shown as helpless. Instead of acting, he was pictured sitting on top of an Oak tree, just above the flood waters (Dworzak, 2005, pp. 48-49). The photograph urged the reader to wonder why he was not able to help with the rescue efforts. The image has serious consequences because it implied that even when a Black individual is in a position of crisis responder, s/he will remain helpless amidst a crisis.

In another example, three Black individuals were pictured lying down in a shaded truck (Stolarick, 2005, p. 5). These three individuals looked like they had given up and were now passively fading away in the shade of a truck. The newsweekly indicated through the inundation of images of helpless Black individuals that they were in need of assistance. A similar illustration showed a Black woman sitting with two babies and a young boy. She also appeared to have given up. The caption explained that she was “waiting with her three grandchildren for help” (Scott, 2005, pp. 54-55). Here again, the image and caption reminded the reader that Blacks were helpless, often in need of the help of Whites.
In addition to depicting Blacks as helpless, Blacks were seen as out of control by being depicted as criminals. Rome (2004) argues that “our definition of crime is socially constructed mainly by mass media and, after further analysis, we find that crime is often associated with African Americans” (p. 3). In *Time*, this relationship was apparent. For instance, in one photograph, three Black youth were confronted by police officers. The caption identified them as “suspected looters” (Bouaphanh, 2005, pp. 36-37). In labeling these individuals as “looters” instead of positioning them as “hurricane victims” seeking shelter or food, the newsweekly captured a chaotic image of these young men. The caption, “armed gangs took to the streets” (p. 37), directed readers even closer to a frame of chaos and reinforced the stereotype of Black youth as thugs and gang members. Entman and Rojecki (2000) state “television news often portrays an urban America nearly out of control: night after night the news overflows with victims and perpetrators of violence” (p. 78). These authors also suggest that these depictions most often link violence to Blacks. *Time* continuously vilified Blacks as the cause of disorder.

Aside from vilifying Black individuals, the newsweekly continued to situate Blacks as in crisis by portraying them as out of control in other ways. In one image, a crowd of Black women and men is pictured with two angry women yelling at one another. The caption reads, “An angry exodus” (Ainsworth, 2005, pp. 40-41). The implication is that without the chaotic behavior of the Black individuals, there would be more control. While the image of an angry crowd and the image of the suspected looters depicted Blacks as in crisis, they also reinforced control. More specifically, they solidified White control.
Often, Whites were portrayed as heroic and in control, further perpetuating the perception of Blacks as in crisis. The binary between Black crisis and White control functioned similarly to the pre-crisis and crisis scene. Both framing binaries intensified readers’ perception of “reality,” while powerfully aligning social issues (in this case race) to (un)favorable frames. The White individual as in control was commonplace within the newsweekly.

Each issue featured a “How you can help” and “Reaching out to help” page. One article pictured a White woman holding two Black children, the only children who appeared happy throughout the issue (Kelly, 2005, p. 6). She was able to give comfort and hope to these Black children, something that the Black mother was portrayed as not capable of doing. The photograph positioned the White woman as a hero to these children, while silently questioning the actions (or inactions) of the Black mother who failed to keep her children close by. It seemed that without the White woman, the Black children would have perished. She became their savior, resulting in the positioning of the White woman as in control.

In a similar situation, a White woman was pictured bringing order to a Black crowd (Burford, 2005, p. 6). The photograph suggested that without the White woman, chaos would win over. She was all that was keeping the Black individuals tamed and disciplined. While the newsweekly depicted these White women as in protective control of Blacks, the White women did not maintain complete control. Instead, White men represented the ultimate hero, displaying both a racial and gender hierarchy, while maintaining the apparent need of Blacks to be disciplined by Whites.
The White male as ultimate hero functioned to further the image of Blacks as in crisis and the White male as dominant. In one photograph, a White man was pictured crying while a White woman rested her hand on his shoulder to comfort him. At first glance, this picture just seemed to be a humanizing example of an average man. The caption was what defined him as a hero, declaring, “A hero’s pain” (Usher, 2005, pp. 32-33). The caption also explained that he rescued ten people. There were no similar pictures of Black men and women denoted as heroes. This picture reminded readers of the role of White male figures as dominant, heroic, and clearly in control.

Reporting produced this frame consistently throughout the newsweekly. In another example, an image captured two White men lifting a Black woman into a helicopter (Wolfe, 2005, p. 56). She, of course, was happy to be rescued and the heroic action of the White men appeared effortless. Certainly, readers expected this scenario to be covered during crisis news reporting. What complicated the meaning of the image was who the newsweekly portrayed as in control. White men always appeared as the rescuers. In fact, there were no images of Blacks rescuing Whites in the newsweekly. Occasionally, journalists presented the reader with images of Black officials aiding Black individuals; however, a White male was also always present as an official in these instances (Bouaphanh, 2005, pp. 36-37), ultimately solidifying White male control.

In extending the frame of control to interrogate representations of gender, White men were most often depicted in positions of control, while Time portrayed White women more frequently as helpless. Within the frame of control, reporting rarely presented women as authority figures. Instead, articles featured men repeatedly in positions of control, while describing women more often in situations where they awaited
help or rescue. For example, one image pictured five male police officers apprehending a wounded man (Dworzak, 2005, pp. 32-33). The absence of female authority figures created a message that males were in control of addressing the crisis. In another image, three women were scattered amongst eleven men in a round table meeting of top governmental officials, including President Bush (Kraft, 2005, pp. 42-43). The image was shot in a manner that Bush and Cheney were the focal point while the other individuals appeared difficult to see. On close examination, the reader could find two women hidden behind Bush, one woman sitting amongst five men, and finally two men standing in the background. Women’s presence as a minority in the frame of control functioned to position women as an anomaly in leadership positions. The continual association of women lacking control while men become synonymous with control naturalized these stereotypical positions. Consequently, the frame of control’s alignment with male images re-centered white patriarchy. Dickinson and Anderson (2004) discuss the re-centering of white patriarchy through Time Magazine’s cover images of O.J. Simpson and Hillary Rodham Clinton, explaining “for white patriarchy, the stories of the fall of Simpson and Rodham Clinton are examples not of American Tragedy, but of American Truth” (p. 288). In Time’s coverage of Katrina, a similar juncture occurred with the stereotypes of women as poor leaders transmogrifying into “American Truth.”

While it is the case that there are less women in positions of authority (a separate issue for concern), women are never featured as focal points in these photographs. An image of five cops apprehending “suspected looters” exemplified this gender disparity (Bouaphanh, 2005, pp. 36-37). The one woman presented in this situation was hidden behind another officer. The male police officers controlled the scene, while she
participated in the background, reliant on the male officers. Because the news media continually confronted readers with images of (White) men dominating the frame of control, a woman’s occasional presence functioned to disrupt the frame by accentuating an inconsistency. Even while this image shadowed the female police officer, she was othered by her anomalous position. The image encouraged the reader to question her presence.

Aside from this last photo of the police officers, all of the previously described images were included at the beginning of feature articles. These images were substantial to framing the content of the newsweekly in that each introductory image established the tone of the subsequent article. Dickinson and Anderson (2004) pose a similar argument for the significance of each image to affect the content of the newsweekly. They maintain that the covers of *Time* “function as a visual rhetoric” (p. 271). More specifically, they contend, “The *Time* covers functioned as one mechanism for literalizing cultural myths” (p. 272). *Time*’s coverage of Hurricane Katrina featured images that profoundly reinforced cultural myths about who was most often in a position of control. With the women in the background and the men in the foreground, the images preempted the articles with the message that male actions provided hope to revive control. One article that began with the aforementioned picture of the three women amongst the eleven men at the conference meeting interrogated four of the officials who were present at the meeting, one of which happens to be a woman: Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco. In the article, Blanco was described as “dazed and unsteady,” two qualities that are not coveted for a leader (Tumulty, 2005, p. 38). She was also represented as having “unrealistic expectations” (p. 39). This second description focused on an illogical
individual, someone who was out of touch with “reality.” Both descriptions coded Blanco as a poor leader.

While one would expect these types of comments to appear in a critical article, the critique of Blanco was decidedly gendered. For instance, the article about Mayor Ray Nagin explained that it was “clear that the mayor was in charge when disaster struck” (Ripley, 2005, p. 36). This quotation situates Nagin strongly within the frame of control. The article positioned FEMA director, Michael Brown, less strongly within the frame of control. The article recognized that there were “calls for Brown’s head” for a poor job leading the recovery efforts (Thompson, 2005, p. 40). However, the article ended by transferring culpability from Brown to the system, emphasizing that the problem was bigger than Brown because the “system is broken” (p. 40). The final article criticizing government officials profiled Homeland Security Secretary, Michael Chertoff. The article explained his worst problem was that he insisted “that the federal response had been far better than advertised” (Carney, 2005, p. 41). Despite this critique, he was depicted as being “a great lawyer, very smart and extremely decent” (p. 41). His fault was that “he’s a lousy politician” (p. 41). Within a media that depicts politicians as evil, this so-called insult is not necessarily a bad thing. While the male officials were criticized as not holding as much control as they should have, Blanco’s critique appeared harsher than the other officials. The criticism of Blanco did not offer reasons for why she had lost control; she was not a “lousy politician” or had dealt with a “broken system.” Instead, she was “dazed and unsteady,” clearly unable to offer control during a crisis.

This analysis suggested that women are more likely to be viewed as less capable even in situations of authority.
To further demonstrate this point, in addition to the articles themselves, each official was pictured with a caption to direct the reader’s interpretation of the picture. The titles of each caption placed each official in a different light. Chertoff’s caption title read, “The big test” (Pool, 2005, p. 41), while Brown’s caption stated, “Many thanks” (Augustino, 2005, p. 40). Nagin’s caption title explained, “On the ground” (Duke, 2005, pp. 36-37). Blanco’s caption title, on the other hand, attested, “Little sleep” (Usher, 2005, pp. 38-39). Consistent with the articles, the captions took the female official and focused in on a problematic issue, while the male officials were paired with captions that were more neutral, not referencing weakness and even a bit praiseworthy. This trend was not just a coincidence that appeared in one section of the magazine. In a separate picture, Lieutenant General Honoré was pictured on the Iwo Jima. The title of his caption exclaimed, “In charge” (Usher, 2005, p. 56). The article described him as “taking care of business” and “uniquely qualified for the task” (Bennett, 2005, p. 56). A woman’s presence in the frame of control was threatening. The consistent downplaying of women in control reaffirmed men’s authority.

As my analysis suggests, the politics of control are deeply gendered and raced. The combination of the frames of control and chaos function as an exposé of power relations among different social groups. In some ways the frame of control is a misnomer during crisis news reporting since “crisis” implies a lack of control. However, the presence of a frame of control is vital to a crisis because it accentuates the frame of chaos as well as shapes readers’ perceptions of social hierarchies. The frames of control and chaos draw a clear line between races, genders, and classes, defining their positions within these frames. Without the frame of control, the crisis would lack meaning;
without a point of comparison it would seem less significant. As was demonstrated in this section, the primary way to portray control during a crisis was by displaying some individuals as in crisis while others were in control. The moment where chaos meets control is the moment where order becomes crisis. That journey alone exposes significant social hierarchies.

*Death and Rebirth*

After a large-scale crisis like Hurricane Katrina, it would seem that the word “death” would signify the horrors faced by the New Orleanians. The expectation was that images of lifeless bodies and articles about the hundreds of corpses trapped in houses would dominate the pages of the magazine. While reporting captured this type of death in *Time*, the prevailing frame focused on the death of the city of New Orleans.

Before depicting the city as dead, images and articles fostered an image of the city before Katrina, when the city was vibrant and alive. By personifying the city, journalists produced a complex image of New Orleans and set the stage for the city to be reborn. For example, a comic strip in the September 12 issue of *Time* depicted New Orleans as a sinking hand and the government as a lifeguard who was slow to come to New Orleans’ rescue (Luckovich, 2005, p. 25). The comic defined New Orleans as a drowning body desperate for help. Personification of the city, even in a fictional context, invited readers to view New Orleans as having human qualities, ultimately offering readers the possibility of identifying with a place.

The personification of New Orleans was also consistent in other, more serious articles. One article explained, “New Orleans lives by the water and fights it,” and talks about people “watching helpless New Orleans suffering” (Gibbs, 2005, pp. 44-45). This
article solidified New Orleans as a living being. In a separate instance, a young girl states, “I think [Katrina] killed our town” (Williams, 2005, p. 60). The young girl clearly implied that New Orleans was alive. Another article referred to “what it means to miss New Orleans” and referenced the city’s “soul” (Isaacson, 2005, p. 71). This article personified the city on a deeper, more personal level in suggesting New Orleans actually had a soul. A separate article explained, “New Orleans was not inclined to abandon” the levee system (Kluger & Booth Thomas, 2005, p. 75). This quotation suggested New Orleans had the power to fight against hurricane winds and neglectful maintenance in order not to “abandon” the levee system. It almost seemed as if New Orleans played a heroic role in trying to fend off crisis. In all of these instances, New Orleans became the victim of others’ failure. The frame of death only functioned if the city was personified successfully. It seemed that since the city was personified consistently, New Orleans’ metaphorical death created the crisis. On the other hand, by reducing all of New Orleans’ inhabitants to a city, reviving New Orleans (not necessarily the individuals) becomes the priority.

With New Orleans in crisis (and on its deathbed) the newsweekly quickly focused on a frame of rebirth. In addressing the rebirth of New Orleans, many articles systematically presented plans for how to fix the damage. In fact, many articles contained solution-focused headlines, such as “Here’s what you do” (Chu & Loebis, 2005, p. 85). This particular article featured “four leaders whose communities were devastated by natural disasters” (p. 85). Each leader explained what they thought should be done to address the crisis, and, consequently, revive the city. In another article, “How to bring the magic back,” the author suggested that the city had “an opportunity to rebuild
itself” and proposed that “the city needs to restore itself authentically” (Isaacson, 2005, p. 71). This article attempted to direct how the city would be reborn. Another article still focused on the rebuilding effort, explaining “The first step in rebuilding New Orleans will simply be to draw off the water that covers 80% of the city” (Lacayo, 2005, p. 67). As this section indicated, Time dedicated a significant portion of the news coverage to plans for rebuilding the city. The focus on rebirth became central to covering this crisis. This frame encouraged readers to contemplate solutions immediately, even before the severity of the crisis was determined. This tendency is potentially harmful to the rebirth of the city because it requires a quick recovery. Pragmatically, a speedy recovery was unlikely, but readers were conditioned to see the solution as easy to achieve, resulting in a tired readership quick to bore of failed promises of New Orleans’ recovery. With the utilization of the frame of rebirth in conjunction with the frame of failure, readers became even more frustrated with the slow pace of the recovery efforts.

Human death was addressed much differently than New Orleans itself. When shown, it was either mostly hidden by an object or it is clearly represented through Black men. In one image two Black individuals were cast aside on the edge of a derelict building (Sullivan, 2005, p. 59). This image framed death as sorrowful and abandoning. In another image, death was shown in the same way with a Black male corpse floating down the flooded streets of New Orleans (Dworzak, 2005, pp. 28-29). These images produced profound racial implications by potentially furthering a stereotype that Blacks were weak and helpless. By showing death only in terms of Black male bodies, the images effectually functioned to emasculate the race through showcasing their inability to protect themselves and others. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1992) reminds us, “Amid the
racial battlefield, a line is drawn, but it is drawn on the shifting sands of sexuality” (p. 79). Images addressed Black male sexuality by placing Black men outside the boundaries of proper masculine activities, one of which was their ability to protect others.

These articles and images showcasing the frame of death were presented alongside stories of the survivors, who journalists often documented as forecasting the future and discussing lessons learned. While the newsweekly often focused on the frame of death, the *Time* issues relied more on the frame of rebirth. Examples of rebirth were used to combat the presence of death, ultimately demonstrating that the healing process had already begun. The newsweekly relied on the frame of rebirth in order to balance the dismal character of the frame of death. Communicating resolve was prioritized over discussing the actual crisis.

The newsweekly documented what survivors had gone through, but awarded special attention to how they were finding resolve. The issues often portrayed survivors as having a similar free-spirited character to New Orleans. In one article, the survivors were referred to as “defiant,” people who “plot the city’s comeback” (Booth Thomas & Padgett, 2005, p. 48). This quotation indicates the close link between the survivors’ and New Orleans’ rebirth. The article went on to describe “slightly sauced survivors [sitting] on the bar stools of Johnny White’s, a tavern” (p. 50). In the spirit of the Big Easy (the portrayal of New Orleans often captured before the storm), these survivors seem to be getting on with their lives and going back to having a good time. This message relied on the assumption that the survivors were from the areas of New Orleans where people were able to afford a good time.4 *Time’s* coverage of these survivors was favorable since these survivors were restoring the city’s spirit. In another example, the executive director of a
historical society was pictured exclaiming, “I will not be whipped. I will be back and 
record the history of this storm” (Chiasson, 2005, p. 46). The executive director and the 
other survivors discussed here were praised for linking their survival with the city’s 
recovery. Many other survivors, however, appeared as a threat to the city’s recovery. 

Concerning these survivors, lives would be restarted in different cities, likely very 
far from New Orleans. One woman exclaimed, “I don’t care if they take me to Honduras. 
Just get me out of New Orleans. I’m never going back there” (Burford, 2005, p. 61). 

Another article explained that one man must face “an abrupt, indefinite exile from his 
beloved hometown” (Hamersky, 2005, p. 46). This type of survivor was presented as 
part of the city’s death. Their abandonment of New Orleans casted them as lesser people 
than those who remained close by to help the city grow. They were depicted as giving up 
and acting selfishly while their city remained behind, left to die.

The social consequences of Katrina and the tragedies the storm created were 
already beginning to be pushed to the background. Eventually the public would move 
toward resolve; however, it is shocking that this shift was occurring in the first two issues 
of *Time* immediately following Katrina. This tendency would likely make it difficult in 
following months for New Orleanians to receive the public’s attention and support in the 
recovery efforts. *Time* Magazine’s coverage clearly prioritized the recovery of the 
country over the recovery of Katrina’s victims who were beginning to be brushed aside.

*Support in Desperate Times*

*Time* utilized the frame of support to confer on readers a sense of purpose in 
participating in reading about the crisis. Through this frame, readers became principle 
actors in the crisis. Articles reminded readers that their support was necessary for full
recovery. Moreover, the frame of support was essential in alleviating readers’ guilt from participating in a nationalized gapers’ block.

Articles often portrayed women in situations that intensified helplessness and furthered an image of a damsel in distress, awaiting rescue. The frame of support positioned women as people who most needed the help of *Time*’s readership. Furthering the image of women as helpless victims, women were portrayed as dependent and men as independent. This depiction was obvious in *Time*’s eyewitness section in both issues of the newsweekly. In the September 19 issue, the eyewitness section presented pictures and quotes from a variety of individuals affected by Katrina in an effort to personalize the crisis. The section featured pictures of three individual men, one individual woman, a woman with her husband and two children, and a male and female cousin pair (Chiasson, 2005, pp. 46-47). A quotation was included alongside each picture. Out of the six pictures, only one quotation was from a woman. Whenever a woman was paired with a man, the man was the one quoted. This tendency positioned men as independent, while women remain dependent on the man’s voice. In the instance where a woman was pictured and quoted independently, the caption explained that she was somebody’s private chef, thus, clearly dependent on someone not represented in the article. The eyewitness section seemed to set the standard for the remainder of the newsweekly, where readers were confronted with (mostly) individual women desperate for help. Often, during crises society’s biases emerge and the attitude that “I’m not prejudiced or sexist” disappears in the moments of panic. The fact that men are given agency in times of crisis and women are not reminds society that we are not as advanced in enacting equality as we would like to think.
In the eyewitness section of the September 12 issue, women were represented in a similar manner. This eyewitness section featured four men in three photographs, one female child, two adult women, and one large group of people. The three pictures of the men reaffirmed a sense of male independence and female dependence. For instance, in one of the pictures, a man was featured comparing his experience with Hurricane Katrina to the Lebanese war (Stolarik, 2005, p. 60). Having lived through a war, this man’s testimony captured what it took to live independently through difficult situations. In another picture, a father and son stood in front of the ocean together. The caption explained that they had decided to camp out on the beach and survive on their own for the time being (Usher, 2005, pp. 60-61). The two men’s decision to camp out demonstrated their ability to act independently.

The quotes and pictures from the women strike a different tone. The two adult women were portrayed as more desperate and emotional. Both women were pictured crying and upset next to their pessimistic quotations that were rooted in loss (Burford, 2005, p. 61; Usher, 2005, p. 61). While *Time* pictured these women independently, their independence illustrated why they should be dependant. Both eyewitness sections establish a foundation for the frame of support. These sections established a hierarchy with regard to who needed the most support.

Ironically, even though the newsweekly portrayed women (thus far) as needing the most support, the articles and images relegated women’s role to caretaker (at least until she and the person/people she was caring for can could be rescued). The large group of people who were included in the September 12 eyewitness section featured a woman who welcomed members of her community into her home. The caption explained that
she had “invited them to stay indefinitely” (Thornburgh, 2005, pp. 60-61). Instead of cleaning up the debris or rescuing others, her role was marked as caretaker for her community. The article cast her in a supporting role.

In another instance, an image captured a woman’s hand, arm and lower torso behind a crying man, who was labeled a hero by the accompanying caption (Usher, 2005, pp. 32-33). The photograph positioned the woman in the background, obscuring her face. She was relegated to the role of emotional caretaking. While the male figure was out rescuing others, nothing was said of her role in the rescue efforts. Instead, the man was featured and she was left in the background comforting him. This instance illustrates the gender hierarchy that emerged amidst the frame of support. The image classified her actions as ordinary and her role was portrayed as less important than the man’s role. The image conveyed the normalcy of a woman supporting a man’s actions.

While gender was foregrounded in articles and images to intensify the frame of support (thus, inviting reader participation in this frame), issues of class further encouraged reader participation in the frame of support. In the newsweekly, poverty was rampant. Many of the images and articles communicated desperation for food, water, and shelter. The reader was encouraged to empathize with the victims and aid them through volunteering or donating funds to help them through recovery. At the front of each issue, readers were encouraged to support victims. Two articles even listed the contact information for a variety of prominent national rescue organizations (Kelly, 2005, p. 6; Time, 2005, p. 6). The placement of these calls for volunteering and giving at the beginning of each issue established the remainder of the newsweekly to become a justification for readers to participate in the recovery efforts. What complicated these
good deeds was the fact that poverty was portrayed as something that resulted from the storm and its consequential flooding. In ignoring the social and institutional causes of poverty, the newsweekly removed readers from the cause, ultimately positioning readers as solely within the frame of support.

While many people were certainly left homeless because of the hurricane, if poverty was portrayed as resulting solely from the storm, then the public was not accountable for its other causes. If poverty were not portrayed in this manner, the public might feel less compelled to give to the victims. With the frame of support, the public could feel good about helping these victims who were lacking the means to meet basic needs. Contrarily, the poor were not seen as victims before the storm, but rather at fault. Additionally, if the responsibility fell on Hurricane Katrina, then society was not encouraged to address the system since an unbroken system does not need to be fixed.

Positioned at the center of the image of the poor were single Black mothers. In one image, a Black woman carried her one-year-old daughter through the rain (Rourke, 2005, pp. 28-29). Dressed in nice clothes and equipped with a backpack filled with belongings, the image positioned the woman’s homelessness as resulting from the storm. This image captured the frame of sympathy by portraying this woman as faultless for her desperate situation. Another image showed a grandmother sitting alone with three young children waiting for help (Ainsworth, 2005, pp. 54-55). The image of the three young children generated sympathy. The woman’s inability to support the children on her own appeared to be the result of the storm. Because of the desperate situation, readers were urged to support these individuals.
In addition to *Time*’s designation of Black mothers as most in need of help, the elderly were also positioned toward the center of those in desperate need of help. One image displayed “elderly evacuees” in a baggage-claim area of a local airport (Laforet, 2005, pp. 52-53). Most of the elderly pictured were lying down in hospital gowns, seemingly unable to care for themselves. Their situation appeared desperate and beckoned readers for support. These two groups of people were positioned to gain the most empathy from readers based on their “vulnerable” positions. This portrayal implicitly positioned single Black women and the elderly as weak and in desperate need of support.

All of the images described previously appeared to be a direct result of the hurricane and subsequent flood. A focus on images hides poverty as having existed before the crisis. Not one image appeared in the pages of these issues of *Time* that showed the destruction of a significantly impoverished section of the city. Most of the images were comprised of the destruction of the Garden District, Bourbon Street, downtown, and other wealthy areas (Chiasson, 2005, p. 46; Dworzak, 2005, pp. 30-31; Dworzak, 2005, pp. 48-49; Gould, 2005, p. 71; Serota, 2005, pp. 66-67). As was the case before the storm, the ninth ward and other poor areas of New Orleans typically were ignored. Because the city hailed tourism, the tourist areas of the city (the Garden District, Bourbon Street, downtown, and other wealthy areas) fit better in the frame of sympathy. These areas were familiar to many Americans who vacationed in New Orleans.

**Characterizing the Quasi-Tragic**

*Time*’s news coverage of Hurricane Katrina can be best described, I maintain, as a *quasi-tragic frame*. In defining the quasi-tragic frame, I turn to Burke’s (1959) notion of
the comic and tragic frames. Instead of viewing these frames separately (as is commonly the case), I have chosen to combine them in order to describe the attitude of the *Time* news coverage of Katrina.

By quasi-tragic, I refer to the news coverage as having the appearance of being framed as comic, or self-reflexive, when in fact it was profoundly tragic, often furthering an attitude of humiliation while inviting the reader to be blameless. However, the tragic nature of this frame was intensified by a comic façade. Not only did the reader believe s/he was being self-reflexive, but the reader was also encouraged to confront tender social issues often in a manner that blindly accepted stereotypes. *Time*’s reliance on gender, race, and class stereotypes effectually dramatized the crisis, consequently exploiting the victims.

For instance, as indicated by my analysis, the newsweekly confronted racial issues, bringing them out in the open. While racial issues need to be discussed instead of ignored, the articles invited the reader to pity Blacks and praise the noble actions of Whites. In bringing forth racial issues, the newsweeklies give readers the appearance of humility since society did not address these issues often in the first place. It would seem that the reader was attending to issues in a comic way because they were asked to open their minds to racial matters exposed by Hurricane Katrina. However, the newsweekly did not challenge the reader to view the world in a new way. It simply reinforced an attitude of humiliation and promoted the status quo.

The quasi-tragic frame also reified hegemonic gender norms and roles. *Time* invited readers to feel proud of the strong men who had come to the rescue of weak women. The emotional charge of these images and articles invited readers to feel as if
they were approaching the issue of gender in a neutral way, feeling empathy toward the weak, when in fact they were not pausing to consider why they had those emotional feelings in the first place. The public accepted these roles as so commonplace that few scholars addressed gender and Hurricane Katrina together as a research topic. This is deeply troublesome since the quasi-tragic frame situated these issues in an unapproachable place. Readers were not challenged to attempt to reach these captive issues. *Time* did not even present gender as an area where society needed to rethink roles.

As I have articulated in this chapter, each frame encouraged an array of social stereotypes. The frames of failure, strategy, chaos, control, death, rebirth, and support all reaffirmed gender, race, and class stereotypes. Each frame generated its own rules to establish power structures. Together they instituted the quasi-tragic frame, stunning readers’ attention and enabling their arrogance.

The arrogance of the quasi-tragic frame reduced the likelihood of self-reflexivity. For the reader, the comic façade severely masked the tragic frame. The quasi-tragic frame boasted humility while breeding humiliation. The feeling of humility then eliminated the potential for readers to make the effort to switch over into a true comic frame. The comic façade dangerously allowed the tragic frame to function seamlessly throughout the news coverage of Hurricane Katrina, reducing critical analysis of fundamental social issues. Therefore, it is essential that the quasi-tragic frame be exposed. My sense is that this frame appears frequently throughout the news media and is not limited to *Time*’s news coverage. Future studies could explore the presence of this frame in other news outlets. Since the news media profoundly shapes reality for millions
of people, it is crucial that readers/viewers are familiar with the implications of this symbolic approach to viewing the world. This chapter, then, serves as a mini-exposé of the quasi-tragic frame within the initial news media coverage of Hurricane Katrina.
“Most disasters come and go in a neat arc of calamity, followed by anger at the slow response, then cleanup. But Katrina cut a historic deadly swath across the South, and rebuilding can’t start until the cleanup is done.” (Booth Thomas, 2005, p. 32)

Functioning as both a looming prediction for the victims of Hurricane Katrina and an apocalyptic warning of the death of New Orleanians within the public’s memory, the title of an article appearing in the November 28, 2005 issue of Time Magazine succinctly encapsulates a significant concern with this mediated crisis: “Don’t Give In to Katrina Fatigue.” Ironically, immediately following this issue a noticeable lapse in Katrina-related cover stories occurred in Time Magazine. In 2005, Katrina was the cover story on four issues, including September 12, September 19, October 3, and November 28. It was not until almost two years later, August 13, 2007, that Time featured Katrina on the cover again. At the beginning of this issue, Time Magazine’s managing editor, Richard Stengel, remarked, “I had New Orleans fatigue. It felt as if I had heard and read enough about Katrina” (p. 6).

As indicated by the quotation in the November issue, Katrina was not a typical disaster. It was more “untidy” because of the unclear line between natural forces, pre-existing inequalities, organizational delays, and structural errors. As time passed, the
frames used to describe the crisis evolved and Hurricane Katrina faded into memory. Mediated memory is a potent force in directing public memory and, thus, public action. It is my contention that as time went by that the quasi-tragic frame became more exaggerated and consequently the frames likely led readers to become more detached from the rebuilding process in New Orleans.

The framing journey began with an interesting twist. In the October 3, 2005 issue (and the wake of Rita) Katrina evolved into its own frame, offering a comic bend to the overall framing of the crisis. A month and a half later, the November 28, 2005 issue embodied the frames of liminality, shame, failure, determined struggles, and support. Then, almost two years later, the August 13, 2007 issue captured the frames of imminent doom, shame, compassion, and failure. The framing trends constructed the quasi-tragic frame and encouraged the public to disassociate from the ongoing crisis in New Orleans.

October 3, 2005: Katrina’s Frame

“Was any storm ever watched as closely as Rita, Katrina’s unwelcome sister come to test the learning curve?”

(Gibbs, 2005, p. 34)

As improbable as it was for another major hurricane to strike the Gulf Coast on September 20, less than a month after Hurricane Katrina ravaged the region, Hurricane Rita arrived on the scene. In this context, discourse about Katrina appeared quickly in Time’s coverage. Katrina acted as a framing mechanism for characterizing the size of tragedy and the response after Rita. While the October 3, 2005 issue did not offer a cataloguing of the frames that Time used to describe Hurricane Katrina, it utilized Katrina as a frame for describing Rita. Therefore, this issue of Time is useful to explore because Katrina itself now shapes how the news media framed other tragedies.
Katrina: Offering Creative Support

Almost as soon as Katrina struck the Gulf coast, the concept of “Katrina’s Legacy” (Time, 2005, p. 13) became a widely used expression in referring to the region’s next hurricane. Katrina acted as the nation’s benchmark for what not to do when planning for and reacting to a hurricane. Hurricane Rita was characterized as “ACT TWO” when she brought “a second cruel assault on the Gulf Coast” (Gibbs, 2005, p. 30). Time’s coverage focused immediately on the question of “how well did we apply Katrina’s lessons?” As this quotation suggests, Time evaluated Rita in Katrina’s shadow.

In order to describe Rita, Time’s coverage relied on the public’s recent memory of Katrina. Consequently, Katrina became the key frame for describing the ensuing tragedy and understanding Rita became dependant on understanding Katrina. After almost four weeks of 24 hour news coverage on damage resulting from Hurricane Katrina, the public understood the potential consequences of Rita on a very personal level. Time reflected on readers’ memory of Katrina and the potential for Rita to cause complete chaos since New Orleans “was completely taken down” (Time, 2005, p. 20) by a similar hurricane. The country recently witnessed the transmogrification of New Orleans from being a very energized city to a “sad and sodden New Orleans, where army engineers had spent the past three weeks dumping sand and gravel to patch the levees” (Gibbs, 2005, p. 34).

The comparison of Rita to Katrina effectively intensified the tragedy (before it even happened) and established expectations for how the ensuing tragedy “should” look. The country has witnessed a similar phenomenon during past crises. In order to report a crisis event, media coverage relied on the public’s memory of particularly severe crises to
frame the discussion of the present crisis. These patterns become clear when examining news organizations’ reliance on the public’s memory of the Oklahoma City bombing to frame 9/11 as well as the reliance of the public’s memory of Columbine to frame the Virginia Tech shootings, for example. Just as news organizations consistently use Columbine to frame subsequent school shootings, Katrina now acts as the frame for describing hurricanes as well as poor and inept governmental response to other disasters.

Since Katrina was such an unprecedented event in regards to both natural effects and organizational failures, selecting a previous crisis to frame Katrina manifested strangely. Instead of using a previous crisis to frame the (delayed) governmental response to Katrina, the newsweekly settled on the topic of charity to frame the conversation. The crises of choice used to frame Katrina and Rita were the Asian Tsunami and 9/11. The tsunami represented the natural disaster component of Katrina, whereas 9/11 captured organizational issues. In reporting the amount of money donated by “Americans” “in the 10 days after Hurricane Katrina hit” the article immediately referenced the tsunami and 9/11 as a way to contextualize giving after Katrina and Rita: “In a similar period, they [Americans] donated $239 million after 9/11 and roughly $163 million after the Asian tsunami” (McGirt, 2005, p. 91). *Time* named this section of the newsweekly as “the disasters that keep on giving” (p. 91). The article celebrated how “charities have been reshaped by Katrina, the tsunami and 9/11” (p. 91). Though *Time* did not rely on the public’s memory of a similar disaster to describe Katrina and the recovery efforts, it did use this framing pattern to describe support. Even so, this typical framing pattern only appeared with Rita. Without relying on a previous crisis to explain the recovery efforts of Katrina, *Time* positioned Katrina to be a larger than life crisis.
Rita: The Successful Disaster

The frame of Katrina developed in only a few weeks; it was employed to frame Rita even before the public understood Katrina. Even so the frame reflected on Katrina’s effects and settled on the fact that despite the suffering that occurred with Katrina “still the ironies blew in one after another” (Gibbs, 2005, p. 34). By the time Rita rolled around specific, but contradictory, expectations formed. The public anticipated encountering significant failures but also expected officials to learn from failures related to Katrina. *Time* explained, “The previous storm was followed by so much human failure that it all but ensured this one would be preceded by failure” (Gibbs, 2005, p. 34). The “Act Two” mentality took hold in New Orleans and people expected Rita to resemble Katrina. With all of the tragedies during and after Katrina in mind, “people weren’t in a mood to take chances” (Gibbs, 2005, p. 35). Actually many decided not to wait around because they felt that “the time for warnings is over” (Gibbs, 2005, p. 35). These types of references depicted the local atmosphere as highly cautious, thus using the frame of Katrina as a lesson.

In tracking the storm, *Time* employed the frame of Katrina to describe the circumstances with Rita. At first, the media predicted the worst: “By Wednesday Rita was a Category 5 hurricane, one of the three meanest storms ever tracked in the Atlantic, moving at about 9 m.p.h. toward her prey” (Gibbs, 2005, p. 35). Though Rita was not as strong as Katrina when it hit the coast, *Time* still referenced the potential for a crisis larger than Katrina. As the cover story article explained, “Everywhere across the city and beyond, people imagined the worst, and given what they had been watching night after night on the news, that wasn’t hard to do” (Gibbs, 2005, p. 36). When the hurricane
finally did meet up with the coast, “Rita was so big and slow, she still caused trouble hundreds of miles in every direction, including Katrina’s stomping grounds” (Gibbs, 2005, p. 36). The frame of Katrina functioned to exacerbate the impending crisis. With what the world had thought to be “the worst case scenario” behind them, Rita threatened to be the final blow that would destroy New Orleans. The frame of Katrina drew upon memories of pandemonium, taking the term to a new level of meaning.

With the potential for an even more severe crisis with Rita, the media suggested that the successful response to Rita was due to Katrina’s warnings. For Texans, “Katrina was a pop quiz” (Gibbs, 2005, p. 39) that encouraged residents to take the hurricane warnings seriously. Time presented the frame of Katrina as available because of a sacrifice: “But if New Orleans was a vast urban sacrifice to greater knowledge, at least the experience was being studied at every level” (Gibbs, 2005, p. 39). The frame of Katrina gave Gulf coast residents a chance at surviving the hurricane. Residents now had Katrina to thank for surviving Rita: “Hard on the heels of Katrina, Hurricane Rita roared across the Gulf and ripped into the coast along the Texas-Louisiana border. This time, however, the coast was prepared” (Time, 2005, p. 40).

Even though the frame of Katrina was only available because of New Orleans’ “sacrifices,” Time attributed the successful evacuation effort during Rita to the Katrina frame. The cover story article listed all of the strategies taken because of Katrina’s lessons:

Meanwhile, the city recited its lessons like a chastened schoolboy. Buses were waiting at the Convention Center, along with half a million meals and a field hospital, in case the city endured a replay. A new $4.5 million communications system using
military satellites was ready in case the phones went out again. But if the city was wiser, so were the people. They were not counting on anyone else to save them this time. (Gibbs, 2005, p. 39)

The newsweekly eagerly used the frame of Katrina as a lesson learned, as if the suffering that led to the existence of the Katrina frame was the happy ending that the nation had been searching for all along. What was itself a tragic event had, ironically, become a positive learning experience:

Several newly repaired levees were again breached by Rita’s heavy rains and an 8-ft. tidal storm surge, submerging many of the areas flooded earlier. This time the city was considered lucky: the rain was much less than expected and most residents were already out. (Time, 2005, p. 41)

The frame of Katrina, while extremely tragic in the beginning, became the nation’s frame for hope. With Rita, the news coverage became much more comic (in the Burkean sense) than tragic. Time’s coverage directed their readers toward the lessons learned; at this point in Time’s coverage Katrina could be credited with creating a more humble nation. Where else could things be taken? It certainly could not get worse than Katrina. In talking about Rita, the frame of Katrina turned comic. The entire cover story article was much more sympathetic to officials and honored their success: “The culture of blame thrives in this climate, so it was easy to miss the victories” (Gibbs, 2005, p. 34). While this reminder was present in the October issue, the comic sensibility would quickly fade.
November 28, 2005: A Liminal New Orleans

“New Orleans Blues
It’s worse than you think.
Three months after Katrina, the city still suffers”
(Booth Thomas, 2005, cover)

By November, Rita had become a faint memory and coverage refocused on Katrina’s wrath. The central frames included in this issue of Time were the frames of liminality, shame, failure, determined struggle, and support. These frames captured an interesting moment in the coverage of Katrina. In this issue Time began to focus on a clearer list of culprits, struggled to capture New Orleans’ identity, and the frame of support became less celebratory and increasingly desperate. In addition, this issue became more depersonalized as the coverage reached farther away from the crisis. Ultimately, Time’s coverage returned more to a quasi-tragic state.

_Liminality_

The articles in Time painted New Orleans as a city marked by uncertainty and trapped in limbo.6 “At night darkness falls, and it’s quiet. ‘It’s spooky out there. There’s no life,’ says cardiologist Pat Breaux” (Booth Thomas, 2005, p. 32). Caught somewhere betwixt the past and future, Time’s coverage relied on the frame of liminality to depict New Orleans in an eerie, unnatural, and indeterminate state.

The article introduced the frame of liminality in a manner that positioned New Orleans as currently unidentifiable—a city without a present identity:

New Orleans will never again be the New Orleans of Aug. 28, 2005, the day before Katrina hit. But that New Orleans was not the city of 30 years ago either. There is no reason to think New Orleans will not once again be a vibrant place, but it will take
time, and more time than one might have thought just a month ago. (Booth Thomas, 2005, p. 37)

The nostalgic glance backwards toward the once “vibrant” New Orleans intensified the post-Katrina longing for New Orleans’ rehabilitation. Even so, as McDaniel (2000) maintains, “While admiration may take place with respect to what is or what was, its temporal direction is forward” (p. 58). This is certainly the case in the November issue where the glance backwards was clearly temporary with the newsweekly obviously struggling to name the city’s future.

As such, articles positioned the frame of liminality as a fleeting frame, or a frame that was destined to disappear as New Orleans was re-identified. In the meantime, in an attempt to cope with New Orleans’ loss of identity, the city was viewed momentarily through the frame of liminality. The main force of the articles’ melancholic tone settled on the recognition that New Orleans will likely never again be the New Orleans of old. In the cover story article New Orleanians’ attempt to revive “old New Orleans” was described as futile:

On Bourbon Street in the French Quarter, the neon lights are flashing, the booze is flowing, and the demon demolition men of Hurricane Katrina are ogling a showgirl performing in a thong. The Bourbon House is shucking local oysters again, Daiquiri’s is churning out its signature alcoholic slushies, and Mardi Gras masks are once again on sale. But drive north toward the hurricane-ravaged housing subdivisions off Lake Pontchartrain and the masks you see aren’t made for Carnival. They are industrial-strength respirators, stark white, the only things capable of stopping a stench that
turns the stomach and dredges up bad memories of a night nearly three months ago (Booth Thomas, 2005, p. 32).

Because of the disparity between the two scenes, hopes of recreating New Orleans as it was were dubbed absurd. McDaniel (2000) speaks to this sense of longing: “Wishing things would have been otherwise and hoping that they will be a certain way positions the human subject between past and future, melancholy and longing” (p. 49). It seems that the longing sensation was predicated around a city-wide identity crisis.

Pre-Katrina, New Orleans had crafted an image of itself as the “big easy,” “the crescent city,” and “the home of Mardi Gras,” which gave it a national reputation as a place of vitality and rich cultural heritage. Because New Orleanians and the rest of the United States embraced New Orleans’ pre-Katrina identity, the loss of such a unique identity almost caused the city to disappear from the national arena. New Orleans’ lesser known slogan, “the city that care forgot,” has in the wake of Katrina become the more known identity. Such an identity hindered the rebuilding process because it recognized the city as long forgotten and far beyond fixing. The cover story article recognized this identity and its potential, (but impractical) future, “The city that care forgot is in the throes of an identity crisis, torn between its shady, bead-tossing past and the sanitized Disneyland future some envision” (Booth Thomas, 2005, p. 32). This quotation appeared to indicate that there were no reasonable options for reconstruction.

Without a reasonable identity, the public will likely forget the city. After two years the city’s Mardi Gras tourist count already had nearly flat-lined from 6,135,890 (Pre-Katrina Facts) to a meager 800,000 in 2007 (Press Release January). Even so, the low number was described as a “resounding success” by the city’s official tourism
website. New Orleans’ predicament offers scholars a valuable lesson in learning how to enhance communication after crises. It seemed that without first concretely naming or identifying the city, little would be done to identify a solution and certainly little would be done to revive the city. As long as New Orleans remains unidentifiable, the city will be neglected. Even New Orleans’ official tourism website offered a special section to justify New Orleans’ symbolic significance to the United States. The section was boldly named “Why New Orleans is Important to America” (www.neworleansonline.com). Alongside this section, the site also listed press releases featuring the city’s current statistics, prominently showcasing a section that lists “Pre-Katrina Facts” (www.neworleansonline.com). The two sections together referenced the city’s longing for the past.

New Orleans was desperate for a revived identity. Without one, the public would walk away from the social issues and rebuilding efforts. The city desperately needed a strategic plan that marketed a new identity for New Orleans – an identity that combined the flavor of pre-Katrina New Orleans and the perseverance of post-Katrina New Orleans to revive the nation out of the plaguing “Katrina fatigue” mindset and into recharged support for the city’s future identity.

Shame

As with the frame of liminality, the frame of shame first began to surface in Time’s November, 2005 issue. At this point in the newsweekly’s coverage of New Orleans, the nation had begun to realize that the recovery was proceeding at a sluggish rate. The cover, which characterized this issue by the frame of shame, depicted a New Orleans that had not changed much in the past three months. The cover featured an
undersized box-like house covered with markings from rescue workers who attempted to communicate about the desperate search for bodies, alive or dead. The equally small front yard was littered with atypical items. The most obvious item, which appeared to be a stove that Katrina had personally abused, almost consumed the entire yard. The caption reinforced the image, “New Orleans Blues: It’s worse than you think. Three months after Katrina, the city still suffers” (Time, 2005, cover). The cover, in effect, questioned why nobody cleared the area of debris. The articles within the issue answered the cover’s daunting question, responding that the (lack of) efforts have been shameful.

After creating a frame of shame on its cover, Time’s next engagement with Katrina was a half-page photo on the index page of an enormous pile of debris towering over a worker. Readers learned from the caption that “30 workers in New Orleans clear debris left in the wake of Hurricane Katrina” (Usher, 2005, p. 5). This image and the caption reinforced a shameful response. The number highlighted in the caption was communicated as staggeringly low by the correlating image. Appearing below the image was the newsweekly’s index. The first point relating to Katrina referenced “Katrina Fatigue: New Orleans is still a disaster zone. What happened to Washington’s plans to rebuild the area?” (Time, 2005, p. 5). As this line suggested, the newsweekly communicated a lack, something missing from the larger narrative. As the question answered, the missing piece happened to be “Washington’s plans to rebuild the area.” In the meantime, the narrative continued to define New Orleans by this absence, a trend that was present ever since the beginning of Time’s coverage. That narrative, as will become more obvious in my analysis of the 2007 issue, became central to the identity of New Orleans. Because the responsibility of the shameful reaction was placed predominantly
on various governmental organizations, public concern easily dwindled, leaving New Orleans paralyzed in a state of disarray. The index previewed the frame of shame and the subsequent consequences that consumed every article within the newsweekly.

The first New Orleans-related article that appeared within the November issue was the cover story, which prominently featured a sense of shame. On the page previewing the article’s content were the words: “Neighborhoods are still dark, garbage piles up on the street, and bodies are still being found. The city’s pain is a nation’s shame” (Booth Thomas, 2005, p. 30). This direct reference to shame invited readers to interpret the government article in a critical tone. While the title referenced a “nation’s shame,” the remainder of the article absolved readers of responsibility for shame. This notion engaged the quasi-tragic frame by omitting readers from responsibility in cleaning up New Orleans, while allowing readers to feel comfortable about their inaction.

In place of reader responsibility, the article introduced other culprits who have reacted shamefully. After describing the current situation in New Orleans, the article continued to explain “the latest insult? The nation’s flood-insurance program ran out of money for the first time since its founding in 1968, and some insurers temporarily stopped issuing checks” (Booth Thomas, 2005, p. 32). The entire shameful situation was attributed to others, and at this point clearly began to merge with the frame of failure. As noted in the article, “FEMA continues to be a four-letter word in Louisiana” (Booth Thomas, 2005, p. 35). By the time the article quoted real estate agent, Sherry Masinter, saying “You’ve forgotten us” (Booth Thomas, 2005, p. 33), “you” had already been rhetorically linked to FEMA and insurance companies, not the dignified readership of Time.
Failure

The November, 2005 issue began to hone in on a clear culprit for the failures in New Orleans. Whereas the early issues of *Time* highlighted the failures of a variety of individuals and elements, including Hurricane Katrina, the Bush administration, Governor Blanco, Mayor Nagin, the Army Corps of Engineers, and FEMA Director Brown, the November issue advanced the frame of failure with respect to a single organization. The issue still recognized others’ failures; however, the Army Corps of Engineers emerged as the principal culprit.

The cover story article named this culprit directly, “Poor levee design by the Army Corps of Engineers caused the flood, not Katrina” (Booth Thomas, 2005, p. 33). At this point, the issue conveyed that the crisis in New Orleans was not the result of a natural disaster. Instead, what really caused the majority of the tragedy was the failed levee system. This statement (re)asserted who was responsible for the failures in New Orleans. No longer was an intangible force of nature left to bear the brunt of the responsibility for the loss of life and property in New Orleans, but three months after the storm *Time* named a governmental organization as the responsible party.

Consequently, as *Time* centered the frame of failure on the Corps, *Time* also positioned the frame of failure to address the Corps’ overseers. The cover story article continued to elaborate on the previous statement, noting “That puts the burden on Washington to help. . . The breached levee, shored up with sandbags, is still leaking onto city streets” (Booth Thomas, 2005, p. 33). Thus, as I noted in the beginning of this section, this issue began to identify a clearer culprit; however, because the culprit was
just beginning to be named in *Time*, the reporting continued to identify other culprits. The Corps functioned as the gateway into justifying others’ failures.

Much of the frame of failure relied on slow congressional timelines. For instance, the cover story article explained, “The delays and squabbles mean that Congress’s $62.3 billion largesse has mostly gone unspent. More than half—$37.5 billion—is sitting in FEMA’s account, waiting for a purpose” (Booth Thomas, 2005, p. 35). Through the frame of failure *Time* described a problem caused by the Corps that was then exacerbated by the system that (not surprisingly) is still failing the public. With the Corps as the clear culprit, the article used the frame of failure to spiral outward to other culprits. With one culprit clearly identified, others could easily come into focus. A similar statement to the previous quotation addressed money and lengthened the chain to meet the Bush Administration:

Under fire for being slow to respond, the Bush Administration had rushed two emergency supplemental bills to Congress with little thought about how the money would be spent or how fast. Now FEMA is ‘awash in money,’ says a Democratic appropriations aide. (Booth Thomas, 2005, p. 35)

In addition to the Bush Administration, the article pointed to ignorance of Republican congressional employees: “The comment of a G.O.P. aide was typical: ‘We want to see them helping themselves before they ask us for help’” (Booth Thomas, 2005, p. 35). From one clear culprit, the article drew connections from the Corps to Republicans. Certainly, *Time* made these links throughout the issues that followed immediately after the storm, but those links were not as concrete. They originated from a largely intangible force of nature and scattered to reactions of a variety of individuals and organizations.
With the frame of failure focused on the Corps, the links to others’ failures became much more tangible, and, thus, much more believable.

*Determined Struggle*

As the issues became further removed from the beginning of the crisis, they were more depersonalized. While the first two issues of *Time* (appearing immediately after the storm) were inundated with personal stories and tragedies, the personal stories in the November, 2005 issue were not central. Instead, the personal stories were scattered randomly throughout the newsweekly with a medium-sized section dedicated to foregrounding the experiences of a few families located near the back of the newsweekly.

In this section, the frame of determined struggle highlighted individual experiences in how to continue life after the levees were breached. The cover described the dynamics of the community with the words, “New Orleans Blues” (*Time*, 2005, cover). The frame focused on the everyday experience of those trying to make it in a falling city. One image depicted a man wearing a respirator mask working around a small house. The caption explained the situation: “Friends clean out the mold-infested home of a woman who has no flood insurance” (Usher, 2005, p. 31). Another image captured a man and woman on the streets of downtown New Orleans sifting through piles of shoes. The caption remarked, “Looking for anything that might be of use, residents pick through flood-damaged shoes and clothing that have been dumped by stores onto the sidewalk” (p. 33). These images described “ordinary” or the “everyday” experiences of post-Katrina New Orleanians. While the newsweekly did not ask the question directly, the images and their captions beg the question: where was the governmental aide? The presence of these images in *Time* offered a subtle critique of the absence of officials.
A more direct reference to governmental aid appeared in the index previewing an article that featured the frame of determined struggle. It reads, “Survivors: Meet five displaced families who are struggling to rebuild their lives—with or without outside help” (Time, 2005, p. 5). This reference illuminated the connection of the frame of failure to the survivors section, reminding readers of why the families were featured through the frame of determined struggle in the first place. The newsweekly almost directly identified this frame to readers and marked it as caused by the failures of others. With the frame of determined struggle previewed by the index and the other articles that captured the frame of failure, readers were invited to proceed through the survivors section with the frame of failure in the front of their minds. The frame of determined struggle became further evidence for the frame of failure.

Among the five stories that featured survivors, three were related to New Orleans. Within the three related stories, the plot was oddly consistent. Typically, the family was lucky to be together after Katrina hit and the levees broke. Soon after, they were relocated and struggled to continue life in a new environment. While they continued to have bad days, the families were doing the best they could to “make it” after the crisis. The consistent plot normalized the experience of “making it” in tough times, a plot that was reminiscent of the American dream. As can be expected with traditional journalistic writing styles, the stories found a happy ending despite the significant struggles.

In fact, the stories all began by focusing on those struggles. For instance, one family was described as doing their best to fit into a new community, “but that doesn’t mean they all don’t have what Nathaniel calls ‘dark days,’ when he admits he has drunk too much Courvoisier ‘as a crutch’ or not talked to his wife at all” (Eisenberg &
In another story, a senior in high school was forced to relocate without her family to New York, where “she struggled to maintain her Southern manners when she heard people say that those who had lived below sea level got what they deserved” (Sieger & Chu, 2005, p. 44). Additionally, the third story featured a mother of two from the Ninth Ward:

Davis has lately found it difficult to cope with their needs. ‘She has her days, just like I do,’ Brown gently explains. ‘Sometimes people don’t feel like getting up in the morning.’ But Brown seems to handle the pressure. If she has an expertise, it is surviving the surprises of fate. (Kher & Billips, 2005, p. 47)

The families’ struggles functioned to “authenticate” the plot, allowing the story to appear credible and remain unquestioned.

After demonstrating the families’ struggles, the story reached the point where the families found resolve. Within the first scenario, the family overcame the “little” things through referencing the near loss of an infant member of the family: “At times, that near tragedy makes it a little easier for the family to accept the mundane, daily struggles of restarting their life” (Eisenberg & Grossman, 2005, p. 40). The family in this story also “like[d] to imagine that in three to five years, they may be able to return to New Orleans” (Eisenberg & Grossman, 2005, p. 41). The moral of the story seemed to be not “to dwell on the past” (Eisenberg & Grossman, 2005, p. 41).

The other families experienced similar resolve. With the second family, “‘Everything is falling back into place’” (Sieger & Chu, 2005, p. 47), while the third family is “happily out of the Ninth Ward” (Kher & Billips, 2005, p. 47), and “things are looking up” (Kher & Billips, 2005, p. 47). These are token examples that made the
exceptional experience appear typical. The acknowledgement of the struggles distorted the fact that these families’ stories were tokenized experiences.

Support

The frame of determined struggle established a useful context for the frame of support. *Time* dedicated an entire article to addressing the need for continued support. In fact, the frame of support assumed a more desperate position in the November issue than it had in past issues. The November issue recognized the urgency of reinvigorating dwindling support. The feature article relied on good people who unfortunately were wronged by their government.

The headline of the article warned, “Don’t Give in to Katrina Fatigue: There are still millions of Gulf Coast Americans who need our help” (Brazile, 2005, p. 39). The notion of Katrina fatigue first appeared in the November issue near Thanksgiving. The article was authored by a New Orleans native who reflected on her family while relying on the context of Thanksgiving to further her claims. At the beginning of the article, the author praised the public for their recent charity: “This week my Louisiana family will be giving thanks to all the Americans who opened their hearts, their homes and their wallets to help the hundreds of thousands of citizens who fled the wrath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita” (Brazile, 2005, p. 39). The article continued by linking generosity with American spirit: “We will always be grateful for that generous outpouring of the American spirit” (Brazile, 2005, p. 39). While New Orleans was stuck in a liminal state, the rest of the nation seemed to be clinging to a traditional identity. Similarly to the many references to the American dream, the article linked a kindhearted nature with being an “American.”
Immediately after the article reflected on American generosity, the reader began to witness the critical turn. At this point the author introduced the problem:

Yet for all our blessings, we are dismayed to hear news from Washington about Katrina fatigue in Congress and the decision by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to disband its emergency-housing program on Dec. 1 for those still scattered to the four winds. (Brazile, 2005, p. 39)

This statement contrasted with American spirit to draw a line between public loyal supporters and governmental failures. Before, in the issues that appeared immediately after the hurricane, *Time* positioned their entire magazine to solicit public help, relying on pathos to convince the public to offer support. In November, only one article stood dedicated to soliciting support. Continued support seems dependent on a solid argument. The author attempted to capture New Orleanians as worth fighting for:

I know I speak for the millions of Americans from Louisiana, Mississippi and the other Gulf Coast states when I say we are determined to rebuild our coastal communities down home. We are good people. We add a lot to the life of the nation. We are counting on you not to forget us now that the cameras have moved on.

(Brazile, 2005, p. 39)

In justifying the worth of the community, the author situated New Orleanians as deserving support. To drive the point home, the author referenced a memory of her father through a personal anecdote. She celebrated her father’s community in New Orleans: “He loved his neighbors. Today, in Katrina-imposed exile, he misses his old community” (Brazile, 2005, p. 39). In addition, the author discussed Thanksgiving family traditions.
While her reflections personalized support, making her experiences more relatable to other Americans, the article relied more on references to failures than personal stories: “Members of Congress appear to be tired of hearing about the needs of evacuees, the lives lost and the vestiges of formerly thriving communities along the devastated Gulf Coast” (Brazile, 2005, p. 39). By referencing failures, the article created an opportunity for readers to distinguish themselves from careless congresspersons. The article, then, urged, “We simply can’t afford Katrina fatigue. There’s too much work to do” (Brazile, 2005, p. 39).

Appeals for readers to separate themselves from congresspersons made the argument for the reader. With a more desperate tone, the frame of support lost persuasive punch. Readers were not led by heartbreaking images and articles to aid New Orleanians. While the enthymematic structure of the September, 2005 issues invited readers to support New Orleanians, the November, 2005 issue article unconvincingly made the decision for readers to support New Orleanians. Also, by positioning Katrina fatigue as already occurring, the text encourages readers to disengage in the argument and move on to the next article.

August 13, 2007: Doom and Shame

“To Our Readers
Why We Returned to New Orleans.
Two years later, the country is still failing a great American city”
(Stengel, 2007, p. 6)

It took almost two years for Time to churn out another cover story issue on Hurricane Katrina. The absence in extensive coverage on Katrina, even for the first anniversary after the storm, was stunning. At this point, the coverage was the most tragic. As time elapsed, the articles had begun to focus on what New Orleans’ future
would hold. Unfortunately for New Orleanians, according to *Time*, that future seemed bleak. The 2007 issue characterized New Orleans by the frames of imminent doom, shame, compassion, and failure. While enough time had not passed to prove this claim, the quasi-tragic coverage predicted another elongated lapse in coverage.

*Imminent Doom*

Within the 2007 issue, an exposé reporting style described New Orleans as destined to experience another Katrina-like crisis. The article exposed readers immediately to this frame on the cover page, which relied on two prominent phrases to encapsulate the issue’s theme: “Why New Orleans still isn’t safe” and “How a perfect storm of big-money politics, shoddy engineering and environmental ignorance is setting up the city for another catastrophe” (Grunwald, 2007, cover). These phrases previewed the frame of imminent doom by directing readers’ attention toward a future that was defined by a more intensified Katrina-like crisis. The cover did not pose the question: “Is New Orleans safe?” Instead, that answer had already been determined and the focus adjusted to the reasons why New Orleans was *not* safe. The follow-up phrase, referencing “a perfect storm,” (re)defines the meaning of the word “storm.” In place of using this word to reference the hurricane, “storm” now referred to “big-money politics, shoddy engineering and environmental ignorance.” The focus merged with a natural agent to a human agent, and the frame adjusted accordingly. The frame of imminent doom only intensified throughout.

After flipping through a few advertisements to reach the index, readers encountered the same frame billed through a different set of words: “Drowning: New Orleans’ endangered storm shield” (*Time*, 2007, p. 5). The message that New Orleans
was sinking and, thus, losing valuable land needed to protect the city from ocean storms was a common way the frame of imminent doom was enacted. One page later, readers encountered a letter from the editor which was saturated with more phrases signaling imminent doom: “We discovered a city that is still vulnerable to disaster,” “If you thought Katrina was bad, just wait till the next one” (Time, 2007, p. 6). In these two statements, Time’s managing editor, Rick Stengel, referred to his personal experience based on a trip with other editors from Time, Inc. This section served to promote Time’s ethos and lessen the ethos of the overseers of recovery efforts in New Orleans, specifically the Army Corps of Engineers. Stengel’s article established Time’s coverage as a dutiful response to the Corps’ “dearth of responsibility” (p. 6). The letter from Stengel continued by aligning readers with Time and against those causing imminent doom. Toward the end of Stengel’s letter he expressed, “We hope that our story is a warning to Congress, the Corps and the leaders of New Orleans that business as usual is just not acceptable” (p. 6). At this juncture it is clear that Time was using imminent doom to reaffirm the quasi-tragic frame. The letter presenting the 2007 issue illustrated that the newsweekly was motivated to “warn” Congress. However, the ode to aid New Orleans was rooted in scapegoating the Corps. This scenario was concurrent with the remainder of the issue, which was inundated with both the frame of imminent doom as well as the quasi-tragic frame.

In fact, if one were to trace a map of imminent doom through the 2007 issue of Time, the map would stretch through almost every page devoted to Katrina except for a meager two pages briefly showcasing Katrina survivors (Usher, 2007, pp. 40-41). Aside from this interlude, the frame of imminent doom reached from the cover to the index.
(Time, 2007, p. 5), and from the editor’s letter (Stengel, 2007, p. 6) to a special page discussing New Orleans two years after Katrina through various links to Internet sites (Time, 2007, p. 9). The frame was also evident on each page of the cover story (Grunwald, 2007, pp. 28-39), as well as on a diagram of New Orleans thrown in the middle of the cover story (Time, 2007, pp. 32-33). This map of imminent doom documents the extensiveness to which the 2007 issue focused on this frame.

Since the cover issue signaled the theme of this issue, delving into the story seems an appropriate next step. The frame of imminent doom was most visible in the cover story article, which warned of a catastrophic future for New Orleans, maintaining the Corps is “staying with traditional engineering that didn’t work in the first place” (Grunwald, 2007, p. 31). This reference linked the Corps’ past failures to imminent future failures. Similarly, the article described that the Corps was fixing the levees by making them larger. Locals have dubbed this larger-than-life levee system the Great Wall of Louisiana. The article disapproved of the Corps’ reconstruction plan, often referencing the past, “The Great Wall [of Louisiana] concept sounds a lot like the mistakes of the past” (Grunwald, 2007, p. 31). The article drew attention away from the Katrina crisis and onward toward the next crisis. In this two-year anniversary issue, the focus was centered on forgetting (not remembering) the crisis. The story served an odd memory function by turning interest toward the next crisis instead of honoring Katrina victims. This tendency made it clear that the news coverage continued to exploit victims through dramatization. So much so, that the article directed interest toward a contrived, but apparently imminent crisis.
The question for readers became, *what is the point in continuing to support relief if doom is already imminent?* This question emerged because of articles describing the problem in New Orleans as being a matter of poor decisions by the Army Corps of Engineers and not a funding issue. “To prevent another disaster, the construction addicts of the Corps, their enablers in Congress and the U.S.’s cockamamie approach to water resources will all have to change” (Grunwald, 2007, p. 31). The message was clearly that it does not matter how much money or hours of service readers contributed because things were not going to change. In fact, the articles demonstrated that more funds to the Army Corps of Engineers could exacerbate the problem:

Many of the same coastal scientists and engineers who sounded alarms about the vulnerability of New Orleans long before Katrina are warning that the Army Corps is poised to repeat its mistakes—and extend them along the entire Louisiana coast. If you liked Katrina, they say, you’ll love what’s coming next. (Grunwald, 2007, p. 30) 

These statements contributed to eliminating a frame of support in the August 13, 2007 issue of *Time*. Without this frame, readers may be less likely to view this crisis in a comic manner.

*Shame*

While the frame of imminent doom was pervasive, Katrina’s two year anniversary was most prominently marked by a single word: “shame.” On the cover of the 2007 issue, a photograph of an undersized wall appears along with the words, “Two years after Katrina, this floodwall is all that stands between New Orleans and the next hurricane. It’s pathetic” (Grunwald, 2007, cover). As this statement suggests, not only did the coverage characterize the (in)actions of the Corps and other governmental organizations, the
coverage was also quite condemnatory. The clear judgment was that what happened (or did not happen) in New Orleans was shameful. The articles attempted to seem unbiased by attributing the judgment call as originating elsewhere: “Someday, historians will find in the saga of New Orleans a 21st century morality tale about wealth and poverty, black and white, man and nature” (Stengel, 2007, p. 6). References to social issues were rare within this issue of Time. Often, the articles that addressed morality focused on the Corps and “man-made”7 structures, while human beings were mentioned mostly as an afterthought.

References to “man-made” failures illustrated a variety of shameful acts as well as transferred blame from the hurricane to “man” (Stengel, 2007, p. 6). Whereas immediately following the storm, social issues were attributed to the hurricane and the subsequent flooding, two years after the fact, references were made to poor engineering. The article comments:

Today, Corps leaders are rebuilding New Orleans levees, but they say it will still take four more years and billions of dollars more just to protect the city from a 100-year storm, the protection they were required to provide before Katrina. That’s still paltry compared with Amsterdam’s 10,000-year storm protection. (Grunwald, 2007, p. 30)

References to Amsterdam’s strong system provided an excellent contrast to the lower engineering standards of the Corps. Those meek standards were exacerbated further by a departure from Katrina’s fault.

The coverage shifted from initially referring to a large “Category 5 killer” to a “Category 3 storm that missed New Orleans, where it was at worst a weak 2” (Grunwald, 2007, p. 30). This shift positioned the Corps as responsible for creating defective levees
that should have stood up to Katrina’s winds. The cover story article capitalized on this
difference in storm size, explaining “the Corps then made such egregious engineering
errors that it wasn’t even ready for a smaller storm” (Grunwald, 2007, p. 34). The article
went on to track the history of New Orleans’ hurricane protection, focusing on how New
Orleans’ French settlers did not need levees to protect themselves from hurricanes.
Instead, the wetlands protected them; however, “now the Gulf has advanced some 20
miles (32km) inland, thanks in large part to the Army Corps” (Grunwald, 2007, p. 31).
This historical account of shameful decisions crescendos with references to requests to
follow a different path: “The Corps ordered communities to imprison the river in a
narrow channel with a strict ‘levees only’ policy, rejecting calls to give the river room to
spread out” (Grunwald, 2007, p. 31). These references to the excessive shameful
(in)actions of the Corps had a variety of implications.

One reference to social problems in New Orleans implied that “man-made”
failures relating to the storm caused “squalor.” The article explained, “The city’s
defenses should have withstood its surges, and if they had we never would have seen the
squalor in the Superdome” (Grunwald, 2007, p. 30). This statement suggested that
without the failures of “man-made” structures, “squalor” would not exist (at least to the
readers of Time). For instance, when warnings of Katrina came through to the nation, the
government could have been more active in evacuating those who could not afford to
evacuate. Pre-Katrina, Black residents and the poor did not exist to a national audience.
New Orleans was widely understood as a fun-loving tourist destination. As it stands, the
“reality” in New Orleans was depicted through tourists’ eyes. In the case of the August
13, 2007 issue, that reality was structured in such a way that it seemed that squalor only
came about because of the Corps. The root of the problems in New Orleans was relegated to “shoddy engineering” (Grunwald, 2007, p. 30), “lethal mistakes” (Grunwald, 2007, p. 34), and “catastrophic failure” (Grunwald, 2007, p. 30). Throughout the course of the 2007 issue, the Corps was ceremoniously shamed.

To cap off shaming the Corps, the 2007 issue ended with an update of a group of survivors. As it was formatted in the issue, the brief section of survivors provided readers with the human implications of the Corps’ (in)actions. This section happened to be the only one that incorporated a human element. Whereas the September 2005 issues of *Time* made a spectacle of the individuals affected by the storm, two years later the coverage was (re)focused to faulty structures, the Corps, Congress, and so on. This new focus encouraged readers to blame more and empathize less.

**Compassion (Media as the Savior)**

While the frame of shame constructed an image of a reckless Army Corps, the frame of compassion emerged to unveil a philanthropic *Time* Magazine. The letter from the editor established a clear contrast for *Time*, who was a self-described savior of New Orleanians and the Corps, who was a *Time*-described evildoer. The letter from the editor was headlined by, “Why we returned to New Orleans” (Stengel, 2007, p. 6). The frame of compassion was introduced in the context of the editor’s trip to New Orleans. Stengel shared his experiences through a compassionate tone, “I learned that New Orleanians were deeply disturbed by the pace of reconstruction and how that effort was being ignored by the rest of America” (Stengel, 2007, p. 6). Even though Stengel held a position that affected public attention toward New Orleans and it took him two years to
visit New Orleans, he separated himself and *Time* from those who ignored rebuilding efforts.

In response to the lack of interest from “the rest of America,” Stengel positioned the issue as “a warning to Congress, the Corps and the leaders of New Orleans that business as usual is just not acceptable” (Stengel, 2007, p. 6). The frame of compassion was embedded deeply within his letter, functioning to place Stengel and the newsweekly as a concerned group. The editor also introduced *Time* Magazine’s plans to raise awareness for New Orleanians. Stengel explained, “*Time* is going to work with the city of New Orleans to sponsor a presidential debate there about the city’s future” (Stengel, 2007, p. 6). The leadership of *Time* in raising awareness for New Orleanians exemplified compassion. Stengel also lauded the people of New Orleans, saying, “If there is one reason to believe that this great American city can rise again, it is the resilience of its people” (Stengel, 2007, p. 6).

The letter from the editor capitalized on the lack of compassion exemplified by the Corps and positioned *Time* as the new leading force in saving New Orleans. This switch in leadership roles, from the Corps to *Time*, may have generated credibility for *Time*. In essence, *Time* was participating in a tug of war contest with the government in order to take public distrust from that outlet to increase trust in the media, effectually creating an image of a media that was on the side of the people.

Unfortunately, while *Time’s* coverage may have been considered to be on the side of readers, their coverage was most certainly not on the side of New Orleanians. Instead, New Orleanians were exploited as part of a larger spectacle. Kellner (2003) argues “that media spectacles are those phenomena of media culture that embody contemporary
society’s basic values, serve to initiate individuals into its way of life, and dramatize its controversies and struggles” (p. 2). *Time* dramatized New Orleanians to fit into a mediated spectacle by dooming New Orleans to another disaster – one that would be even worse. This focus on spectacle profoundly impacted the identity of New Orleans, but the spectacle also functioned to affect *Time’s* own identity. Indeed, the focus became “a media-mediated spectacle, with the media itself part and parcel of the story” (p. 100).

Regarding the spectacle in New Orleans, *Time* Magazine was mediated to be the compassionate savior of New Orleans and ultimately a part of the solution.

*Failure*

Even though *Time* was already comfortably positioned as the compassionate savior, the frame of failure clarified the frame of compassion. This frame was the most complex because it embodied several unique themes that were not as apparent in earlier issues of *Time*. The first prominent theme concerned issues of temporality. The frame of failure responded to the fact that the story was being reported two years after the storm occurred and not only was the world aware of the failures that played a part in the crisis in New Orleans two years prior, now *Time* had evidence to show that those failures were being repeated. The letter from the editor in the 2007 issue explained, “Two years later, the country is still failing a great American city” (Stengel, 2007, p. 6). The failure was marked as a continuous event, further intensifying the frame of failure. A similar statement appeared as the title in the cover story article, “How years of misguided policies and bureaucratic bungling left New Orleans defenseless against Katrina—and why it may happen again” (Grunwald, 2007, p. 28). As this title suggests, temporality very strongly affected the degree to which the failures were characterized in *Time’s*
Leff (1988) highlights the importance of temporality with regard to discourse, noting “Temporal movement . . . frames the action of the various argumentative and stylistic elements” (p. 26). Thus, temporality served an important function in legitimizing arguments within *Time’s* coverage of those responsible for structural failures in New Orleans.

The newsweekly tended to focus on temporality in varying degrees. In some instances, the use of temporality appeared less direct, where the article would reference the passing of time and readers were encouraged to make their own conclusions. On the cover, the image of a subpar wall was punctuated by the words: “Two years after Katrina and this floodwall is all that stands between New Orleans and the next hurricane” (*Time*, 2007, cover). Through this theme the shift in time seemed to be the ultimate failure. In other words, the newsweekly highlighted the absurdity of an ongoing failure.

Most of the images in the 2007 issue represented a traumatic before and after scenario. In one image, a Black family was pictured standing “on the foundation of their destroyed house in December 2005” in the Lower Ninth Ward (Van Lohuizen, 2007, pp. 34-35). The image was accentuated by another image that showed that “the lot has been cleared of debris but not rebuilt” (Van Lohuizen, 2007, pp. 34-35). On the adjacent page, a photograph showcased a similar scenario. One of the photos captured a flooded landscape surrounded by debris, including a semi truck wedged into a large tree (Van Lohuizen, 2007, pp. 36-37). The second image was of the same lot cleaned of debris, but marked by residents who “remain displaced, living in trailers and RVs” (Van Lohuizen, 2007, pp. 36-37). The “Then & Now” photos illustrated little difference after two years of potential for change. A map of New Orleans showed the “population before Katrina”
and the “population today,” illustrating that only a little more than half the pre-Katrina residents had returned to the city (Time, 2007, p. 33). The theme of temporality functioned well to stress the severity of the failures. The images suggested that the passing time had given the Corps an extra chance; but that chance was marked by failure as well.

In addition to issues of temporality, another theme, “man” versus nature, surfaced within the newsweekly. Almost immediately, the issue distinguished the culprit for disarray in New Orleans: “The storm was not the tragedy. The tragedy was how unprepared we were—and how we still have not learned the lessons of Katrina” (Stengel, 2007, p. 6). Immediately after Katrina occurred, Time presented a frame of failure that was fragmented. Two years later, Time formulated the frame of failure to be much more focused. The move from discussing the hurricane as causing the crisis to attributing the disaster to “man” was essential. Without establishing this switch the cover story article would seem out of touch and unrealistic. It seems that Time recognized this dilemma. In the letter from the editor, Stengel explained:

In thinking about Katrina, most Americans consider the disaster to have been a random event, a force of nature that couldn’t be controlled or predicted. But two years after Katrina drowned New Orleans, I’m persuaded that what happened in the Big Easy was less an act of nature than a man-made disaster. (Stengel, 2007, p. 6)

The remainder of the letter from the editor contained similar statements that separated nature from “man.” For instance, one statement explained, “Through a mixture of shoddy engineering, poor planning and selfish politics, a survivable hurricane was turned into an epic disaster” (Stengel, 2007, p. 6). This quotation hints that the deaths caused by
the crisis could have, in some senses, been regarded as a homicide on the part of the Corps. Additionally, another statement described, “The storm was not the tragedy—that was an act of nature. The tragedy is how unprepared we were—and how, today, we still have not learned the lessons of Katrina” (Stengel, 2007, p. 6). The cover story article echoed Stengel’s letter, “The most important thing to remember about the drowning of New Orleans is that it wasn’t a natural disaster. It was a man-made disaster, created by lousy engineering, misplaced priorities and pork-barrel politics” (p. 30). Clearly, *Time* was questioning the manner in which the public viewed the “tragedy” in New Orleans. Whereas the common way to view this crisis was through nature, *Time* transformed it into the fault of “man.”

This switch had a number of consequences. It seems it may be easier to blame a concrete human element (the Corps) in place of abstractly criticizing a natural occurrence (Katrina). Obviously, because of the disparity between the hurricane winds, levee system, and flooding there was not a clear culprit. In fact, a variety of things could have taken the blame for the destruction in New Orleans. I am more concerned with why *Time* chose to focus on the Corps. The answer seems to be that the Corps’ history and proximity to the levees was the most available source for creating a spectacle.

A final theme within the frame of failure was a depersonalization of the crisis. While personal stories dominated the pages of the early 2005 issues, in the 2007 issue, personal stories were relegated to a small section of “survivors” located near the end of the issue. In addition, the issue also included a reference to *Time’s* website where readers could access more personalized coverage. The small website section included a brief title, “Then and Now,” while the caption explained the website, photographers
“document what has happened to the areas of New Orleans that were damaged by the hurricane and the challenges still faced by those who lived through it” (Time, 2007, p. 9). Additionally, this section included a small section on “Local Voices.” The caption explained, “Despite politicians’ pledges to rebuild the city, much of New Orleans remains abandoned and in disrepair. In an online forum, several prominent New Orleanians provide their ideas for ways to bring the city back” (Time, 2007, p. 9).

The second section that included more personalized coverage was located immediately after the cover story article. The section featured “The Displaced. A gallery of survivors still finding their way home” (Usher, 2007, pp. 40-41). The rhetorical decision to use the term “survivors” complicated the meaning of these images. The term begs the question, survivors of what? The section suggested that these people are survivors of “the aftermath,” “rebuilding” efforts, and the “government’s inaction” (Usher, 2007, pp. 40-41). Consequently, some have “resettled,” hope to “rebuild” or are “stuck in a trailer,” but most have “relocated” and have “no plans to return” (Usher, 2007, pp. 40-41). “The Displaced” section used personalized examples as a means to support the argument made in the cover story article. The personal examples appeared only to function as evidence for a significant governmental failure. With this in mind, it also seemed that those who made the argument most compelling were White; only two of the nine images included Black individuals.

The message was that the survivors were important but not central to the focus of reconstruction. Instead, they served well as supporting material. It seemed that the newsweekly had little need for them in creating a spectacle. In fact, they had been phased out of the coverage.
As I was sitting at a booth in Panera Bread, a bakery-café, writing this chapter, a young man interrupted me to question what I was doing. I explained to him that I was writing a thesis. He responded with the typical question, “On what?” I told him that it was about Hurricane Katrina, trying to be brief with my response in order to bring the conversation to an immediate halt.

. . . (he didn’t catch the hint) . . .

He began questioning me on the politics surrounding Katrina. His questions happened to focus on failures. He wondered if it was true that the mayor refused to help New Orleanians. Not wanting to begin a debate I retorted, “I don’t know.” Apparently irritated that I did not want to engage his question, he kept on, “Why don’t you know that? Shouldn’t you know the answer to that?” I responded, “The whole thing was mediated.” He reacted with an interested look, said a few things in response, and thanked me for the conversation. That was the end of that. He left and I returned to focusing on chapter three.

In the meantime I began thinking about our interaction. I found it interesting that the one association that he had with the whole crisis regarded failures, scapegoating, and blame, and yet he seemed pleased with himself for the critique he introduced in the form of a question. He was performing the quasi-tragic frame—while his “questions” centered on a tragic frame, he seemed content, almost proud, of himself for recognizing that a devastating event took place in New Orleans. And while he put effort into exchanging ideas and was quick even to chastise me for not engaging his question, he had neglected that he was part of the problem too. It was all quasi-tragic.
In fact, while each issue of *Time* embodied the quasi-tragic frame the concept of
the quasi-tragic becomes even more focused when the evolution of the frames are
captured. While in the October 3, 2005 issue the frame of Katrina seemed to offer a more
comic twist, the comic elements within the issue did not stick in later issues. After the
frame of Katrina, the coverage switched back to the frames of liminality, shame, failure,
determined struggles, and support in the November 23, 2005 issue. Finally, by the time
the two year mark rolled around on August 13, 2007 the frames of imminent doom,
shame, compassion, and failure characterized the crisis. This timeline of frames
demonstrates an unfortunate transition from comic to tragic. Taken together, they capture
the quasi-tragic.

The quasi-tragic encourages people, like the young man described previously, to
blame while being exalted as compassionate. But it is not enough to simply blame. The
blaming begins the process of disassociating. By scapegoating an organization like the
Corps (who quite frankly should take on some of the responsibility for the crisis in New
Orleans) readers of *Time* have satisfied their concerns which focus more on who should
take the fall for the tragedies and less on how to help people rebuild their lives after the
tragedy. Take for example, the November issue where *Time* was clarifying the culprit.
That issue satisfied *Time* for almost two years before the newsweekly clarified the
culprits even further. When the conversation arises, it focuses on a scapegoat, not just
within *Time*’s issues but also within everyday conversations.

Despite *Time*’s earlier warnings, Katrina fatigue is growing. The quasi-tragic
frame enables this trend. This is not a trend that was caused by *Time*’s coverage. The
newsweekly only perpetuated our own patterns that lead to quasi-tragic frames. What
this thesis illuminates is the process of how our framing leads to the quasi-tragic. The source is irrelevant. The process matters more because once the framing cycle is broken we can begin to revive New Orleans and disrupt Katrina fatigue.

“The most important thing to remember about the drowning of New Orleans is that it wasn’t a natural disaster. It was a man-made disaster, created by lousy engineering, misplaced priorities and pork-barrel politics” (Booth Thomas, 2005, p. 30).

There is simply more to it than the quasi-tragic frame would have us believe.
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

“I believe the ever expanding influence, reach, and scope of the mass media has worked insidiously to legitimate exploitative social hierarchies” (Lipsitz, 1990, p. vii).

And there it was—the edge of humanity. As a nation, we all arrived at the same moment, approaching the abyss we so feared and desired in the same breath. It mattered not that the experience was mediated; we were still circling the “Real” together (Zizek, 1989). The whole affair was terrifying but so stunning.

And as it continued we found ourselves drowning in (dis)pleasure. The sublimity of it all had disappeared and our (collective) fantasy began to fade (McDaniel, 2000). When our attention drifted away, we left them to drown in more than we could ever comprehend.

With each passing day, Time’s forecast of Katrina fatigue materialized more strongly. What had manifested into the lead news story for all networks soon disappeared from the national news platform. The first step in discerning why Katrina fatigue set in was to analyze “what happened” by uncovering the frames constructed in Time’s cover issues, ultimately addressing my first two research questions:
Q1: What was *Time* Magazine’s framing of Hurricane Katrina in the two cover story issues immediately following the storm (September 12, 2005, September 19, 2005)?

Q2: What was *Time* Magazine’s framing of Hurricane Katrina in the remaining three cover story issues (October 3, 2005, November 28, 2005, August 13, 2007)?

In addressing the first research question, I discovered that the September 12 and 19, 2005 issues—the two cover issues immediately following the storm—were structured through the same frames, including failure, strategy, chaos, control, death, rebirth, and support.

In investigating the second research question, I found that the October 3, 2005 issue crafted Katrina as the frame. Additionally, the November 28, 2005 issue utilized the frames of liminality, shame, failure, determined struggles and support, while the August 13, 2007 issue involved the frames of imminent doom, shame, compassion, and failure.

Having determined the frames employed through these issues of the newsweekly, I turn to my third research question which posed:

Q3: What are the implications of *Time* Magazine’s framing of Hurricane Katrina during the aforementioned periods?

While this question was addressed intermittently throughout the previous two chapters, it leads me to consider precisely how and why was New Orleans/Katrina faded out of *Time*’s coverage? It is clear that the disappearance of Katrina within the media had profound effects for those people attempting to recover from the physical and emotional scars caused by the storm and the subsequent breach of the levees. The disparity between the types of frames utilized immediately following the storm from a few months after and two years later holds the key to the answer for this question. New Orleans did not just
disappear suddenly. Interest of the city faded away. The presence of certain frames and absence of others offers one explanation into how New Orleans was phased out.

The deeper question, however, is why? In addition to those frames, the concept of the sublime comes into play and exposes an interpretation to our question of “why?” Time’s coverage of Hurricane Katrina captured the essence of sublimity. From that sublime experience, power was soon factored into the conversation and even the media began recognizing the serious social inequities exposed (or caused by the storm, as it is most often portrayed). Time’s portrayal of New Orleans-Katrina created an apocalyptic spectacle, with much of the coverage relying on sublimity to foster interest in the story.

The Sublime

The apocalyptic narrative offered readers a taste of sublimity by calling into question readers’ humanity and producing a moment of (dis)pleasure. The notion of sublimity relates closely to eroticism. Bataille (1962) explains, “We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity” (p. 15). Through a national medium like Time Magazine readers are invited to participate in a moment of continuity. By engaging Time Magazine many readers experience sublimity together. Bataille describes life as “a door into existence: life may be doomed but the continuity of existence is not” (pp. 23-24).

We find hope in this possibility of achieving continuity, and although we know we will inevitably achieve it only in death, we continue to search for moments of continuity throughout our lives. Through the New Orleans/Katrina coverage readers were provided continuity through the apocalyptic narrative which offered the experience of “little deaths,” or brief moments of ecstatic continuity.
These erotic moments can give our life meaning, but they also remind us of our mortality. We fear the finality of death, and yet we seek out ways of experiencing what it offers. Bataille (1986) suggests, “What we desire is to bring into a world founded on discontinuity all the continuity such a world can sustain” (p. 19). Such a strong desire propels us forward to seek moments of meaning, moments of continuity. Though such continuity can be achieved through our own actions, we often turn to the news media to precariously experience death at a safer distance. Let me be clear that when I refer to experiencing death, although readers witnessed death in the pages of *Time*, I refer more specifically to the experience of “little deaths,” or pleasurable moments when we become continuous. These moments can vary from involving drugs, sex, violence, pain, disorder, to simply seeing the point at which society comes undone.

The New Orleans/Katrina crisis, along with similar crises, provided readers with the experience of witnessing society coming undone. With the New Orleans/Katrina crisis, much of the discourse included issues of race and class, in addition to common focuses like looting and vandalism. The added dimensions provided a more enriched experience for viewing society’s fall. In experiencing a crisis like New Orleans/Katrina readers were brought closer together through the mediated experience of disaster and their apocalyptic spectacle reporting style. Together, readers faced the sublime.

The sublime offered readers (dis)pleasure. Readers were beckoned by the destruction and suffering that was occurring in New Orleans not likely because they enjoyed watching others suffer but because the situation promised to satisfy their desire for continuity. As McDaniel (2000) explains, “The exertion of force by a ‘great object’ mediates the displeasure of being conquered, terrified, or otherwise overcome as a
pleasurable, sensual experience” (p. 54). The sublime is a mixing of pleasure and displeasure fused together so tightly that the person experiencing it struggles to distinguish one from the other. “Sublimity is, then, not just an aesthetic category concerning the commerce between form, matter, and idea; it is a political category concerning *power*” (p. 54). A sublime experience moves the soul toward (in)action; it all depends on the frames supporting the mediated experience.

While many readers found (dis)pleasure in the destruction in New Orleans, after time passed the situation grew too intense. The public began to develop “Katrina fatigue” and withdraw from paying attention to the crisis. Displeasure took over after readers became aware that in New Orleans society did not just come undone for a couple of months. Instead, New Orleans seemed to have been broken indefinitely. At the point of realizing the crisis in New Orleans was not just a fleeting moment where things came undone but actually a permanent fall, watching the situation was no longer appealing. Displeasure took over and the text began encouraging readers to distance themselves from the crisis and failures. It became less of a sublime experience and more of a realization that readers were part of the cause of the larger problem. Instead we chose to drift away from dealing with our own culpability and began to engage in a quasi-tragic frame. As an odd survival tactic, readers began to disassociate from the crisis in order not to linger on the question of their own humanity.

The text made attempts to remind readers of their humanity. Ironically, while many readers were attracted to the coverage of New Orleans/Katrina because it offered continuity, in disengaging from the crisis readers damaged the sublime. For the moment the crisis offered continuity, but the consequence of engaging the sublime was othering.
Simultaneously readers knew who they were by engaging the question of their humanity and having compassion for the victims in New Orleans, they were only able to proceed through their lives by understanding that those affected by Katrina were not them. Clark (2004) comments on this experience, noting that the media “teach[es] Americans who they collectively are by presenting them with a sequence of aesthetic images of who it is they are not” (p. 52). This ambivalence creates uncertainty and encourages readers to disassociate with New Orleanians because they now pose a threat to readers’ existence, their humanity. Similarly to sublimity, the apocalyptic spectacle became a humanizing force.

Apocalyptic Spectacle

Though both extreme weather and human error contributed to the tragedy in New Orleans, Time Magazine and other media produced a picture of reality about Hurricane Katrina, naming the experience a crisis. The media, then, was central to the precise character of the crisis in New Orleans. As Hall (1984) explained in another context, “What I see those stories moving into is that precise field of the distribution of the dominant ways in which a society makes sense of what is going on around it or what is happening to it” (pp. 7-8). Not surprisingly, the New Orleans/Katrina crisis brought with it an array of stereotypes and biases that represented conditioned ways of telling stories. The entire mediated ordeal (re)produced myths that rely on portrayals of stereotypical images about race, class and gender. Hall maintains that through analysis of the media “one becomes aware of the powerful impact of narrative in making myth appear to be real” (p. 5).
But simply describing what types of mythic narratives emerged is simply unremarkable because they are so easily identifiable. Of greater interest, however, is what frames were employed that made it “natural” to tell a certain story. Through an analysis of media frames it is possible to illuminate the narrative’s tendencies. In other words, the frames offer a lens for discovering the components of the narrative that enable stereotypes and scapegoating. Framing is one method scholars employ to, as Hall (1984) calls for, disrupt the narrative:

When a medium like television has such a powerful, realistic or naturalistic charge to it, people then do need to have those narratives interrupted and questioned in order to understand that they are a result of a social and historical practice; they aren’t just given. It isn’t the reflection in a mirror, it’s the construction of it: it has been made to mean something by the processes of signification and representation. (p. 10)

It seems that many people resist the interruption because they want things to be that simple—merely a reflection. *Time*’s spectacle feeds into humans’ desire for simplicity, allowing it to be easy to become preoccupied with the media’s spectacular production and to resist any interruptions.

After utilizing a particular stock of narratives and stereotypes, *Time* turned to spectacle in order to situate the crisis as entertainment, adding spice into familiar stories. This strategy easily fit into the current news media context of fear and scandals. Kellner (2003) elaborated on this point, explaining, “The combination of a crisis-ridden global economy with ever-proliferating media and technology, and a global Terror War within a highly contested combustible political domain, promises an increase in apocalyptic
spectacle into the new millennium” (pp. 15-16). Though the New Orleans/Katrina spectacle obfuscated the narratives in play what does not at first seem as clear is the involvement of dominant frames in sustaining the narratives. The quasi-tragic frame, for example, strengthened the narratives by preventing interrogation through a comic veneer. Readers had no need to question the narratives because they likely felt blameless after participating in what seemed to be self-reflection.

The apocalyptic spectacle in reporting Hurricane Katrina also distracted readers from calling tragic narratives and corresponding frames into question. Because apocalyptic spectacle is currently a dominant mode for describing the world within the news media, *Time*’s readers were already conditioned to expect tragic frames. Of course, an apocalyptic spectacle is short lived. The end either does or does not come. In order to maintain credibility *Time*’s narratives supported the notion that the end occurred, ultimately negatively affecting interest in the rebuilding efforts in New Orleans.

**Framing Katrina**

In the previous two chapters, I analyzed individual issues of *Time* in order to begin to identify what frames emerged in varying contexts. Because the lapse in time and the occurrence of subsequent crises, the way *Time* and other news media discussed the New Orleans/Katrina crisis evolved. The frames employed in the initial issues affected the types of frames utilized in later issues by structuring memory of the crisis. Having grasped the specific focuses of the individual issues, the last step is to trace the evolution of the prevailing frames of the crisis and subsequent implications. In other words, what are the social consequences of the news media’s framing of Hurricane Katrina? Based on
the frames I have identified in the previous chapters, I found four significant implications of *Time*’s framing of New Orleans/Katrina.

First, the lack of a clear identity for New Orleans had a substantial impact on long-term recovery efforts. New Orleans’ indeterminate identity was a significant reason for the coverage taking a backseat in *Time*’s reporting. Looking back after analyzing the issues preceding the August 13 issue, I now realize that this frame was beginning to emerge all along. Most clearly, *Time* staff and readership sensed a significant problem in the dwindling interest of the crisis in the November 28 issue which warned of Katrina fatigue. At this stage, *Time* was clearly struggling with the frame of liminality.

However, months before the November issue, as soon as Katrina materialized on the Gulf Coast, New Orleans’ identity was called into question. While the frame of liminality was present all along, certainly a consequence of any crisis, it did not become a dominant frame until New Orleans’ identity was clearly not going to be revived.

Any crisis will threaten the status quo because identities must adapt to a changed environment. Even though a place is never the same in the wake of a hurricane or similar disaster, the impulse of news coverage is to merge the familiar old identity with the “lessons learned” from the crisis. The result is an identity that has grown or learned from mistakes and has benefited from the transformation. That impulse to merge identities was certainly consistent with *Time*’s reporting on New Orleans and Katrina. The two September issues featured entire sections on lessons learned and whenever any of the issues included a personal story the happy ending was enabled through lessons learned. With Katrina, that strategy failed to reignite a familiar identity.
Without an identity, the coverage emphasized the frame of liminality and New Orleans became uneasy to talk about. *Time* insisted on figuring an identity for New Orleans through the four issues spanning from September to November, but those three months of failed attempts quickly passed and as the third month’s issue appeared the frame of liminality became increasingly obvious. The November issue seemed to offer a last chance for constructing a clear identity. When one did not materialize, the subject disappeared for almost two years. A place’s identity matters profoundly for how its future will unfold.

Second, the frame of support maintained an (un)stable presence throughout *Time*’s coverage. This frame was consistent in every issue except for the final August 13, 2007 issue. The presence of the frame of support functioned as a testament to American values of generosity and goodwill. The frame signified that in despite of all of the suffering after Katrina, U.S. Americans were generously assisting New Orleanians. This frame, regardless of whether individual readers supported New Orleanians with time or money, served to make an unexplainable situation meaningful and allowed readers to feel good for being a part of such a caring country.

Since the frame of support helped to soften the hard realities of death and suffering, its absence from the August issue was noticeable. Along with the disappearance of the frame of support the coverage was unable to continue offering the message that things will turn out okay. Instead, it seemed that U.S. Americans had failed to live up to the ideal of what constitutes being a good citizen.

Though reflecting on what “might have been” is not without its shortcomings, there is value in considering how coverage may have differed had Rita never occurred.
Rita’s presence strongly influenced the progression of *Time*’s coverage of Katrina. Without Rita, the frame of support likely would have disappeared sooner and New Orleans/Katrina probably would have been withdrawn from the newsweekly by October. But Rita did happen and while the second hurricane was a significant hindrance for New Orleans and other Gulf Coast cities, after Rita *Time* refocused the frame of support to demonstrate the creative giving efforts of U.S. Americans. This new focus on the frame of support after Rita prolonged New Orleans/Katrina coverage to include the November issue. After the November issue and the two year lapse in coverage the frame of support was completely absent from *Time*’s August issue. Ultimately, the frame of support was replaced by the frame of compassion which refigured the concept of support to include a hands off approach of talking about the crisis. By praising simply addressing New Orleans/Katrina, *Time* replaced volunteerism and fundraising with talking about the crisis. This shift changes more than how readers talk about the crisis; it affects how readers act. Satisfaction can be achieved solely from acknowledging that Katrina happened. In encouraging people to only talk about the crisis, New Orleans/Katrina has suffered (and will continue to suffer) from a lack of action.

Third, the frame of failure constituted a steady thread throughout *Time*’s coverage. This frame enabled a discussion on faults and blaming. Its continual presence created deeply tragic coverage which fostered a sense of humiliation and encouraged scapegoating. Within each issue of *Time*, the frame of failure produced a similar effect. It produced coverage that relied on the tragic frame because of its tendency to focus on blaming others. But these conclusions are evident just from viewing each individual issue and looking at the basic theoretical underpinnings of the concept of framing.
What remains more intriguing are the consequences of this frame. The real issue is not how the frame of failure functions, but what its continual presence means for New Orleans. The consistent presence of failure is detrimental because *Time’s* format conditions readers to expect the frame of failure as a consistent reaction to crisis. Effectually, readers become comfortable with engaging the tragic frame and even learn to accept it. Additionally, the continual presence of the frame of failure causes readers to eventually disengage and be content with a two year lapse in coverage, for example. At some point readers expect to hear about progress. In the case of *Time’s* New Orleans/Katrina coverage, the absence of any mention of progress contributed to the emergence of the frame of imminent doom.

This frame formed as a reaction to constant failure and little progress. I predict that it will contribute to another prolonged absence in coverage precisely because it frames the situation in New Orleans as unfixable. As the frame of failure is removed farther from the beginning of the New Orleans/Katrina crisis, the frame will be more detrimental to maintaining public interest with later coverage. Simply put, because of the damage caused by the levees the public expected to see failures surface after Katrina. While the presence of the frame of failure was expected during the initial coverage of New Orleans/Katrina, progress was also expected during the months and years following the storm. As long as the frame of failure consistently overpowers discussions concerning progress, coverage will continue to dwindle and valuable conversations regarding race, class, gender, and recovery strategies will not be held on a national scale.

Fourth, *Time’s* coverage was quasi-tragic, a characteristic which aided the disappearance of New Orleans/Katrina coverage. As was introduced in chapter two, the
quasi-tragic frame has the characteristics of the tragic frame with a comic façade. In other words, the quasi-tragic frame appears to offer a sense of self-reflection while still encouraging readers to attribute culpability to others. While the quasi-tragic frame is most obviously present within the individual issues of *Time*, in stepping back to view the coverage as a whole the quasi-tragic frame becomes more problematic. Because of its comic appearance, the frame justifies the disappearance of coverage since it seems as if effort was made to reflect on recovery efforts. Readers are invited to feel satisfied for reflecting on social concerns even though these reflections are conducted at a surface level and result in a tragic attitude.

The small doses of comic veneer are essential in enabling the quasi-tragic frame. For instance, frames such as support, determined struggle, and compassion countered the presence of frames such as failure, shame, and imminent doom. Even though the latter list of frames created a sense of humiliation, the former list of frames overpower to offer a sense of humility. People would rather feel good about themselves. While the comic moments are more infrequent, people will latch onto the comic aspects because it provides more satisfaction. Within *Time*’s coverage comic frames functioned to justify the presence of the tragic. This format sends the message that the tragic frame must be engaged in order to be realistic about *Time*’s coverage.

Reflections

At the beginning of this project I assumed that it would be most appropriate to compare the two issues of the newsweekly immediately following the storm to the anniversary issues included one year later. Much to my surprise, as I began chapter three, I quickly realized that *Time* did not create a one year anniversary issue. In fact, there
were few references to New Orleans/Katrina in the issues one year later. In the place of New Orleans/Katrina coverage was reporting of the fifth year anniversary of the terrorist attacks on September 11. In a society that insistently celebrates anniversaries, especially of tragedies, it was surprising that Katrina did not warrant significant anniversary coverage. Even more astonishing was that *Time* did not produce a cover story issue on New Orleans/Katrina throughout the entire year of 2006. While my original research plan was disrupted, the absence of coverage became one of the more intriguing findings in my study, offering insight into how framing affected the future coverage of New Orleans/Katrina and providing a starting point for predicting the trajectory of future stories.

My naïve assumption with anniversary coverage relates to my impulses with framing. I surprised myself when I approached chapter two by categorizing frames into race, class, and gender. I relied on preselected categories instead of allowing the text to show me which frames were in play. My impulse demonstrates how easy it is to shape a text into a particular box. After approaching my analysis in this way I found it difficult to let the text talk to me instead of doing all of the talking myself.

Just as is the case in daily interpersonal interactions, it often is more important to listen to the text than to do all of the talking. It was difficult to grasp this concept because I chose a topic that I was passionate about. This was a valuable lesson to learn because it helped me to realize how to interact with a text that mattered to me. Ultimately, I was able to hone in on how *Time* reports crises and the impacts of frames for future involvement with a particular story. This project helped me to realize the significance of framing. Particularly, it was useful to view the evolution of frames from a
desperate time (when the crisis first broke in the news media) through a period of reflection.

Limitations

Certainly, before pursuing a project scholars must limit it. Though I put much effort into avoiding limitations, I encountered limitations before I even began researching. I knew from the very beginning that I wanted to analyze the media coverage of Hurricane Katrina. By choosing *Time* Magazine as my text I began defining “media” in my project. While *Time* Magazine is characteristic of other media, it also varies greatly from other news outlets. The claims I was able to make from analyzing *Time* absolutely would vary from other news outlets. New Orleans’ local newspaper, the *Times Picayune*, probably did not forget about Katrina one year after the storm came through the area. It is definitely tempting to suggest that all other news media framed New Orleans/Katrina in the same manner. Clearly, my conclusions are limited by the text I chose to unpack.

Furthermore, I limited my analysis to cover story issues of *Time* Magazine instead of dissecting all articles that related to New Orleans/Katrina in a two year span. Those articles are very much a part of the larger narrative of New Orleans/Katrina. By only selecting the cover story issues I allowed the text to direct which articles were most important. While there are advantages to proceeding through my project in this manner, I did allow the text’s bias to be my bias. Similarly, *Time* almost exclusively addressed New Orleans instead of reporting on other Gulf Coast cities affected by the storm. Again, I used the text’s bias in highlighting New Orleans even though other communities were part of the larger narrative.
In addition to limitations from the text I created another set of limitations through my chosen methodology. The frames that struck me as the most prominent might not be the same to others. Though the frames people sense are often similar, the way a person names and describes them affects their meaning. As a Master’s student studying media communication I most certainly will have a different read from New Orleanians who were affected directly by Katrina. My read is no better or worse than New Orleanians – just different. It would be foolish of me to expect that a diverse audience would experience articles in *Time* Magazine in the same exact way. The text does, however, provide a similar interpretive frame.

But of course *Time* Magazine was not doing all the framing. In structuring my research questions I framed the direction of my study. By asking certain questions I already began making conclusions about how framing in *Time* Magazine would function. This format kept me from being more open to the text. Ultimately, my structured agenda influenced the outcome of this project.

Future Directions

Future research on crisis news reporting might focus on framing in order to continue to find patterns that can aid scholars in predicting the evolution of crisis news coverage. As this study has concluded, the framing of an event matters in how people will address “victims” and how the government will appropriate funds for rebuilding an area affected by natural and/or human-caused circumstances. Framing also matters in how readers/viewers characterize entire groups of people – who rendered a quick response because they were classified as important and who deserved to suffer because of refusing to leave after several hurricane warnings or insisting on living in a particular
area that should expect to suffer from a hurricane. As absurd as it sounds, these types of statements were made by U.S. Americans after Katrina. In fact, some of them were my friends who I thought knew better. This fallacious reasoning is not uncommon in news media.

Parallels can be drawn between many “newsworthy” situations. In all cases the framing of an event directs culpability and impacts identities. Framing categorizes people by race, class, and gender and dictates whether the reader/viewer should identify with the victim, criminal or hero. In continuing to explore the impacts of frames in crisis news coverage, scholars may be able to offer direction for how to limit tragic narratives. Future projects could apply the concept of framing to other news texts (like rape stories, for example) in an effort to uncover the base of tragic narratives.

Apart from limitations and future directions, this project offers a valuable interpretation for how the media went about defining New Orleans/Katrina. In framing events like crises the news media expounds and legitimizes stereotypes and tragic narratives. My analysis provides critical insight into that process, hopefully leading to a strategy for disrupting dominant tragic narratives. While the crisis in New Orleans is far from over, Katrina fatigue will continue to set in for readers of *Time* Magazine so long as the tragic frames are not disrupted. The path must divert the nation away from the familiar gaper’s block and toward a more comic ending.
REFERENCES


Gibbs, N. (2005, September 12). New Orleans lives by the water and fights it, a sand castle set on a sponge nine feet below sea level, where people made music from heartache, named their drinks for hurricanes and joked that one day you’d be able to tour the city by gondola. *Time, 166*, 44-49.


*Communication Reports, 1*(1): 26-31.


www.neworleansonline.com


NOTES

1 Weaver (1953) coined the concept of “devil terms” (terms society views as negative) and “god terms” (terms society views as positive).
3 One exception to the rule involves a Black family helping a White body (gender is unclear). The photo depicts the White individual slumped over in a chair, while a Black woman holds the White individual’s head (Gay, 2005, p. 27). The rest of the family looks on in disbelief as the White individual appears to be near death. Unique to this situation, the White individual is elderly and physically disabled. While this image positions a Black individual is helping a White individual, I think there is something to be said about this individual being disabled.
4 This sentence references the Ninth Ward, a place where tourists avoided and poverty was prevalent.
5 The coverage inadvertently implied that the tragedies in New Orleans were, in part, due to residents not taking the hurricane warnings seriously.
6 Encarta Dictionary defines “limbo” as “a state in which somebody or something is neglected or is simply left in oblivion.” “Limbo” can also be defined as “in a state of uncertainty or of being kept waiting.”
7 The terms “man,” “man-made,” and “mankind” are used exclusively within the 2007 issue of Time. In keeping with consistency, I use these terms but mark them with quotations to distinguish them as problematic.
8 Squalor is a term often used to describe destitution.