

“Risk” - a term that is used by multiple actors in my fieldsite; public health officials, environmental scientists, school board members and parents all use this term when referring to lead poisoning. However, the what counts as risk and riskiness and how risk is measured or interpreted varies across social groups. For example, a scientist might try to quantify risk through surveys, data collection, ect, but parents might view risk more qualitatively and as an experience rather than a set of numbers. Most of my interlocutors are concerned with how to reduce risk, whether that is through personal changes to behavior or demanding structural changes in governance. Risk, the idea already having purchase within anthropology, draws together all of my interlocutors’ perspectives on lead poisoning and speaks to an established set of literatures.

“Blame” - the second core category is focused on who gets blamed, how they get blamed, and whether or not they accept responsibility. Discourses surrounding blame for lead poisoning and who should accept responsibility for reducing risk is a tactic used by the government and the public, alike. County health departments are more likely to put responsibility on the citizens under the guise of “awareness” or “education”, but citizens are less likely to blame each other and will instead, look to the local or state government for answers. Blame is another analytic that connects major actors in a multitude of ways and also brings to light, how people think about class, poverty, expertise, the responsibility of the state, and the responsibility of its citizens.