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Like a Fish Out of Water: Reconsidering Disaster Recovery and the Role of Place and Social Capital in Community Disaster Resilience

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Abstract In this paper we draw on the findings of a critical, multi-sited ethnographic study of two rural communities affected by a wildfire in British Columbia, Canada to examine the salience of place, identity, and social capital to the disaster recovery process and community disaster resilience. We argue that a reconfiguration of disaster recovery is required that more meaningfully considers the role of place in the disaster recovery process and opens up the space for a more reflective and intentional consideration of the disorientation and disruption associated with disasters and our organized response to that disorientation. We describe a social-psychological process, reorientation, in which affected individuals and communities navigate the psychological, social and emotional responses to the symbolic and material changes to social and geographic place that result from the fire's destruction. The reorientation process emphasizes the critical importance of place not only as an orienting framework in recovery but also as the ground upon which social capital and community disaster resilience are built. This approach to understanding and responding to the disorientation of disasters has implications for community psychologists and other service providers engaged in supporting disaster survivors. This includes the need to consider the complex dynamic of contextual and cultural factors that influence the disaster recovery process.

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It is only recently that scholars have begun to explore the fundamental connection between social capital and place (Hanna et al. 2009). Rarer still is scholarship addressing recovery, community resiliency and place within the context of disaster. This paper draws on the findings of a study of the recovery process in two rural communities impacted by the devastating McLure forest fire in 2003 in British Columbia (BC), Canada, in order to examine the links between community resilience, place, and social capital in the disaster recovery process. The findings from this study highlight the importance of the psychology of place to community and individual resilience when place is disrupted—not only through displacement, but as a result of the myriad economic, material and symbolic losses and changes associated with disaster events. In so doing, the paper argues for a more nuanced approach to disaster recovery that integrates a consideration of the complexity of the psychology of place and its critical role in the development and maintenance of social capital and, hence, community resilience. The concept of social or community resilience has many definitions and is the focus of an interdisciplinary body of theoretical and applied research that draws from fields such as psychology, social ecology, public health, community economic development (CED) and sociology. These theories differ in their characterization of community resilience as an outcome or as a process (VanBreda 2001), however, within the context of disaster studies the construct of resilience is generally understood as the capability of a community to face a threat, survive and bounce back or, perhaps more accurately, bounce forward into a normalcy newly defined by the disaster

related losses and changes. Community resilience is, in effect, a reflection of people's shared and unique capacities to manage and adaptively respond to the extraordinary demands on resources and the losses associated with disasters (Paton 2006; Norris et al. 2008).

Social Capital, Place and Community Resiliency Within the Context of Disaster

The theorizing regarding adaptive capacity in community resiliency literature often includes a consideration of social capital. Social capital can be understood as aggregate assets or resources that inhere in individuals and communities as a result of various dimensions of social organization (Wellman and Frank 2001). This consideration of the quality, diversity, and intensity of social relations at least implicitly suggests a consideration of place. Social relationships are both temporally and spatially located. Even those relations mediated by virtual connections through the internet, telephone, or other medium occur in place. In developing the concept of habitus, and social capital more generally, Bourdieu challenged clear cut distinctions between psychological, social and physical processes—arguing, rather, that they are complexly enmeshed with one another in the course of day-to-day life (1986).

One of the challenges of using a social capital framework in health research is lack of consistency with which the term is interpreted, measured, and applied (Derose and Varda 2009). In addition, some authors have criticized what they see as an overemphasis on social capital that minimizes other important material factors. Despite these critiques however, public health and disaster management policies and practices increasingly stress the mediating role of social capital in the health and wellbeing of communities (Wakefield and Poland 2004).

Scholars have drawn tacit connections between social capital and place, notably in epidemiological studies and public health literature. In this literature, place is most often considered in geographic terms as the background location for social activity. In this way, neighborhoods and communities as geographic locations most often define the primary unit of study despite the fact that social activities and space are increasingly less geographically bound (Edmondson 2003). In her ethnographic study of social relations in New Zealand, Stephens (2007) found that despite using neighborhoods or local communities to structure the study, the primary day-to-day enactment of social capital observed amongst participants (e.g., connections, associations) were not related to neighborhood but operated, rather "across several different fields of practice such as family, schooling, work, and recreational activities beyond the neighborhood" (p. 1178).

In the context of an examination of disasters and disaster resilience, place cannot easily be ignored as a primary factor in experiences of social capital. Place has most prominently figured in the research on disaster resilience as it pertains to displacement resulting from forced migrations or evacuations. Findings from a variety of studies of the effects of forced dislocation demonstrate that many people navigate transplanting and sudden changes in their home environments with great difficulty (Brown and Perkins 1992; Fried 1963). In the event of natural and other kinds of disasters, the sudden and sometimes devastating displacement can be the cause of profound feelings of grief and anxiety (Erikson 1976a, b). Indeed previous quantitative studies have documented depression, PTSD and disassociation in survivors of forest fires (McFarlane et al. 1997; Holman and Cohen Silver 1998), particularly among individuals with experiences of more direct contact with fires (Koopman et al. 1996). Because this loss of place can be prolonged or in some instances permanent, the ramifications of displacement for the health and wellbeing of those affected are profound. As Diaz and Dayal (2008) state, "the most catastrophic impact of natural disasters is an individual feeling of 'loss of place'" (p. 1174). Natural disasters such as the McLure forest fire not only represent a profound disruption of individual experiences of home, place and identity, but a collective dislocation of community and belonging. The field of community psychology with its emphasis on the dynamic relationship between collective and individual processes (Banyard and Miller 1998, p. 489) is uniquely poised to contribute theoretically and practically to studies of disaster and recovery.

Norris et al. (2008) further elaborate the connections between place, social capital, and health through their examination of community disaster resilience. In their theoretical modeling, community disaster resilience is a process that emerges from a network of adaptive capacities including the capacity to develop and maintain social capital as it is expressed through a sense of belonging, a sense of community, place attachment, and participation in civil society. From this perspective, place is both the material and social site for the development of social capital, anchoring a sense of self, and a sense of self-in-relation, through memory and the meanings invested in that site through repeated interactions (Milligan 1998). Further, disasters interrupt the tacit experiencing of a seamless narrative of who and what we are with reference to where we are (Casey 1993). This occurs not only as a result of displacement but as is illustrated in the following case study, through a myriad of other place-based disruptions and losses.

Case Study: Place, Identity and Social capital in the Context of the McLure Fire

The McLure Fire was one of a series of devastating interface fires in BC during what was the province's worst fire season on record in terms of damages. Firestorm 2003, as it became known, resulted in the loss of over 300 homes, many businesses, and the destruction of thousands upon thousands of hectares of range- and forest-land in the North Thompson and Okanagan valleys in the southern interior of the province.

The McLure Fire began on July 30, 2003 ignited by a discarded cigarette. Overnight it mushroomed into a uncontrolled firestorm and was quickly threatening the small, unincorporated communities of Barriere and Louis Creek, approximately 350 km northeast of Vancouver. At the time of the fire, these neighboring communities and their surrounding environs were home for approximately 3,200 people (Statistics Canada 2001a).

By mid-day, August 1, the fire had all but destroyed the smaller community of Louis Creek, burning through 73 homes and businesses and the Tolko Sawmill. Fire fighters managed to hold the fire line at the outskirts of neighboring Barriere saving most of that town with the exception of an industrial park and some outlying homes. By the time it was contained, the McLure fire had burned through approximately 28-thousand hectares of range- and forest-land and fencing worth as much as 5.6 billion dollars (Thompson Nicola Regional District 2003). The resultant decision by the Tolko mill owners not to rebuild resulted in the permanent loss of approximately 200 of the valley's top paying jobs (Thompson Nicola Regional District 2003).

Methods

The psychological research on the process of disaster recovery; although relatively extensive, is surprisingly narrow, with the majority of studies employing quantitative methodologies to assess the psychological outcomes of the stress and coping process associated with disasters (e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder, generalized anxiety disorders, depression) and the efficacy of psychological intervention strategies (Norris et al. 2002a; b; Raphael and Wilson 1993). More recent scholarship highlights the unique contributions qualitative research has made to the field by illuminating the contextual and cultural conditions that shape specific needs and influence the ecological validity and effectiveness of specific interventions with various populations (Nastasi and Schensul 2005).

Building on this more recent trend, this study adopted a critical, multi-sited ethnographic approach (Marcus 1998) to study the discourse of disaster recovery and the social-psychological processes that were constituted by and constituitive of this discourse. Multi-sited ethnography can be distinguished from other more traditionally place-based ethnographies, by constructing narratives not only around people and places, but also around ideas and cultural metaphors (Martin 1994). In other words, a multi-sited ethnography is not necessarily grounded in a single place, but follows the object of study in/across physical, temporal, and conceptual space.

In this study, data included researcher participant-observations, local news media accounts and solicited (i.e., interviews) accounts of the recovery process were examined to gain insight into the constraints and affordances of the dominant or most available construction of recovery, to consider other emergent constructions and possibilities identified in affected residents' accounts, and the implications of the dominant discursive construction of recovery for the health and well-being of those survivors and their communities.

Analysis involved a combination of the constant-comparative methods of grounded theory (Pidgeon and Henwood 1997) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2003). The blend of the qualitative methods used in the present study provide descriptive insights not only into the recovery experiences of survivors but also open a space in which the ideological assumptions that shape and are shaped by their disaster recovery experiences may be exposed and questioned.

Key informants from Barriere and Louis Creek ($N = 4$) were identified through provincial news media accounts of the McLure fire. Adopting a purposive sampling strategy, several of these individuals were contacted by the researcher and acted as informal sponsors (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983) of the research in their communities. Drawing on their knowledge of their communities and the participant selection criteria, these key informants helped identify and recruit a total of 43 individuals from the two communities and immediate surrounding region. Neither community was incorporated at the time of this study and, as with many rural communities the geographic boundaries were only loosely determined and often extended beyond the boundaries officially defined by the local authority, the Thompson-Nicola Regional District. For this reason, participants self-identified their residential status as living in Barriere, Louis Creek, or neither.

The main focus of such sampling was to insure as broad a range of experiences and subjectivities as possible based on their potential to further inform the phenomenon of interest, disaster recovery (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This included identifying participants across the two communities using key categories based on livelihoods resulting in members of the ranching community ($N = 3$), Tolko-mill workers ($N = 4$), service providers ($N = 15$, including 6

non-resident service providers), business owners (N = 4), self-employed and homemakers (N = 7), retired residents (N = 6), resident (N = 2) and non-resident (N = 2) regional government representatives. An attempt was made to also include both residents who had experienced severe losses (e.g., home and business) and those who had been evacuated but had not experienced any direct material losses. This latter division tended to reflect the differences in the levels of destruction between Louis Creek where many of the communities homes and local businesses (including home-based businesses, the local antique store, the Tolko mill) were lost and Barriere where most homes escaped damage. A total of 72 homes and nine businesses (not including home-based businesses) were lost in total, with 3,800 people evacuated, 800 of whom were evacuated a second time.

The majority (N = 24) of those interviewed had lived in their respective communities for over 10 years; many of those (N = 15) had lived there for more than 20 years. Of those who responded to the question concerning age, the majority (N = 31) ranged between the ages of 40–60 years old at the time of the first interviews reflecting both the demographic trends of an aging rural population, the research limitations (i.e., interviewing adults only), and the purposive sampling strategy. This latter which relied on key informants identifying individuals that met the criteria of playing a formal or informal leadership role in the community and/or the researcher's stated need for diversity across livelihoods, levels of disaster-related loss, gender, and community-residence. Four of those interviewed were between the ages of 20–40 years old, and 6 were above 60 years old. Of those who responded to the question regarding income (N = 31), the majority declared a household income that ranged from $10 to $60 thousand (N = 17). All participants were asked to identify a pseudonym that was used throughout the analysis and reporting.

Most residents of Barriere and Louis Creek were Canadians of European descent, but there was also a small reservation in Louis Creek, with members of the North Thompson Indian band. According to Statistics Canada (2001b), the Louis Creek-4 reserve had 22 residents and eight private dwellings at the time of the study. Of these, six dwellings were destroyed in the McLure fire. Attempts at recruiting in this community did not result in any interviews but the Chief of the North Thompson band, a resident of the nearby Chichua reserve, was interviewed.

Fieldwork, consisting of participant observation (document through field notes and analytic memos) and interviews with individuals and couples, and a focus group with disaster-recovery service provider, involved a total of 65 days over the course of 2 years following the fire, from November 2003 to November 2005. Initial fieldwork in 2003 focused on developing relationships and engaging

with the community as a participant observer in social and community functions, activities and informal conversations (documented in field notes and analytic memos). A total of 49 semi-structured interviews were collected during three fieldtrips in the spring, summer and fall of 2004 (12 + months following the fire). A final field trip in the summer of 2005 involved another 29 days of observation and informal data gathering (i.e., participant observation, informal conversations documented in field notes and analytic memos). The focus of the interviews was on residents' experience of the fires, the recovery process, and the contextual, structural, personal, and social factors that influenced that process.

In addition to the interview data, a series of local newspaper texts were also subjected to a dual analysis (Cox et al. 2008). The articles were selected from the North Thomson Star Journal, a small, weekly, regional newspaper from the coverage over the 3-month period following the McLure Fire (August 1, 2003 to October 31, 2003). Articles and advertisements referring directly or indirectly to the fires or the recovery process from the fires were selected (N = 250) and then analyzed using an adaptation of Huckin's (2002) four-step analysis of newsprint media (for a fuller account of the methods and outcomes of this analysis see Cox et al. 2008).

The interviews and observational data (i.e., field notes) were initially analyzed using the coding, memos, and constant comparative analytic strategies associated with grounded theory methodology (Charmaz 1990, 2000; Pidgeon and Henwood 1997). The transcripts and media accounts were subjected to multiple readings and detailed coding in order to identify categories or themes that contributed to a conceptual framing of the disaster and the recovery process. The analytic process was based on immersion in the data and repeated sortings, codings, and comparisons that began with line-by-line coding, identifying consistent and contradictory aspects of participants' accounts using invivo codes (i.e., in the participants words) and then moving onto selective coding focused on a more conceptual corpus of codes (Charmaz and Mitchell 2001) This process entailed not only searching for the ways in which codes could be collapsed into aggregate categories, but also searching for the differences within categories. In keeping with the constant comparison approach, the codes and categories were systematically compared and contrasted in order to yield increasingly complex and inclusive categories or themes, moving to analytic (interpretive) labels. The goal of this analysis was to identify a core concept (i.e., disorientation and reorientation) and elaborate that theory or explanation of recovery. Throughout the progression of the coding process, particular attention was paid to the functions of discourse in the participants' accounts—the ways in which social identities, social

relations, and knowledge about the recovery process seemed to be constructed (Fairclough 1995; Phillips and Hardy 2002).

The second stage in the analysis of the media and interview texts involved a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Wetherell et al. 2001). The texts were subject to multiple readings and a recursive process of deconstructing and interpreting the social production of meaning and power relationships evidenced in the texts (Fairclough 2003). The focus of this analysis was to develop a critical awareness of the ideological themes or assumptions and the discursive strategies residents employed in their construction of recovery and the ways in which these strategies reconstructed and/or transformed the dominant discourse of recovery identified in public accounts (i.e., media accounts, research).

Results and Discussion

When residents returned to Barriere and Louis Creek, they returned to a changed landscape. The terrain surrounding Louis Creek and, to a lesser degree, Barriere had been transformed. Scorched ground and blackened tooth-pick like trees replaced the green hills and forests. With the loss of forests and range land, there was a noticeable absence of birds and animals, domesticated and wild. Some residents faced the material loss of houses, businesses, and jobs, but even those who had not suffered direct material losses faced the loss of many of the routine and familiar aspects of their lives. For many residents, the fire resulted in an increased sense of vulnerability and an ongoing sense of uncertainty associated with the realization that what had previously been only a threat was now a real possibility. There was a sense of disorientation that was characterized by a general and sometimes profound sense of distress, bewilderment, and grief, and a sense of unreality or what several described as a "surreal experience."

According to the Oxford dictionary, disorientation is defined as "losing one's bearings" either navigationally or psychologically. The corporal world, shaped through and within discursive practices (i.e., language and social practices) provides a material marker for a variety of literal and symbolic extensions of our subjectivities or identities including: our possessions (Belk 1988; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Kleine and Baker 2004); where we call home (Buttimer 1980; Cuba and Hummon 1993); our surroundings (Guiliani and Feldman 1993; Low and Altman 1992); our affiliations (Hogg and Abrams 2003; Turner and Reynolds 2003), and our immediate and extended communities (Bakker-Rabdau and Bakker 1973; Belk 1988). These orienting frameworks (i.e., the attachments to and evaluations of the material and social world)

provide a sense of belonging, whether that is experienced as belonging or not belonging, in place, relationships, routines, and intentional engagement with the world through activities in the public and/or private spheres.

The interview texts suggested that a sense of disorientation began for residents with the "almost film-like" sensory experience of the fire's approach as the roar of the flames drowned out normal sounds, the heat and smoke grew more intense, and they were faced with choosing what parts of their lives they would or could take with them in the mass evacuation.

> We just didn't think it would ever be like this. Thursday night and the town went black, still, and quiet. It's like 9 or 10 o'clock at night and we were sitting outside, and all of a sudden everything went black, and it's like oh my God. And the smoke. You knew you were in trouble We did a little drive through before we left. It was like a ghost town, just a couple of horses running down the road. The road trip was surreal. Climbing up highway 24, it was like something out of a movie or a Steven King novel. People, standing beside their cars, radiators overheating, hoods up and nobody's stopping because everybody's got to get out. There's fear in their eyes. All they had stashed is piled in the back of their vehicles. This massive exodus (Ned, Barriere resident).

For many residents, this sense of disorientation, of being removed from time and place was prolonged as they "sat in limbo" in hotels and evacuation centers awaiting word of the fate of their homes and their community and was made even more unreal as they drove through dramatically and permanently altered landscapes.

> A neighbour came by and said the mill is gone, and panic hit me. The next morning we drove back, dodging burnt off power poles. It was like a movie set, a moonscape with no humans around…. Long before I hit the turnoff I knew. The horizon was bare and our stuff was gone. Walking around reaching down to touch the soil…it was burnt so clean all the organic material was gone. And it was cold. I expected it to be hot (Shish, Louis Creek resident).

Even for those who experienced little to no material losses, the experience of evacuation, of being forced to flee their homes and then being kept away by armed police, was itself disorienting. During the evacuation, residents temporarily lost connection with relational networks and the familiar surroundings of their homes and their communities. At the same time, they experienced the radical uncertainty of not knowing what would survive or be inalterably changed by the fire. They described having experienced a deep sense of

disorientation at having been uprooted and threatened that was still apparent up to 2 years after the fire.

> The people who were evacuated were more traumatized than the people that stayed and damn near burned up. The people that lost nothing, but were evacuated, like I said before. We know several people that, they will never get over that evacuation, that not knowing what happened to their home (Thompson, Louis Creek resident).
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> It's a displacement, it's a feeling of displacement… but that being displaced from your home, that, you know, just having somebody come by and say you have to leave, you have to leave your home, that's just an incredibly terrible feeling of powerlessness. It's powerlessness, helplessness, and just mass confusion (Marg, Barriere resident).

Over a year and a half after the fires, a number of residents told of still having boxes that they had packed during the evacuation and which remained packed because they wanted to be ready in the event of another fire, or because they did not want to remind themselves of the evacuation experience by unpacking them. An area counselor described how, for some of her clients, just leaving Barriere had been disorienting. Many of her clients, she said, were marginalized by poverty and used to living relatively isolated lives and they may not have left the community for months and months at a time under normal circumstances. She described their experience of having to evacuate as "an avalanche coming down."

For those who returned to destroyed homes and businesses, the disorientation deepened in the face of the loss of the most basic material and geographical markers of their lives: their possessions were gone, their neighbors and friends dispersed, and the built and natural markers of their homes and neighborhoods no longer existed. At the heart of their disorientation were myriad disconnections from the orienting networks that had grounded residents in their lives. The social-relational and geographic place they called home had been irrevocably altered.

> You know, you can hardly recognize where you were even though you're going up and down the road a million times and, you know, all these favourite little trick trails that we used to ride and, and I can't even find it, you're never gonna look at the country the same way (Timber, Barriere resident).
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> Everything was steady here. I felt safe here. It's like the difference between a good driver and a bad driver. The good driver knows her way, knows like it is familiar to her. A bad driver is how I felt like when I came here, I was home again but there was no house, there was nothing here (Jan, Louis Creek resident).

By the first anniversary of the fire most residents in Louis Creek and Barriere, who had lost their homes, had rebuilt at least to the point of occupancy. Beyond the pragmatic consideration of shelter, the rebuilding of homes seemed overwhelmingly to be a process of reconnecting with their sense of rootedness or their belonging in place. Although the physical structures were there however, a house, according to many of those interviewed, was not a home. As one Louis Creek resident put it, "It's not just your house, it's your heart that's lost" (Richard Louis Creek resident). Many of those interviewed the first year described feeling "not at home," in their new homes, attributing their disorientation to the foreignness they were surrounded by inside and outside their homes.

> We lost our lifestyle not just a few possessions" and "we went from rolls to the rails" overnight. Everything is a challenge, like everything. I go to bake a cake and oh, I'll just look up a birthday cake. Hmmm, a recipe, I've got a cupboard full of recipe books that were given to me. I've got to start searching through to find a cake recipe. You know, and I had everything at my fingertips before. Oh, and then I went to make a pie the other day, I couldn't find a pie plate. Simple things and yet you can't quite put it together and you think what is wrong with me mentally (Pam, Louis Creek resident).

In the sudden loss of the familiar and routine, the comments of many of those interviewed suggested that they were confronted to varying degrees with the incommensurability of our need as humans for continuity and stability and the inherent instability of a world continually in flux (Caputo 1987). The illusion of permanence, predictability, and stability that is established through routines and the structuring of familiarity was unmasked. In the process, the ground of being for those directly (and in some ways indirectly) affected was both literally and metaphorically shaken resulting in a sense of disorientation.

The collective disruption caused by the fire exposed the taken for granted role of place and home in identity formation simultaneously and coextensively for residents, in effect triggering a collective identity crisis (Buttimer 1980). In this way, the McLure Fire acted as a discursive insertion point, a time and place in which routine social practices were momentarily disrupted and the smooth functioning of the background knowledge of those affected was interrupted. The direct encounter with our materiality and with suffering calls forth more than coping, it call into question the relatively stable story of self (Charmaz 1999). In the pause that is created, or the de-routinization of living as Giddens (1979) described it, a discursive opening is created, and in this opening a process of navigating, negotiating and reconstructing identity, or reorientation, is initiated.

Media Accounts

The content analysis of the media coverage of the immediate recovery process revealed six main themes in the recovery discourse. These six themes revealed a construction of recovery that was dominated by economic-material concerns and a silencing or sequestering of suffering. The dominant voice in these accounts of recovery was male, authoritative and institutionalized. The findings of the media analysis supported the notion of a hierarchy of credibility in which expert voices were privileged over those of local residents, a finding consistent with the media discourse associated with technological disasters (Cox et al. 2008). Further, the critical discourse analysis suggested that the dominant discourse of recovery tended to reinstate the status quo and prescribe a preferred version of recovery in which suffering was privatized and individualized and positioned as something to be managed effectively and moved beyond as quickly as possible. A failure or inability to conform to this construction was construed as a character flaw or pathology.

These accounts drew on themes consistent with dominant discourses (e.g., neoliberal discourse) that reinforced existing material and social relationships in the two communities. The passive subject positions indicated that there may be a limited potential for individual and collective empowerment and the development of emergent leadership within the communities as the recovery process unfolded. In sum, this construction has the potential to undermine the provision of necessary resources and social programs that might best support individual and collective health through the recovery process and beyond—a trend already identified as an effect associated with dominant discourse (Coburn 2004). Coming as they did in the early phases of the recovery process, these public accounts of recovery set a social framing of expectations and norms for recovery that were at times echoed by residents in the interviews and at times contradicted. The dominant construction seemed to align more with the experiences of those who had suffered fewer material losses, whereas a number of those who had lost homes spoke of feeling judged for not conforming to these expectations.

> "I don't know. It's just hard to take some of the comments you hear that you think, oh, that just hurt, you know. And they don't realize, they don't think, they're not thinking what they're saying but then they can afford not to think because they were fine, you know. They haven't, they're not putting themselves in other people's shoes. In a way it's divided Louis Creek and Barriere more than ever, because it's kind of them and us, well we're okay up here, you know, life goes on (Pam, Louis Creek resident)

Reorientation, Identity and Place

The threat to or destruction of homes underscored the interconnection between the questions "Who am I?" and "Where am I?" As they discussed their individual and collective recovery, residents described engaging in a process of recreating their individual and shared identities. In effect, they engaged in a process of reorientation finding their psychological and structural bearings in response to the changes in their "frames of horizon" (Taylor 1989), those material and symbolic markers of individual and collective identities that are ground in the environmental, social, economic and political landscapes in which we live.

The spatial metaphor reconnects the idea of the self as discursively produced within a material and relational framework—an embodied, situated self that must navigate and respond to the questions posed by an ever changing landscape. Further, the term points to the constitutive role place plays, in all its material and symbolic meanings in the discourse and practices of disaster recovery and resilience.

The basic orienting frameworks of residents' individual and collective identities, in all their fluidity and complexity, were irrevocably altered in small and sometimes enormous ways for all who participated in the interviews. People had been temporarily or permanently uprooted, the environmental landscape was irrevocably altered, day to day routines were disrupted, houses and possessions were lost. Home was no longer the home they remembered. Given the threatened or actual losses in their material and relational surround, what had been for most residents an implicit background to their ongoing process of self-orientation, now became foreground.

One of the key navigational frameworks in this reorienting process was place, the ground as it were of recreating and redefining in a material and symbolic sense their homes and community in response to the changes and losses caused by the fire. Not surprisingly for a rural community, there appeared to be a deep attachment to the natural environment. Residents in both communities commented on their sense of dislocation on returning to the charred hillsides, and a deep grief was often apparent as they talked of the loss of the familiar environment and, in particular, the loss of wildlife. Cox and Holmes (2000) found similar responses in their study of place and identity in the context of an Australian bush fire.

> Nature is growing again but it's growing differently…people want it to be back to the same, right what it was before and it will never be, it will never be the same and some people really have a hard time with that. (Betty, resident service provider)
> You know, you can hardly recognize where you were even though you're going up and down the road a

million times and, you know, all these favourite little trick trails that we used to ride and, and I can't even find it, you're never gonna look at the country the same way (Timber, Barriere resident).

To many of the residents of Barriere and Louis Creek, the immediate natural environment stood as a living, visual metaphor for the process of negotiating a new relationship with the changes and losses associated with the McLure fire. Residents of both communities focused a good deal of time and energy on reestablishing their immediate environments by planting and nurturing the green that had not been destroyed by the fire. They spoke of the importance of seeing new life in the hills surrounding them in the seasons that followed the fire, and noticing the return of wildlife as this slowly occurred. The "regreening" of the environment was a particularly important aspect of the reorientation process in Louis Creek where the environmental degradation was so extensive that residents seemed determined to generate a sense of place as quickly and completely as possible through replanting.

Sam, an avid gardener and resident of Louis Creek, talked of the importance of redeveloping her garden and of her desire to ensure that whatever happened with the Tolko site would include some creation of natural beauty. One resident spoke of her excitement at the return of squirrels to her garden, and another, Ollie, told a story of her granddaughter coming to visit the summer following the fire. The little girl presented Ollie with a pot in which she had started a pine seedling, saying, "Grandma, if you water that everyday it'll grow pretty good and then when it's big enough we'll go plant it in the forest behind your house." Ollie (Barriere resident) paused after telling the story and then commented, "So you realize we just kind of go on 'cause this is where we're at and this is what has happened."

Renegotiating Identity

Harner (2001) has suggested that the stability of community identity in rural, resource dependent communities relies on the congruence between the shared meaning of place for the majority of residents and the ideological beliefs of those in power. In the wake of the McLure Fire, the relative stability of the community identities of Barriere and Louis Creek were called into question. In the destruction of Louis Creek's taken-for-granted identity as the site of the Tolko mill, residents engaged in a process of renegotiating the shared and distinct identities of the two communities. The emphasis on economic recovery that ensued framed regionalism as a necessary evolution in community identity, thus echoing the dominant discourse.

The social practices of recovery, evidenced in the activities of governmental and non-governmental agencies similarly reflected the promotion of a strong regional identity.

By contrast, those residents interviewed and living in Louis Creek spoke of a renewed sense of identity that was delineated on the basis of what they had shared. Cohen (1985) argued that the construction of a community's boundaries occurs through social interaction and the search for commonality. In the reorientation process following the McLure Fire, the symbolic construction of Louis Creek coincided with the geographic construction; Louis Creek was defined by the geography of the fire and the geography of the social interactions around the common losses.

> When your little unit of Louis Creek is totally toasted, is gone, then you come into a personal pride. Well, we live here, you know, and this is our community and we want to rebuilt it and make it happen. I don't think I ever had any sense of community until the fire came (Thompson, Louis Creek resident).

The strengthening of the Louis Creek community identity fits then, not only with the "retreat to a place of hibernation" (Cox and Holmes 2000, p. 71) but also with Harner's (2001) proposal that a "resistant identity" arises in communities in response to a perceived threat. This kind of reactive identity, he argued, did not support an "enduring sense of collectivity" because it relied on an "inward-looking provincialism" that "promote[d] inaction and resignation" and impeded grassroots activism (p. 144). Certainly, the sense of fatalism and disempowerment he described was evidenced in many of the comments of residents of both communities, particularly in connection with the perceived sense of powerlessness in the decision-making aspects of the recovery process that so greatly affected reorientation. Conversely, in Barriere, where the losses lacked this homogeneity, no single voice seemed capable of speaking for the various subcultures (e.g., ranchers, ex-Tolko workers, those involved with tourism). In the absence of this internal-solidarity, a new emphasis on regional identity emerged, espoused by those in positions of power (e.g., Provincial and Regional District representatives, Economic Development Officer) as a necessary evolution in the identity of the communities if they were to rebuild a sustainable economic future. This regional focus, driven as it was by economics, in many ways was a shift from the more traditional rural identity they had embraced before the fire, based as it was in their distinctiveness and differences between communities.

> The Valley has traditionally been, very peripherally within itself, there's been a real sense of distinction about each little place. And now we need to be all

together here. And, so we're sort of bucking our own tradition, in a way (Alice 01).

Another manifestation of this collective identity reorientation emerged as a renewed interest, particularly amongst business leaders in Barriere, in incorporation. Residents reported that the notion of incorporation had arisen previously and been defeated by those who did not believe the benefits would outweigh the increase in taxes associated with such a move. Residents attributed much of the previous resistance to the idea to "old families" who formed the "power base" in Barriere. Incorporation was positioned as a response to problems that seemed to have arisen during and after the fire as a result of their being no municipal leadership structure. There was an assumption, within Barriere at least, that it, being the larger of the two communities, would subsume Louis Creek within its boundaries.

There were examples of what Harner (2001) described as emergent identities. He explained these as a reworking of the resistant identity that transcended insider/outsider boundaries typical of the provincialism of resistant identities, to forge regional social and economic connections across geographic distances. The North Thompson Volunteer and Information Centre was developed as a grassroots strategy to build capacity in the two communities through supporting cooperation and information sharing amongst existing volunteer organizations. Likewise, the North Thompson Community Forest Society emerged as a response to the perceived threat to the sustainability of the community that resulted from Tolko's decision not to rebuild and reopen the mill and from the changes in government regulations that made this, at least in part, possible.

The discourse employed by those who developed the Community Forest Society resisted the dominant discursive practices that framed the demise of the Tolko mill as inevitable, rendered the changes to government policies and regulations that facilitated Tolko's decision invisible, and individualized responsibility for addressing the loss of employment. In creating the organization they forged subjectivities that reflected a collective valuing of local expertise and initiative and collective self-determination. At the same time, both this and the dominant version of regionalism proposed by the Economic Development Society were based in an economic discourse that relied on a commoditization of the environment (forestry and tourism respectively). By contrast, the Volunteer and Information Centre initially drew on a community capacity building discourse that fore-grounded the development of social capital in terms of increased networking and collaboration amongst existing community groups. According to those that had initiated the project, however, the material

and structural constraints of maintaining a not-for-profit community organization soon meant that the Centre became more focused on how to sustain itself, now competing for program funding with the organizations they were intending to support.

At an individual level, many of those interviewed also spoke of an ontological shift in their relationship to the world and each other. They talked of "a loss of innocence," of "being shaken out of their comfort zones," and "having to grow up a lot" in the process. Others spoke of living now in a "world of no guarantees," and realizing that they had been living "like ostriches sticking our heads in the sand." For some, this seemed to engender a shift in the prioritizing of values. For still others, there was a sense of curiosity about what exactly it was they were struggling with.

> I don't think we really realize how changed we all are. We have so much. We're protected. We have so much freedom…so how could this terrible thing happen to us? It's really interesting when you get down to what it is that is we're feeling. What is it we're holding on to? What is it we can't get by. There's a vulnerability…if that's the right word, that we didn't realize we had (Ollie, Barriere resident).

Place as Home

Place as home, was a significant orienting framework in the reorientation process. There seemed to be something deeply resonant about the loss of homes that was apparent in the outpouring of donations and in the distribution of the Relief Fund that was not as apparent in the responses to those who had lost jobs. Certainly within the dominant Western discourse, home is constructed as the site of the greatest power and control as evidenced in the metaphor of the home as a castle—there is, as Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz* reminds us, no place like home. Further, home ownership, as it is constructed in many Western countries at least, is seen as a necessary, desirable, and almost developmentally normal milestone bordering on a right (Dupuis and Thorns 1998), and constructs a subjectivity of the homeowner as more responsible, a better citizen (DiPasquale and Glaeser 1999). The loss of homes, therefore, holds powerful associations for many people and this was reflected throughout the findings.

The notion of home holds multiple layers of meaning and, like the term place, engages both a physical or material discourse and a psychological, symbolic one (Hart and Ben-Yoseph 2005; Mallett 2004; Seamon 1979). For residents of the two affected communities, the meaning of home was mobile and changeable depending on the context

and the discourses that were employed. When residents of Barriere spoke of the houses lost in Louis Creek, they often described these by drawing on a material discourse that framed the home as a structural or economic "asset" or dwelling (Mallett 2004) as in, "We have sustained great losses locally, but thank God they are only property losses … property can be replaced" (resident cited in North Thompson Star Journal, 2003).

This construction of home, however, ignored much of the transactional nature of home as a site of belonging and shared cultural meanings (Guiliani and Feldman 1993). Residents of Louis Creek drew more often on an extended discursive construction of home that entailed what Relph (1976, p. 141) called "insidedness," that is, the extent to which they felt connected to or a sense of belonging within the extended physical location of home (i.e., dwelling, surrounding, social networks). In this sense of home can be understood as a centre "of meaning, or focuses of intention and purpose" (Relph 1976, p. 22). This feeling of being "at home" transcends the material expression of home such that home is "incorporated and assimilated into the fabric of embodied existence" (Lang 1979, p. 201). Beyond narrow material and economic narratives of home lay expressions of home as shelter, as a symbolic extension of self, as meaningful livelihood, and as a locale of social relations and community.

Home as Shelter

Although for an alarming number of people, in particular women and children, home is a place of fear and violence (Eisenstat and Bancroft 1999), for many, home represents safety and security (Moore 2000). Home in this sense, constitutes a well-defined boundary between the intimate expression of self and the public expression of self; an embodied integration of the symbolic importance of home as a place of retreat (Cox and Holmes 2000). In the findings, there was an explicit acknowledgement of the home as the material representation of safety both as shelter from the elements, and as a symbolic referent of the desire for safety, continuity, and control. For most residents, therefore, the reorientation process involved reconstructing a sense of safety that included renegotiating a relationship with the environment in the light of a diminished sense of safety.

The dislocation of evacuation, the experience of being forcibly removed from their homes, was extremely unsettling for both those who did and did not lose their homes. In as much as the reorientation process involved the reestablishing of place or self in place, residents of both communities drew on the available cultural and social resources to reestablish their sense of safety and belonging. The dominant discursive practices of recovery, however, focused primarily on the home as a physical shelter and the material markers of recovery. Little support was provided to those who had not lost their homes and yet were still engaged in the symbolic recreation of home. As several residents pointed out, the timing of rebuilding and the larger recovery process was driven by the mandates of governments and organizations providing aid. In some ways, once the material markers of recovery were present (e.g., homes were rebuilt), the recovery process at the individual level was deemed to be over. As early as the end of October 2003, less than 3 months after the fire, residents were talking about putting the fire behind them: "A lot of people in the community just said 'Enough!' and we need to get on with what we need to do." (Mac, Barriere resident).

There were a number of contradictions evident in the differences between the construction of the loss of a home and other losses. The relief agencies providing psychosocial support to residents and the North Thompson Relief Fund clearly distinguished between the loss of a home and that of employment, businesses, or in the case of ranchers, cows, outbuildings, and fences.

> There was $3 million sitting there and you've got one man running this huge body of money and his comments were, you know, I'm gonna be looking after people, not cattle, without understanding that, well, cattle are the people, it's family for the ranching community (Timber, Barriere resident).

The institutional practices (e.g., relief funding) that flowed from the dominant construction of home as residence (i.e., building) discounted the broader symbolic and social meanings of home as a repository of long family traditions, and in the case of the ranchers, of their families' economic viability. The separation of home from economics was to many residents an artificial and an urban construction that did not take into account rurality. Likewise, for ex-Tolko workers, few of whom lost their homes, this dominant discursive framing of their losses as purely economic and labor-related ignored their subjectivities as community members. The dominant discourse disengaged the home from its symbolic and social meanings constructed and, in so doing, created a hierarchy of losses in which the home as shelter and a reflection of an economic investment superseded all other specific individual losses. Home as a powerful location of social capital (Parcel and Dufur 2001) was cast aside by the primacy of economic capital.

Home as a Symbolic Extension of Self

Amongst those who had lost their homes there was an equally strong although less explicitly articulated construction of home as a symbolic and a multifaceted

extension of self (Belk 1988). In the literature on place and possession attachment, the salience of home to identity is construed in part from its role as a marker of the narrative of self over time (Low and Altman 1992). In this regard, home is a very powerful site of identity in which the role of place and possessions intersect.

> Everything was steady here. I felt safe here. It's like the difference between a good driver and a bad driver. The good driver knows her way, knows like it is familiar to her. A bad driver is how I felt like when I came here, I was home again but there was no house, there was nothing here (Jan, Louis Creek resident).

From this perspective, the home-as-place was not simply shelter or the backdrop to residents' existence, it was also a repository of their symbolic investment of self in things, or the objective manifestations of self (Latour 1996). Our possessions have a utilitarian or functional role as tools that support and facilitate our engagement with/in the world. They also have a symbolic role, acting as tangible referents that allow us to rehearse who we are (present, past, and future), who we are not (the boundaries between self and other), and how we fit in the world. In this sense, the reorientation process for those who lost homes and businesses involved an artificially condensed process of self-restoration, established through a sense of continuity and interconnectedness through the re-accumulation of possessions.

Because of the self-definitional value of possessions, the reorientation process for many of those who lost homes was complicated and protracted. Not only were residents negotiating the material replacement of their possessions, they were also engaged in the much slower process of integrating those material objects into their self-story through their interactions with those objects. Simultaneously they were engaged in a mostly unacknowledged process of grieving the loss of their previous possession, particularly in terms of their self-definitional value.

> Everything is a challenge, like everything. I go to bake a cake and oh, I'll just look up a birthday cake. Hmmm, a recipe, I've got a cupboard full of recipe books that were given to me. I've got to start searching through to find a cake recipe. You know, and I had everything at my fingertips before. Oh, and then I went to make a pie the other day, I couldn't find a pie plate. Simple things and yet you can't quite put it together and you think what is wrong with me mentally (Pam, Louis Creek resident).

Further, although the loss of special possessions (e.g., treasured artifacts, family photos) was acknowledged as significant to some degree, it was assumed by many who had not lost their homes that the loss of other items was simply a matter of inconvenience and that with their replacement residents who had lost their homes were actually better off than they had been. This is also reflected in the literature on possession attachment, a parallel literature to that on place attachment, which has tended to focus a great deal of attention on these special possession categories and less so on the mundane categories (Kleine and Baker 2004). What this construction failed to take into account was the symbolic value of even the most mundane of items (e.g., clothing, cooking utensils) and the ways in which their absence in residents' lives caused a recurring and prolonged sense of disorientation and distress.

Home and Work

Home as the locus for work had particular relevance in this study as many of those who lost homes simultaneously experienced the loss or significant disruption of their livelihoods. The intersection of work and home is an important aspect of rural living where non-traditional sources of income have grown (Gundry 2005; Ofosuhene 2005). In the context of Barriere and Louis Creek, these businesses included a variety of home-based businesses and businesses that existed on the same properties as home. For ranchers, for instance, the meaning of home extended to include their outbuildings, pastures, grazing land, and their family's history on specific tracts of land—their family extended to include the livestock on which their livelihoods relied. For others, homes and businesses shared the same land (e.g., the Louis Creek Antique Store). Researchers have also pointed out that paid employment itself is a powerful determinant of social capital (Stone et al. 2003). Disorientation and reorientation extended into every facet of the lives of those who lost both their homes and businesses.

Home as Social Relations and Community

Home, in its broadest sense (this material and symbolic confluence of meanings), also represents the affiliations and social construction of place that leads to a collective sense of attachment represented in the notion of sense of community (Milligan 1998). Norris et al. (2008) describe sense of community as "an attitude of bonding" that includes "mutual concerns and shared values" and that is a characteristic of resilient communities (p. 139). Consistent with the research on disaster (Erikson 1976a, b; Kaniasty and Norris 2004) and social psychology literature, the threats and disruptions of the McLure Fire contributed to both the disruption and, for some at least, the enhancement of a sense of community within and between the two study

communities. Furthermore, interviewed residents' location on this continuum often reflected the nature and severity of their losses.

For many Louis Creek residents, the loss of their homes and the various structural and environmental markers of their community seemed to contribute to heightened identification with their community, which distinguished Louis Creek from neighboring Barriere in ways that it had not previously been distinguished.

Conversely, Barriere residents seemed both to experience a fracturing of their community along lines of who received what aid, and the perception that some individuals were taking advantage of the influx of aid. Many residents also described a withdrawal from their shared sense of community with Louis Creek, that is, retreat into a "place of hibernation" as Cox and Holmes (2000, p. 71) described in their study of the effects of an Australian wildfire on sense of place and home. This seemed to be a protective retreat, a move away from the material (e.g., the burned hillsides, the destruction of homes) and emotional markers of suffering (e.g., signs of distress) that were so much more evident in Louis Creek. Residents of Louis Creek, on the other hand, lived in the midst of the fire's devastation. They tended to construct a retreat based on their shared suffering, banding together and narrowing the boundaries of belonging to include only those who shared this "ground zero" experience of the fire.

> When your little unit of Louis Creek is totally toasted, is gone, then you come into a personal pride. Well, we live here, you know, and this is our community and we want to rebuilt it and make it happen. I don't think I ever had any sense of community until the fire came. (Thompson, Louis Creek resident).

Rural communities because of their small size, relative homogeneity, and geographic location tend to foster a strong sense of identification and belonging (Statistics Canada 2005). Rural experiences of reorientation may be mediated by unique relationships to social capital, including: (1) the propensity for long term social networks (Onyx and Bullen 2000), (2) extremely diverse networks due to smaller community size and close proximity to an array of community members (Erickson 2003), and (3) heightened levels of social capital (Erickson 2003). Disasters, because they can disturb and realign social capital, have implications for resilience and place. Woolcock argues that it is those communities with high intracommunity connection (social capital) which maintain additional support through weaker connections to external communities that are likely to thrive in the future (1998, pp. 170–173).

Disruptions, such as those caused by the McLure fire, can cause distress but can also forge new or enhance existing attachments to place (Cox and Holmes 2000). In his seminal ethnographic study of the Buffalo Creek disaster, Erikson (1976a, b) found that the loss of well-established social networks and ties to place caused enormous distress and demoralization amongst affected residents of that small community. Although, unlike the Buffalo Creek disaster, the McLure Fire did not directly result in any deaths, residents from both communities in the current study spoke of a similar sense of disorientation and distress at the disruption and destruction of their community and the surrounding environment.

The importance of community-as-home was apparent in the disruption and renegotiation of social relationships and community definitions that occurred with residents. Research on other disasters supports the impulse observed, particularly among residents of Louis Creek, to preserve and invest even greater importance in their community identity (Bolton 1999). Likewise, the increased sense of connectedness and camaraderie apparent in the early stages of the reorientation process in the two communities was in keeping with the research on the emergence of altruistic communities following disasters (Erikson 1976a, b; Kaniasty and Norris 1995). The apparent shattering of this seeming coherence was also anticipated by the literature that attributes the deterioration of support networks to the overtaxing of material and psychological resources during the extended recovery period (Kaniasty and Norris 1993).

Because the identified construction framed the disaster primarily in economic terms, the influx of aid was predominantly in the form of money and goods. As was suggested by the findings, this tended to diminish the likelihood of locals helping locals and was associated with a high degree of conflict over the distribution of goods that exceeded in some ways the need for those goods. With few exceptions (i.e., Mennonite Disaster Services), this aid was bureaucratized and defined by a social service discourse in ways that diminished the positive potential for the development of relationships and capacity building.

A regional community identity was also identified in the discourse analysis process. Regional identity provides a framework for common identity and social action in the service of social, economic, and political goals (Keating 1998). The North Thompson regional identity was already established to some degree prior to the McLure Fire, but the discursive practices of those directing the distribution of relief funds could be seen in both interviews and media accounts to be creating as social fact this regional identity.

> The Valley has traditionally been, very peripherally within itself, there's been a real sense of distinction about each little place. And now we need to be all together here. And, so we're sort of bucking our own tradition, in a way (Alice, Barriere resident).

The promotion of this regional identity is consistent with the shifts in focus within dominant neo-liberal economic discourse to an emphasis on regionalism. This discourse tends to legitimize the status quo of power relations in as much as "social identities always include a normative element of power" (Paasi 2002, p. 146) and are expressions of power relations (Massey 1994). The discursive practices of promoting and solidifying a regional identity were most evident in the comments of those in charge of the distribution of relief funds (private and government) and were consistent with their tendency to frame the recovery process following the disaster primarily in economic terms. Drawing on the discourse of regionalism, those in power denounced the emergence of a strengthened local community identity in Louis Creek as potentially economically counterproductive and socially unnecessary.

> …when I speak of Barriere I'm speaking of Barriere, Louis Creek, Exlou, Dixon Valley, because for me to look at it I think it's one common community. And I think they should be looking at it that way too. I think sometimes we get too focused on Lewis Creek being a, it's, it's a small community that, it's too small. If it wasn't for the larger community of Barriere, really there's no tax base or no great focus and I think it would be a detriment to them to, ….And we have to look at ourselves that way because if we divide ourselves up, we'll conquer nothing (X, government representative).

Their response to this emerging identity was to re-inscribe the status quo of power relations between the two communities, to reinforce the need for experts to direct this regionalization of the economy, and to marginalize the creative potential of individuals to determine a new economic course by limiting the allocation of funds to large-scale employment, regional projects.

Home and Gender

Congruent with the findings of studies that have examined the gendered dimensions of disasters (Fordham and Ketteridge 1998; Stehlik et al. 2000), home was also constructed in gendered terms that drew on the same stereotypical constructions of the social division between private and public spheres and the roles of men and women. Home was constructed as the primary domain of women and the center of individual privacy. The expression of suffering and the overt signs of emotional distress were delimited as belonging at home, where they were attributed predominantly to women because the fire had threatened and disrupted their domain.

> But the women of the community, they've, uh, it's their home and the home is the focus in general… they're very withdrawn and even my own wife has, is one that seems to have been taking a long time to get over it, the fact that, I think because your home, your, your nest and everything else has been threatened and disrupted and with the men your focus is your job. I mean that's, that's your main focus in life is go out there and make a living. But the women of the community, they've, uh, it's their home and the home is the focus in general. And it seemed to have hit them the hardest (Ken, Barriere resident).

> For men to be focusing solely on the economic side of the picture and ignoring the social well being and the environmental portion, that is the way that men have traditionally done things. And for them to be not considering a woman's perspective or point of view…god we had to fight to get the vote. From their perspective, they are not doing anything wrong (Sam, Louis Creek resident).

Women were positioned as the purveyors of home-as-nest, or home as the place of family and nurturing and thus the most invested in and most responsible for the maintenance of the continuity and stability of home. Men were positioned as constructing the houses that women then turned into homes.

The action of the discourse of recovery generally regulated masculine and feminine subjectivities and bodies through a privileging of what are considered to be traditional male attributes (e.g., autonomy, individuality, reason, expertise)—a *masculinist discourse*. The overall effect of which was to inscribe as normative practices that focused on and responded to issues and needs in the public sphere, while marginalizing or ignoring issues more related to the private sphere such as the mending of the social fabric of the communities. This discursive construction positioned women and men differently in terms of the availability and legitimacy of their power within the structures and institutions guiding recovery and afforded subject positions that drew primarily on stereotypical differentiations between men and women. Several of the discourses residents used were explicitly gendered: (a) women as emotional/men as rational; (b) women as nurturers/men as providers; and (c) women's place is in the home/men's place is in the public sphere.

Traditional conceptions of gender roles and a gendered imbalance of power seemed to preclude both a meaningful recognition of women's contributions which included leading initiatives to establish post-fire community initiatives (e.g., North Thompson Volunteer and Information Centre; North Thompson Community Forest Initiative) and playing a central role in re-establishing the social fabric of

the two communities. The implicit and at times explicit conceptualizing of women's place as being in the home contributed to their disenfranchisement in terms of access to power as it related to recovery decision-making and distribution of relief funds.

> …the process is that the men have the "old boys club." Now that is not making me happy because I don't have a say in the direction of this community, and as far as I am concerned if this is a democracy then we should all have a say in the direction of the community, not just a bunch of guys from Kamloops (Sam, Louis Creek resident).

These findings are congruent with previous studies demonstrating a gendered distribution of access to power and the apparent lack of gendered analysis in social capital initiatives despite the seminal social networking role women play in communities (Healy et al. 2007).

Conclusion

This study underscores the need for a more nuanced examination of the disaster recovery process and the ways in which we support survivors through the process. The choice to conceptualize at least one important facet of recovery as a process of reorientation is made to directly evoke the relevance of place, social capital, and identity formation in the psychosocial recovery process of disaster survivors and their communities. The process of making sense of and integrating the myriad material, social, and symbolic losses and changes associated with disasters is identified as an important consideration in the development of intervention strategies at the individual and community levels.

The need for a more complex analysis of and response to the psychosocial processes following a disaster is further underscored by an examination of the 'double assault' that often plagues the most vulnerable communities—often the most economically and/or culturally marginalized communities—in the aftermath of disasters. The response to disasters involves an influx of people and resources into communities and regions precisely at a time when, as the findings of this study suggest many of those directly impacted are experiencing a profound sense of disorientation. In the midst of this disorientation, key decisions about the allocation of resources and future rebuilding efforts are being made that shape not only the immediate experience for survivors, but that have long term consequences for them and their communities.

The rush to return to normal as quickly as possible following a disaster makes intuitive sense. There is a pragmatic urgency for rebuilding structures and infrastructures in order to ensure that those displaced by a disaster have shelter and safety and that governments and institutions are able to restore the basic functioning of society. Likewise, there is the emotional and psychological urgency of addressing the suffering associated with dislocation and disorientation. At the same, the findings of this study show that the urgency driving the recovery and rebuilding process can obscure and leave unaddressed important social-psychological processes and unmet needs that can undermine long-term sustainability and community resilience.

Whereas the rhetorical practices of the dominant discourse of recovery represented in both media and interview accounts drew on concepts of resilience and individual/community empowerment, the reported practices in Barriere and Louis Creek often failed to simultaneously address and integrate survivors' emotional, psychological, and social recovery needs into the planning and allocation of recovery funds and resources. Those interviewed described a recovery process that tended to overemphasize economic concerns over social ones and promote an unquestioned acceptance of recovery and rebuilding policies and activities that re-inscribed pre-existing power structures and gender inequities.

The findings further suggest that in the rush to *fix things* and return them to *normal,* even a so called *new normal*, the dominant ideological assumptions underlying the disaster recovery process positioned suffering or anything that interfered with productivity as a problem to be solved through technology, bureaucracy, and the maintenance of the status quo. Such a discursive construction of recovery tends to individualize and privatize the psychological and emotional distress associated with disasters, contributing to a social denial of the depth and duration of survivors' distress (i.e., sequestering of suffering) and at times isolating those whose recovery trajectory was slower. In the process the creative potential in the opening generated by a disaster's disruption of normal may be ignored, or at times actively denied, but not by all.

Naomi Klein (2007) describes the potential for exploitation at these critical junctures when the shock and disorientation of disasters inspires a sense of urgency that may preclude a more measured consideration of major decisions. She points to a growing and "intensely violent brand of disaster capitalism" that exploits the social and institutional disorientation caused by disasters (p. 580) and allows "radical social and economic engineering" paradigms to be pushed through by politicians and business leaders (Klein 2007, p. 9). Klein's thesis is consistent with land-use decisions in Thailand following the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. Villagers displaced by the tsunami were refused access to their land by the military as corporations moved into acquire lucrative ocean front property (Leavell 2007). Similarly, Hurricane Katrina has dramatically reconfigured

the social, cultural, racial and physical landscape of New Orleans through excessive "privatization" and "deregulation" (Giroux 2006, p. 172). Klein's (2007) research clearly suggests that in the absence of a more intentional civic engagement and dialogue with recovery, at least some sectors of civil society are only too aware of and ready to act on the opportunities presented by the disorientation of disasters.

Implications for Research and Practice

The research offers a tentative, grounded understanding of an aspect of recovery not previously elaborated. Although the nascent theorizing of recovery as in part a process disorientation and reorientation is based in a very small and specific sample, this does not preclude the possibility that similarities may be found in other contexts. More research is needed to explore and evaluate the extent to which this lens might or might not be generalized to other disaster recovery settings, both rural and urban. For community psychologists and other social scientist researchers and practitioners interested in understanding and shaping the post disaster environment, however, the results may provide a useful lens for identifying new more client- community-centered directions and possibilities for post-disaster psychosocial interventions and support to disaster affected individuals and communities.

In addition to more effectively meeting the immediate needs of disaster survivors, this approach might also contribute to a more balanced strategic consideration of disorientation and reorientation by taking into account the broader interests of society and the ways in which short- and long-term recovery and rebuilding decisions affect structural and social inequities. Further it might encourage a collective exercising of the creative and reflexive muscles required to build and enhance resilience in the face of disasters, and the reality that weather related and human caused disasters are increasing in both frequency and the magnitude of their impacts.

The implications of this research suggest that works may also need to be done at the policy level in order to incorporate a more intentional engagement with the disorientation of disasters and the role of place and identity reorientation in disaster recovery. In some measured way, recovery policies and practices might better balance the need to alleviate suffering and reestablish normalcy with the potential for individual and shared reflection and curiosity about the preferred new normal, thus inspiring a greater sense of ownership about how and who is involved in determining that reality.

Shotter (2003) alluded to the possibilities inherent in such a shift in our cultural relationship to distress and disorientation. He described a move away from a problem-solving orientation to suffering and distress to a reflective approach that would open up a dialogic space in which the possibilities called forth by disorientation are explored.

This opportunity, painful and unwanted though it may be, is implicit in the words of one survivor of the McClure Forest Fire as he described the disorientation he felt following the fires—"You don't belong anywhere. There's this fire and all that went with the fire, and then this strange feeling, this strange, not belonging anywhere (Brian, Barriere resident)" It was, he offered, a feeling of being a "like fish out of water," and, like fish out of water he and his fellow survivors were suddenly conscious of that which, until that point, had been largely out of their awareness. Reorientation, the individual and collective negotiation of identity and belonging in the wake of disasters can be painful, stressful, and confusing, but it can also be transformative. It is this possibility that is captured in the comments of a resident of Louis Creek describing how the disaster and disaster recovery experiences had changed her:

> I think it makes you a kinder person. I think it makes me a more forgiving person…I understand people more, understand their anger more, and just really appreciate life more. I think I am a more generous person than I was before. So maybe it made me a more active part of humanity too. It has changed me (Thompson, Louis Creek resident).

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