



Figurative and literal ripples spreading across the social landscape: A qualitative study on the community response to a disaster

Charlotte L. Palmer

Supervised by: Dr. Geoff Bunn

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ABSTRACT

A weakness of disaster research is the tendency to focus on only the severely affected. This study interviewed a range of disaster victims in order to gain a full understanding of a community's recovery process. Specifically this study aimed to develop an Bailey, Mort *et al.*'s (2004) understanding of the insider vs. outsider binary that is often created through disaster scenarios, to discover the role storytelling plays in recovery (Bailey, Convery *et al.*, 2004) and focus on the shared sense of community produced (Convery & Bailey, 2008).

This study hopes to improve on previous literature by taking in a much wider sense of community to gain a bigger picture of a community response.

Thematic analysis of interview transcripts revealed that community members initiate their recovery process through sharing their disaster experiences with those they trust thus revealing the binary of insiders vs. outsiders. Ultimately this process was found to result in an increased solidarity and mutual supportiveness within the community.

This process helps build on disaster response predictability.

KEY WORDS:	COMMUNITY	FLOOD RESPONSE	DISASTER RECOVERY	QUALITATIVE	THEMATIC ANALYSIS
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Introduction

The crux of a disaster experience has been described as the 'dynamic interplay of individual and community experiences' (Kaniasty & Norris, 1999, p.25), it is thus essential that disasters and communities are considered inseparable and interwoven throughout the recovery process (Galea & Resnick, 2005). Unlike many stressors, when a disaster happens it happens to the whole community (Norris *et al.*, 2008), with the effects running deep into its social tissue (Convery & Bailey, 2008). Thus 'members are exposed together and must recover together' (Norris *et al.*, 2008, p.145). This view of a disaster experience turns what was an environmental, geological issue into a social problem (Echterling & Wylie, 1999), where the emphasis is not on the physical damage but on the damage experienced by the people. This is supported by Salzer and Bichman (1999, p.74) who argue that 'some of the most damaging aspects of a disaster are disruption in social support networks and community cohesion.'

The closer we look into disasters and their repercussions the more details will be revealed and the more likely reliably repeating patterns will emerge (Kaniasty and Norris, 1999). This uncovering of patterns and trends in disaster recovery is critical in understanding and establishing a level of predictability as to how victims will react (Picou, 2009; Silove *et al.*, 2006). A common misunderstanding within disaster response is the idea of victims wholly depending on emergency services and outside aid, along with widespread reactions of fear, panic and confusion (Quarantelli, 1999; Helsloot & Ruitenbergh, 2004; Veenema, 2007). These misconceptions spread via stories in the mass media which are often inaccurate or misinformed (Constable, 2008; Wenger *et al.*, 1975). The true response to a disaster is usually characterised by victims reacting quickly and intuitively (Salzer and Bichman, 1999). Victims are found to act 'as rationally in disaster situations as they do in everyday life' (Helsloot & Ruitenbergh, 2004, p.110) with communities showing few signs of shock or dependency (Cline *et al.*, 2010).

However, these highly publicised presumptions of high levels of distress and chaos within communities' following a disaster has led to a perceived need for a multitude of psychological interventions (Salzer & Bickman, 1999, p.64), such as disaster counsellors and critical incident stress debriefing (Mitchell, 1983; Mitchell & Everly, 2000). In actual fact these interventions have found to be ineffective (Rose *et al.*, 1999), not needed or wanted and in fact pose the possibility of hindering the affected community's recover (Bonanno & Galea, 2007; Mayouet *et al.*, 2000).

Research suggests that in fact a community knows how to better recover from a disaster than outsiders do (Dynes & Drabek, 1994; Shavlev, 2004), and that one of the greatest errors within disaster scenarios is to over-rate the outsiders ability to understand and shape the recovery process and to under-rate the capacity of the affected community to draw on their own resources to guide and ideally lead the recovery (Silove *et al.*, 2006). Community members make up a natural support network, a human immune system (Norris *et al.*, 2008) that has developed over time in which they invest, access, and use resources embedded within the network to gain returns (Lin, 2001). This gives community members a host of advantages over outside helpers (Landau & Saul, 2004). Landau and Saul (2004) suggest that we need to remove this we/they dichotomy between the professionals and the victims, arguing that an artificial division between those who have the knowledge and

resources, versus those defined as incapable, overwhelmed, and needing help, is counterproductive. They go on to suggest that the outsiders should support the natural systems, rather than control them.

This shared and supportive social network has been suggested to intensify during and after a community disaster (Buikstra *et al.*, 2010), the experience of the same fate has been seen to increase identification among victims and cause any previous social barriers to dissolve (Eranen & Liebkind, 1993). Authors have suggested that disasters can sometimes impair the quality of life in the community, reporting community wide tendencies for members to feel less positive about their social network (Norris *et al.*, 1994). However these findings are in a minority. Most research finds heightened communal cooperation and surges in social support in the aftermath of a disaster (e.g. Norris *et al.*, 2001; Perry & Lindell, 2003; Rodriguez *et al.*, 2006), with the community being taken 'beyond its pre-existing levels of integration, productivity and capacity for growth' (Wicke & Silver, 2009, p. 234).

This study will take inspiration from research carried out by Convery and Bailey (2008), who through an intense study on Carlisle flood victims managed to 'capture inside, localized knowledge' (p.100) of the events that took place at the time of the flood and the following sequence of events. They consider the impacts from a 'lived, local experience' (Convery & Bailey, 2008, p.100) perspective and discovered the aspects that most affected the victims, such as; accommodation, enduring renovation, funding and social discrepancies. However, there are some identifiable gaps within Convery and Bailey's (2008) study, they chose to only talk to those victims that were 'most affected by the floods' (p.102), they missed the wider sense of community by singling out those at the epicentre of the disaster. This study plans to cover a much more varied group of flood victims so as to see a whole community response. Convery and Bailey (2008) hint at communities pulling together as well as the binary of insider and outsiders that is created through a disaster, but the areas are limited and in need of a much richer understanding. Ultimately, Convery and Bailey's (2008) study establishes the sequential basics of the events that take place in the aftermath of a disaster. However, they do not tell an in-depth story of a community's response and recovery. This study plans to paint the whole picture of the process of a community recovering from a disaster.

Bailey, Convery *et al.* (2004) illustrate the rich possibilities of focussing on disaster victims' narratives, in particular exploring the inter-play between what is being told and how it is being told. They argue the process of storytelling can reveal embodied accounts of trauma and recovery within the localised, cultural context of the experience. This study plans to look into the process of storytelling and the role it can play in disaster recover but now on what or how it is being told but to whom.

Bailey, Mort *et al.* (2004) looked at 'professional versus citizen knowledge' (p163) at the time of a disaster and found surprisingly that there was no increased demand on health services during or after a disaster due to disaster victims' tendency to go to those on the 'inside of the disaster' (p.164) for help and support rather than professionals. This study will look further into the binary nature of insiders and outsiders a disaster creates.

Throughout this literature review it has become apparent how communities are calling out for improvements to be made in the process of aiding a disaster response (Adinolfi *et al.*, 2005)

In light of the above, this study aims to look further into the social repercussions and community responses to a disaster, specifically this study's aims are:

1. To see if Convery and Bailey's (2008) model of a community's response to a disaster is valid when taking in a much wider sense of a community, to capture the same intensity of localised knowledge whilst developing their findings of a community pulling together.
2. Bailey, Convery *et al.* (2004) illustrate the rich possibilities of focussing on disaster victims' narratives, this study plans to look into the process of storytelling and the role it can play in disaster recovery but not on what or how it is being told but to whom.
3. To see if Bailey, Mort *et al.*'s (2004) findings that disaster victims tend to seek help from those on the 'inside' of the disaster over professionals is valid across all levels of a community.

Methodology

Design

A qualitative approach was deemed to be the most suitable choice of methodology for this study. Qualitative research has been described as having the ability to 'put a "face" to the disaster and suffering' (Salzer and Bickman, 1999, p.64); allowing disaster victims to be seen as real people with real life experiences instead of a number or statistic as would have been the case with a quantitative approach. Qualitative research is widely used across disaster research (e.g. Buikstra *et al.*, 2010; Convery & Bailey, 2008; Mort *et al.*, 2005; Whittle *et al.*, 2010), Tapsell *et al.* (2002, p.1513) suggest this is because qualitative research has a 'key role to play in explaining and interpreting people's lives, actions, perceptions, fears and feelings, particularly when researching sensitive issues such as flooding'.

Similar to that of Wicke and Silver (2009) the interviews were built on a series of semi-structured questions, this approach was taken so that the data obtained was as rich and detailed as possible. By not having a strict structure it meant that the interviewees were more in control and thus had the ability to take the conversation towards areas where they felt held most meaning. Semi-structured interviews allowed the process of interviewing to be loosely framed by broad, open questions (Bailey, Convery *et al.*, 2004), for example 'Could you tell me your story of the flood?', this resulted in detailed transcripts containing long and uninterrupted accounts about the time of the flood.

Materials

Each interviewee was engaged in a discussion prior to the interview, as well as given a brief and consent form, to ensure an understanding of the process and purpose of their involvement was established. Brief and consent forms were then signed by each interviewee (original copies have been retained as they contain real names). Interviewees were then given the opportunity to ask questions and given a debrief

afterwards. The discussion prior to the interview was also used as an opportunity for the researcher to build a rapport with the interviewee; this was essential in ensuring the interviewee was at ease with the researcher and thus felt comfortable to talk in detail.

A semi-structured interview schedule was used to guide the interviews, allowing a degree of consistency. The questions were derived from an extensive literature review on community disaster and recovery. The questions were grouped by three main areas of literature which inspired this study; the role of insiders and outsiders (Bailey, Mort *et al.*, 2004; Dynes & Drabek, 1994), the idea that a community pulls together at a time of crisis (Convery & Bailey, 2008; Hobfoll *et al.*, 2002; Kaniasty & Norris, 1995), and the role of storytelling (Bailey, Convery *et al.*, 2004; Landau & Saul, 2004).

Interviewees

Interviewees were obtained via snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961), stemming from one interviewee known by the researcher. All interviewees work and live in or around Cocker mouth so have a deep knowledge and understanding of the town in terms of the people, the traditions and general way of life.

Interviewees were given pseudonyms and numbered in interview order (see Table 1)

Table 1

Interviewee pseudonyms and occupations

	Pseudonym	Occupation	Relation to Cocker mouth
1	Alice	999 Dispatcher, Cocker mouth Fire Headquarters (FHQ)	Lived in Cocker mouth for 10 years, now lives in a neighbouring town. Has a property there which flooded.
2	Ben	Detained Fire Fighter, Cocker mouth FHQ	Lives in a neighbouring village, grew up in Cocker mouth.
3	Callum	Watch Manager – Fire Fighter, Cocker mouth FHQ	Lives in a nearby town, girlfriend lives in Cocker mouth
4	Darren	Full time Fire Fighter, Cocker mouth FHQ	Lived in Cocker mouth all his life.
5	Elliot	Performance and planning manager, Cocker mouth FHQ	Grew up in Cocker mouth and now lives nearby.
6	Fay	Retail assistant, National Trust Shop, Cocker mouth	Lived in Cocker mouth for 15 years, house was badly flooded.
7	Gail	Acting Custodian of Wordsworth House	Lives in a nearby town, has worked in Cocker mouth for 12 years.
8	Harriet	Cocker mouth pub owner.	Lived in Cocker mouth all her life; house was badly flooded

Procedure and setting

Interview location was chosen by the interviewees so as to ensure they felt at ease and able to speak freely. Six of the interviews took place in the interviewees' place of work, one chose to talk in a cafe in Cockermouth and one was carried out at the researcher's house.

A pilot interview was carried out to establish if the proposed questions would be easily understood by interviewees and in a logical order, it also gave the researcher an opportunity to see the level of additional prompting that would be required. Only minor changes were made, mainly on sequence of questions and cutting out of questions which produced too similar answers.

All interviews followed the amended interview schedule (Appendix 3), being adapted where appropriate. Interviews were digitally recorded and promptly transcribed by the researcher.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, a method of analysis often chosen by disaster researchers in order to make sense of the rich and extensive data (Moore *et al.*, 2004). This analysis process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) comprehensive guidelines. The researcher familiarised with the interview content through transcribing and repeated reading, throughout this process patterns were noted and the transcripts were colour coded. This produced a number of key themes which were then checked and re-checked. The final themes were then further interpreted through the reviewed literature.

Ethics

All interviewees were briefed prior to being interviewed and consent forms were signed. Each interviewee was advised that they could opt out of any questions asked and had the right to withdraw at any time before February 2011. All interviewees were emailed their transcripts after the interview so that they could be checked, withdrawn or amended. The researcher has discussed the interview experience with all interviewees since in order to monitor any unforeseen negative effects or misconceptions, as the interview process was quite upsetting for some due to the nature of its content. All interviewees will be provided with an electronic copy of the report on its completion.

Results

Through thematic analysis the following five themes were identified; metaphors of war, storytelling, shared sense of community, insiders vs. outsiders and changes within the community.

Metaphors of war

During the analysis a recurring use of war metaphors became apparent. These were seen to be used in the description of the emotional state at the time of the flood:

I think it had similarities to being in a war, just sheer panic and not knowing who was ok and who wasn't. (Alice)

I can understand what happened during the war, The Blitz now, people worked together, it was good to see (Ben)

So it was a good pull together really. The good old Dunkirk spirit (Callum)

They were also used to describe the physical state of the town:

...it was like going back to Beirut. There was just rubble everywhere, the devastation you saw (Harriet)

Storytelling

The process of storytelling was revealed to be a unanimous critical aspect in the recovery process. Despite people's role within the flood or how directly they were affected, everyone needed to tell their story.

The act of storytelling was described as a 'coping mechanism' (Callum) that helped to give 'closure' (Callum) on the events that took place. Darren refers to how talking helped in the healing process:

I think it [talking] does play some sort of part in healing, people aren't bottling it up, they're telling their stories, they're sharing their stories. I mean even ourselves at the fire station; we were still talking about it weeks later...So yeh it definitely does play a big part in letting it all out (Darren)

There seems to be a distinction of how severely affected the victims were as to whom they chose to tell their story to. Those at the heart of the flood, whose lives were most affected only told their story to people that had experienced the same ordeal, this is shown by Harriet:

...in our little community of people who have all been through it, we talk about it together quite a bit, but I wouldn't want to talk about it to people that weren't there and haven't gone through it (Harriet)

Alice, who was affected badly also found that talking helped in the healing process, the intensity of telling her story can be understood when she reveals that 'even now it [telling her story] reduces me to tears' (Alice). Alice chose to only talk to those close to her, mainly her work colleagues, she even describes how she refused to talk to those that were not from the community:

I was in the cottage sweeping up one day and a man from Sky came over with this big fluffy microphone and his cameras and I went no thanks [holds hands up], I mean I know its news but it's my life, my home (Alice)

At the other end of the scale there were those that were affected by the floods but on a less personal level. They seemed to find it easier to talk to outsiders and in fact describe finding comfort in doing so:

I was lucky enough in one sense, if that's the right word, I told the story of the floods in our weekly update and that also formed the basis of articles that went into national press, so in a way that helped me off load some of what had happened (Elliot)

I have had to give media interviews and in some ways that has been quite therapeutic actually, having a justification to talk about it with someone...it lets you vent it in a very safe way (Gail)

Shared Sense of Community Produced

The flood was seen to produce a sense of a shared community. Many people reported that they now 'know far more people in Cockermouth as a result of the floods' (Elliot).

Everyone involved described how 'everyone just pulled together' (Ben). These characteristics portrayed a romanticised response; exemplified through Ben and Harriet's descriptions of the days after the flood:

...they were having parties in the street, barbeques and parties, champagne you know, and people were speaking to each other and they hadn't spoken before (Ben)

I think by about 8 o'clock at night we had the first power cut...people just went to their homes around and turned up with candles, it was amazing, and we lit all these candles and served spirits and bottles and we kept everything going we had no cash register, just stuffed money into pint glasses (Harriet: 86-90)

This was seen as a positive result of the flood and was the consequence of peoples' recovery process. People at every level of the community were found to identify with this aspect of the flood.

Insiders vs. outsiders

A theme found to be important and influential within the recovery process was the binary of insiders vs. outsiders. This was discovered through who people chose to tell their flood stories to, and who they went to for help or support.

People appear to choose those they know and trust and those that have been through a similar ordeal, in some cases it even appears that professional help has been shunned. This can be seen through Alice and Callum when they spoke of who they went to for support:

...we could have had critical incident debriefs but we chose not to have them, we just spoke to each other (Alice)

Well we have got numbers we can ring to get professional help but we didn't need them, well I don't think we did, we just talked it through ourselves, just thrashed it out. (Callum)

This could be due to an understanding that insiders have amongst themselves that an outsider could not possibly have; Ben explains how his daughter instinctively knew something was wrong; 'she looked at me and she knew there was a problem' (Ben), he describes her as his 'biggest support' (Ben) throughout the recovery process.

Fay describes how she made her choice of who to go to for help and support: 'I didn't want any professional help because everyone was in same position as myself' (Fay), again showing how deep understanding and close relationships are valued over expertise and professional help.

This theme also includes the paradoxical relationship between flooded and non-flooded individuals. The paradox is caused due to the help given by the non-flooded and the appreciation that this help was received with. However, simultaneously there was an underlying feeling that the non-flooded did not fully understand what it felt like and were moving on quicker than the flooded could cope with. This aspect can be seen through comments from Harriet; who was flooded, and Gail; who was not flooded.

Harriet felt that those that weren't flooded don't really know how bad it was:

...no one actually crossed over to get to our side of town, so those that didn't really need to go there didn't, so half the town didn't actually see what it looked like (Harriet)

She also felt that the non-flooded people of the town thought that her and other flood victims should move on and begin to forget:

...the people who weren't directly affected have had enough of hearing our stories, I think it just gets to a point where they think everyone's got over it now but you don't, you never get over it...everyone's now looking forwards to the recovery and thinking let's put it all behind us. I don't think they actually realise how it feels, well as you saw I'm still so emotional about it 12 months down the line and I don't think they appreciate that you still have to discuss feelings and that and I don't think you'll ever get over it. (Harriet)

Harriet's comments about the non-flooded are almost confirmed by how Gail describes how she felt when she saw the houses that were flooded, although it is not in a malicious way it still creates a divide of 'us' and 'them':

I hadn't been down to Waterloo Street and those areas of the town where the houses had been very badly affected but one day I walked down there with my husband and I was just really really tearful and shaky and I said I just can't walk down here, I just can't be down here because I felt quite overwhelmed and I hadn't expected that...after that I avoided those parts of the town and really didn't want to go into the residential bits that had been effected unless I obviously had to (Gail)

Changes in the community

As a consequence of the flood there are aspects of the community that have changed, which have mostly resulted in a more solid and mutually supportive community. Alice describes how 'it's made people stronger' and 'closer', Elliot expands on this by saying how as a result of the flood he has not only met more people but 'become more involved in what's gone on in the town and become part of its recovery' (Elliot).

Harriet talked about how the changes have really helped the town both practically and emotionally:

'various people within the town have chosen to fight for flood defences for the town, now that would never have happened before, that group had been in existence for years but what's happened in this last 12 months, has pulled everyone together and made them fight harder, and we've now got street angels...making sure people are ok, regularly checking up on people' (Harriet).

Discussion

This study found that regardless of an individual's position in a disaster or how severely they were affected, they have to undergo a recovery process. Strikingly, across the community this recovery process was always initiated by telling, comparing and repeating their disaster stories. This process however, revealed a distinction between flood victims; through whom they told their story to, subsequently exposing the binary of insiders and outsiders.

This process of recovery was found to result in a shared sense of community at all levels. People tended to use war/crisis metaphors to help conceptualise their feelings, attempting to give meaning to what they saw playing out across the community. Ultimately, the flood resulted in changes in the community felt by all those involved.

Story Telling

The sharing and retelling of stories has been identified as a critical factor in the process of a community recovering from a disaster. The idea of talking and sharing experiences is evidently crucial from the beginning of this process (Norris *et al.*, 2008), due to the validation, reassurance and reinforcement of resilience the act provides (Norris *et al.*, 1994; Sims *et al.*, 2009). A community collectively telling their story is 'one of the most important processes for healing' (Landau & Saul, 2004, p.302), and often described by victims as a 'crucial step in recovering their sense of well-being' (Landau & Saul, 2004, p.305). A crucial factor found by researchers is that the telling of traumatic experiences is shared with those that are close, respected by and supportive to the victim (Kaniasty & Norris, 1999). This study found that those involved in the flood did indeed seek support from those they knew best, in some cases only sharing their stories with those that had been through the same ordeal; it was these tight knit social networks that aided the community's recovery (Buikstraet *al.*, 2010; Fisher & Sonn, 2002). However, this study also found that those individuals that were on the periphery of the flood victims; those that were interchangeably labelled both insiders and outsiders, chose to talk to people who were outside the flood situation and found comfort in doing so. Ursano *et al.* (1994, p.406-407) suggest that '[d]enial, humour and communication with the 'outside' non disaster world can all be important coping strategies during and after, the exposure to trauma', which concurs with the findings of this study. This reveals the importance of looking at the community from a wider perspective and shows how Bailey, Mort *et al.*'s (2004) findings cannot be applied to the whole community due to them focussing on a very narrow segment of the affected community.

Insiders vs. Outsiders

Storytelling revealed the binary of insiders and outsiders. Within this binary there was found to be several sub-binaries for example, professional vs. non-professional, and flooded vs. non-flooded. The individuals within the binaries are not fixed and linked within neighbouring binaries, for example a fire fighter is a professional and thus an outsider, however during the flood they were seen as insiders because of what they went through for the community but also due to Cockermouth's unique setting they too were locals with in-depth local knowledge (Paterson *et al.*, 2010). Gail who was heavily involved and affected by the flood would be seen as an insider due to her flood experience however when consider on a deeper level, from Harriet's perspective, Gail becomes an outsider as she fits in the non-flooded category. Gray *et al.* (2004) exemplify this point when discussing those individuals who are indirectly exposed to the flood by virtue of their roles and responsibilities, who are automatically classed as outsiders, can in fact be trauma victims and therefore very much insiders. This illustrates that this distinction between outsiders and insiders that disasters frequently create (Convery *et al.*, 2008) can be rather arbitrary and difficult to delineate (Grey *et al.*, 2004). This nature of the said binary was missed by Bailey, Mort *et al.* (2004).

The utilisation of professionals in a disaster aftermath often causes discomfort amongst victims (Mayouet *et al.*, 2000), who prefer to seek help and support amongst trusted members of their own communities rather than from professionals (Bailey, Mort *et al.*, 2004; Korczynski, 2003; North & Hong, 2000). This study supports these claims, as victims were very much found to 'serve as their own best responders and resources' (Wicke and Silver, 2009, p.234). Repeatedly saying how the town came together and coped in unity. This study also found that professionals and outsiders were turned away whenever possible; with close friends, family and colleagues being chosen over counselling, critical incident debriefs and general professional support. However, outside help is always needed to an extent in disaster scenarios (Cline *et al.*, 2010); larger organizations and volunteers were relied upon in order to provide the more practical support (Appleseed, 2006), after all, 'these "wonderful helpers" are an integral part of a struggling collective' (Kaniasty & Norris, 1999, p.36). Yet, these outsiders lack required in-depth knowledge and tacit understanding of those they are trying to help (Silvoe *et al.*, 2006; de Tocqueville, 2001, 2000). This leads to a paradox of power concerning the use of professionals (Suparamaniam & Dekker, 2003); there do the disaster victims with the local knowledge and social understand yet they lack the authority or more commonly the resources to implement strategies for recovery. There are then the professionals, the outsiders who have little understanding of the disaster stricken community and all the authority and resources but with no accompanying knowledge to know what to do with them (Dynes, 1989). As Suparamaniam and Dekker (2003, p.313) point out 'knowledge and authority are rarely located in the same author'. This was clearly seen when emergency services brought in from cities couldn't navigate the unusual layout of Cockermouth; they had the speedboats and hi-tech equipment, yet had to be accompanied by locals in order to find their way. This exemplifies how outside 'helpers' can become a hindrance instead of essential saviours (Eynde & Veno, 1999). Research has hinted at the possibility of communities being capable of managing their own affairs and drawing on their own resources to overcome acute disasters (Bravo *et al.*, 1990; Silvoe *et al.*, 2006), using Cockermouth as an example it would appear this is very much the case.

There was also a sense of insiders and outsiders within the community, between the flooded and non-flooded individuals. Harriet described how she felt the 'non-flooded' wanted to forget and move on. This was almost backed up by Gail who spoke about how she avoided the badly flooded parts of town. Tapsell and Tunstall (2008) suggest this lack of understanding on the non-flooded behalf can develop into problems as time moves on and the non-flooded begin to put the flood behind them.

Metaphors

Metaphors categorise the world for us and create cognitive frames that can ultimately have real-world consequences (Todd & Harrison, 2008). Tierney *et al.* (2006) found that following Hurricane Katrina the media recurrently used metaphors of war to describe the aftermath. This led to the public and military treating the situation like a war zone, consequently Tierney *et al.*'s (2006) title of 'metaphors matter' can be seen in a new light. Metaphors of war were found to be frequently used in the aftermath of the Cockermonth floods, however to a different effect. In this study the metaphors resulted in imagery of a community working together towards a shared purpose; a community coping. The use of metaphors also created further distinction between insiders and outsiders; the insiders, such as Harriet used war metaphors to try and embody the physical devastation she saw in her town. However, the outsiders used them to make sense of what they saw through making social and situational comparisons (Yates *et al.*, 1999), allowing them to interpret the situation in a way they could identify with.

Shared sense of community

Disasters have been reported to disrupt the sense of community (Abramowitz, 2005; Kaniasty & Norris, 2004), or intensify existing social disadvantages (Ginexi *et al.*, 2000). This however, was not the case in Cockermonth. In fact, the floods appeared to enhance the community's sense of similarity and interdependence, creating an increased sense of community (Edelstien, 1988). This could be explained by the shared valent event hypothesis (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) which describes how the more significant a shared event is to those involved, the greater the community bond. This was felt throughout the community due to an extensive range of individuals coming together around practical and social concerns, thus enhancing social connectedness (Landau & Saul, 2004).

Changes in the community

The combined aspects of the flood resulted in a changed community, characterised by increased solidarity and mutual supportiveness.

People reported feeling more embedded in the community's social networks, leading to positive implications for both individuals and the community (Norris *et al.*, 2008), as people's individual skills and expertises are combined and put to a unified effect. This was seen both practically and emotionally after the flood; it was decided that street angels, who were just local people, would be available to regularly check how people were coping, this is still ongoing over a year later. Practically, the community pulled together to fight for flood defences creating a much stronger force; Harriet described how before the flood the flood defence group was made of local well

wishers and do gooders but now 'we had civil engineers, we had legal people, people that are involved in public relations, we assembled a team that were very professional that you wouldn't get in most companies and they're all local people' (Harriet, 303-307). This depiction of a community pulling together chimes nicely with Wicke and Silver's (2009, p.234) statement of disaster victims serving 'as their own best responders and resources'.

Practical Implications

Ultimately, this study suggests a model which can assist disaster administrators and response councillors in predicting the disaster recovery behaviour of a community. This study reveals a sequence of recovery which can aid the understanding of how disaster victims react and recover, adding some predictability to the process. This study has discovered that communities have a natural support system that helps them cope and adapt as a unit, outside help is often not wanted or in most cases needed. These findings hold huge implications as to how these 'outsiders' should act. This study proposes that this natural response is not fought against but accepted and enhanced further through disaster plans.

Story telling was found to be vital in initiating recovery and creating community bonding, therefore disaster resources should be implemented in such a way that makes this process easier; Cockermouth churches set up a cafe that became the centre for this storytelling and recovering (Cumbria: After the flood). If disaster planners were aware of the positives that can be reaped from such a simple facility then it could be put into practice.

This study also suggests preventions should be implemented so as to reduce the amount of access the media and other such unnecessary outsiders can have to disaster victims due to the great discomfort and upset they can cause.

Outsiders lack vital tacit knowledge that is needed in disaster response. To eliminate the power paradox discussed key pre-attributed members of the community should be given higher levels of authority and resources so as to aid a recovery that best suits the town. Community organisations are often described as 'the backbone for a community's response to disasters' (Dynes & Drabek, 1994, p.13) thus pre-attributed members could be chosen from such organisations.

Counsellors should be brought in, not to council but to pass on their skills to members of the community so the community can counsel themselves; this means that individuals are getting the support they need without the need for bringing in outsiders to do so.

Future Research

No study reviewed took in such a wide sense of disaster victims, most chose to study just those that were severely affected (Convery & Bailey, 2008; Sims *et al.*, 2009), this study looked at people from the severely affected, to the emergency service workers, to those answering the 999 calls to just local individuals. This extensive spread of people was an invaluable resource in gaining access and an understanding of a whole community's true response to a flood. Therefore there is a

recommendation for future research to consider a wider definition of community so as to gain added validity. This is an area of research that holds immense importance due to its real life consequences, and as nature's 'awesome power of destruction' (Yates *et al.*, 1999, p.133) appears relentless; ongoing research must develop to discover further patterns of predictability.

Reflexivity

I realise the conclusions drawn are influenced by my personal experiences and cultural understanding. I grew up close to Cockermonth and have family members that live in and around the town; therefore I have a strong attachment to the place and the people. This local knowledge has given me a deeper understanding of the community's way of life as well as an ability to identify with the close-knit nature of the community that very much influenced their flood response.

A qualitative approach was used because a quantitative approach would have been unable to gain the insight and depth of perception needed for this study. To portray a community as a group of statistics which are then fed through computer software would seem almost insulting. This study required a more sensitive approach that could capture the community's true feelings, emotions and reactions to the flood and bring meaningful recognition to their experience.

As an inexperienced interviewer I am aware I may have influenced the course of the interview due to my want for the interviewees to answer my research aims. However I felt this improved with each interview; by Harriet's interview I was able to let her narrative fully develop resulting in rich uninterrupted data. In the thematic analysis I tried not to misinterpret the interviewees (Hurd & McIntyre, 1996) keeping their remarks relevant to the context in which they were given.

I believe being from the area gave me an advantage in gaining such in-depth and detailed data. The interviewees could see I had a pre-existing understanding of the events that took place and repeatedly expressed how they wouldn't have wanted to talk to someone that didn't. In this way I felt very privileged that they were willing to open up to me and divulge such personal information.

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