ECHOES, TRANSGRESSIONS, AND TRANSFORMATIONS:
IDENTITY REORIENTATION AND THE DISCOURSE OF DISASTER RECOVERY

by

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ABSTRACT

Little attention has been paid to the discursive framework that guides the experiences of “recovery” from natural disasters and associated health-related consequences. Traditional psychological paradigms in disaster studies have tended to adopt a mechanistic view that controls for complexity by minimizing the sociocultural and gendered contexts of disaster recovery and accepting uncritically the ideological assumptions that guide the process. This has resulted in a narrow framing of recovery that focuses primarily on the economic and material consequences of disasters and promotes a speedy return to the status quo.

This study begins to address this gap in research and practice by adopting a complex-systems and critical perspective to examine the psychosocial process and discursive practices of disaster recovery. A critical, multi-sited ethnographic approach was applied to study the recovery process in two rural communities in British Columbia, Canada, where the McLure Fire forest fire destroyed homes and businesses, ravaged the landscape, and devastated the economic sustainability of the region. Qualitative analysis methods, including strategies from social constructivist grounded theory, methods from critical discourse analysis, and creative writing strategies were employed to examine interviews with residents, local news media texts, and the reflections of the researcher for themes and guiding and informing discourses.

A social-psychological process described as disorientation and reorientation was identified in which residents navigated and negotiated shifts in their material and social frames of reference associated with the material and symbolic losses incurred as a result of the McLure Fire. Reorientation involved a complex process of recreating and redefining individual and collective identities. Despite the complexity of this process, the dominant discursive practice of disaster recovery identified in both the media and interview accounts continued to emphasize the economic and material aspects of recovery. This had the effect of marginalizing and sequestering suffering, and constrained opportunities for individual and social capacity building. The findings suggest that adopting a complex systems approach to disaster might result in new more flexible and empowering practices. Including a mindfulness approach to the disorientation of disasters would focus attention on emergent possibilities and the creative potential of the identity reorientation process during recovery from a disaster.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circling Once Again xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale and Goals of the Study 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the Study 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scattered Sentences, 9-11 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUALIZING THE STUDY - DISCOURSE, NATURAL DISASTERS, AND PSYCHOLOGY 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Disasters 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Disasters through the Lens of Psychology 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Discourse 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic Stress Discourse 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Research on Disasters 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttraumatic Growth 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaster Recovery 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance of Researching Disaster Recovery in Rural Communities 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Community 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Communities in the Consideration of Natural Disasters 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance of Researching Media Coverage of Natural Disasters 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Context and Rationale 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What If 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY - A CRITICAL, MULTI-SITED ETHNOGRAPHY 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological Approach 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnography 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-sited Ethnography 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded Theory Analytic Strategies 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse Theory 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria Required to Identify Discourses 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the Study 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sites of Inquiry 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriere and Louis Creek 47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1. IDENTITY CATEGORY PROFILE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS .............. 62
TABLE 2: CHRONOLOGY OF FIELD WORK ............................................................ 63
TABLE 3: BREAKDOWN OF NORTH THOMPSON STAR JOURNAL
ARTICLE TYPES ........................................................................................................ 105
TABLE 4: REORIENTATION - KEY MECHANISMS AND PROCESSES ............. 136
TABLE 5. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS ............. 243
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: AERIAL OF THE NORTH THOMPSON VALLEY AND SMOKE FROM THE MCLURE FIRE ................................................................. 50

Figure 2: MCLURE FIRE AT EXLOU ON THE BANKS OF THE NORTH THOMPSON RIVER ................................................................. 51

Figure 3: TOLKO MILL BURNING ................................................................ 52

Figure 4: REMAINS OF TOLKO MILL AT LOUIS CREEK ......................... 53

Figure 5: CHARRED SLOPES NEAR LOUIS CREEK .................................. 53

Figure 6: MAIN CATEGORIES OF THE CONTENT AND Identity MATRICES IN THE MEDIA DATA ANALYSIS .............................................. 71

Figure 7: SMOKE FILLED SKY OVER LOUIS CREEK ................................ 87

Figure 8: HAYWARD HOME IN LOUIS CREEK BURNS ............................ 89

Figure 9: LOUIS CREEK AFTER THE FIRE ............................................. 90

Figure 10: DEVASTATION IN LOUIS CREEK .......................................... 91

Figure 11: THEMES OF RECOVERY IDENTIFIED IN NORTH THOMPSON STAR JOURNAL ARTICLES ................................................. 107

Figure 12: MEDIA EXPOSURE BY OCCUPATION AND LOCATION .......... 109

Figure 13: GENERAL MECHANISMS AND KEY PROCESSES OF REORIENTATION FOLLOWING THE MCLURE FIRE ..................... 137
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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to all the community members of Louis Creek and Barriere who opened up their homes and their hearts. You gave so generously of your stories and thoughts at a time when you were consumed with the difficult task of rebuilding your lives, and I have tried to produce something that honors that. I hope in some small way that I have been able to translate your generosity into work that meaningfully contributes to our ability to respond to disasters in more generative and empowering ways.

I also extend this dedication to all those who continue to give so generously of their time, expertise, and energy as disaster responders in order to support those affected by disasters.

And finally, I dedicate this work to the promise of compassion that lies within each of us as we navigate our journeys of being together and being alone.

Om Mani Padme Hum
I am,
We are,
Hermeneutically circling.
Questioning the existence of a stopping place
Intuitively understanding that below the binary,
Underneath the grasping at certainty,
Lies mystery, not mastery.

Looking back,
At the first stab
In this defrocking of discourse.
Like Dorothy’s Lion, lacking in courage
My questions were assimilated and contained
My performance,
Standing perfectly still.

Circling,
Once again,
On this pilgrimage of curiosity.
This story, unfolding, explicating, inscribed,
Still struggles within the nature of its telling.
Strives to transgress
Its flat, fixed life in text.

Enigmatic
Double agent,
Reason is once again in motion,
In a clumsy dance of radical faith, bewilderment
As I swear allegiance to the servant of my intuition.
I offer this poetry,
Laughing as I go around.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 2003, the forests of British Columbia, Canada (BC) exploded in flames. Firestorm, 2003 as the fire season became known, was one of the worst on record in the province involving the loss of over 300 homes, many businesses, and thousands upon thousands of hectares of range and forest land in the North Thompson and Okanagan valleys in the southern interior of the province. On August 1st, 2003, I responded, along with hundreds of other volunteers, to the outbreak of the McLure Fire in the North Thompson Valley, BC. The McLure Fire was to become one of the most destructive interface fires, or fires that occur at the intersections between wilderness and human settlement, that season. Initially I supported the response efforts in Vancouver, BC, and then went to Kamloops, BC, the closest city to the fire and the one to which most of the residents of the North Thompson Valley had been evacuated.

As I worked to support the psychological and emotional well-being of evacuees and emergency responders, I was reminded again of my growing curiosity about the dominant view of disasters and the dominant Western response to the disruption they cause. This curiosity had initially arisen for me while responding with the American Red Cross to the 9-11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. For 3 weeks in October 2001, I talked and worked alongside thousands of volunteers and New York City residents as they struggled to make sense of what had happened. It was a profoundly moving experience to be in the midst of such an iconic, American city during what felt like a mythical event. New York was vibrating with an undercurrent of fear and uncertainty, but also a palpable sense of compassion and desire for connection as tens of thousands of volunteers and residents converged to respond to the largest domestic disaster in North American history.

As with many of the terms used in this study, finding a word to describe the broader, shared social and cultural assumptions characteristic of Canada, the United States, and perhaps to a lesser degree Western European societies is no easy task. The term “Western” is not unproblematic as there is no uniform definition of what constitutes the West. The term was originally tended to refer to societies of Western Europe societies settled by Western Europeans through immigration. This and other similar terms, such as Anglo-American or dominant western Judeo-Christian culture, offer at best an ambiguous, short-hand to describe shared tendencies amongst developed, western nations and it is with this awareness of its usefulness and its inadequacy that I use the term in this study.
In the context of the McLure Fire, I found myself, once again surrounded by uncertainty and the adrenalin fueled compassion of responders. I listened to resident's stories of the fire, their evacuation, and the ongoing questioning of what was to come. As I listened to those stories, I heard confusion and a sense of urgency, a deeply seated need to make sense of the events. I was also struck by their visceral need to connect and acknowledge their shared humanity in the midst of the disconnection and disruption of the disaster. As with the 9-11 disaster, this impulse to come together, however temporary, did not diminish the horror and loss that people were experiencing but seemed to arise from it as though the shattering of assumptions, familiarity, and certainty had generated a spontaneous need to experience relationship.

Participating in these disasters had a profound effect on me as a clinician and a researcher. I had a sense in both cases that I had witnessed and participated in a momentary, collective awakening that was quickly lost or at least overshadowed by a whirlwind of activity in which I was an active participant. These seemed to be liminal moments of rupture in which the surface of our culture of disconnection and our silence about our suffering was disrupted by the dropping of an unexpected rock. The contraction of fear that rippled out from the epicenter of this sudden and unanticipated rupture was met simultaneously by ripples of an expanding awareness of our interconnectivity, an awareness that had been held largely out of consciousness in day-to-day living.

Reflecting on these experiences and reading the literature, I became more curious about the cycles of fear and compassion, contraction, and expansion, that seemed to occur collectively in response to a disaster. In particular, I became more curious about how this period of time following a disaster was discursively constructed. What were the ideological assumptions and social conventions shaping these liminal moments? How had "recovery," a term associated with illness and therapy, come to metaphorically stand for the complex process following a catastrophic, collective event involving economic, political, psychosocial, and spiritual losses and transformations? How might the dominant discursive framework of disaster recovery and suffering offer liberating or constraining possibilities to those directly and indirectly involved in 2

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2 Suffering is a term loaded with cultural assumptions. I use it as a way of describing the psychological the emotional pain of having things not as one wishes and as a substitute for other terms more specifically associated with psychological research on disasters, such as loss, trauma, and stress. In so doing, I am trying to offer a term that encompasses those more specific terms while alluding to the emotional/psychological pain these terms describe. According to the
the process? How was it that disasters seemed to evoke a shared and powerful experience of compassion and connection that appeared to be so easily lost in the midst of the "healing process" following disaster events?

These questions are at the heart, and I use the term purposefully, of this dissertation. The heart speaks of a knowing that is both reasoned and intuitive: what Gendlin (1978) described as a felt sense (p. 99). Invoking the heart of this inquiry speaks of my commitment to incorporating the metaphoric, intuitive, unbounded knowing that tends to be shunned by the dominant discourse of science, as part of my method. It also acknowledges a commitment to using a mix of qualitative methodologies in order to encourage a critical questioning of the taken-for-granted assumptions and ideologies of disaster recovery, through writing and thinking differently, through engaging with/in the play of scientific reason as "emancipatory acts of protest" (Caputo, 1987, p. 233).

Rationale and Goals of the Study

Each year disasters, particularly those described as "natural disasters" affect the lives of thousands of people worldwide (United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction [UNISDR], n.d.). As population densities increase and centralize, as human settlements encroach further into rural areas and marginal environments (e.g., floodplains), and as global warming increases the likelihood of the occurrence of hydrometeorological or extreme weather events, the magnitude of the psychosocial and economic effects of natural disasters increases (UNISDR, n.d.; Shrubsole, 1999; Walter, 2001). Despite the extent, complexity, and unpredictability of the effects of such disasters, the research on the psychosocial process of recovery from such disasters is surprisingly narrow, particularly within psychology where disasters are constructed primarily in terms of individualistic and mechanistic models of stress and coping (including traumatic stress). Very little of the research on disasters in North America has questioned the assumptions that inform disaster responses during the disaster recovery period. Even less of this research has focused on rural environments, despite the fact that the adverse effects of the vast majority of natural disasters are felt primarily in rural and less developed areas (UNISDR, n.d.).

Oxford English Dictionary (Simpson, 2005), suffering is defined as "the bearing or undergoing of pain, distress or tribulation." The term is also congruent with the Buddhist philosophy that comprises one of the threads of this study.
In this study, I address this paucity of research by critically exploring the psychosocial process known as “disaster recovery” in the context of two rural communities. I have employed a post-structural perspective that attempts to sit in the complexity of the disaster recovery process rather than control that complexity as is more common in a great deal of psychological research on disasters. This perspective draws on post-structural understandings of consciousness and identity as relational, interconnected, a process of autopoiesis or self-authoring, which in turn, draws on complexity theories (Varela, 1991). The latter theories suggest that we live in a universe of interconnections that belies the linear causality and duality inherent in much of modern thought (Capra, 1996). Complexity theories provide mathematical and conceptual models that construct an empirical explanation for the intuitive/experiential notion that in living systems, the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

According to these theories, ours is a world comprised of non-linear, complex, adaptive systems operating in a dynamic balance between static and chaotic modes such that change and readiness to change happen when a system is in a state far from equilibrium (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). Causality is no longer understood in terms of linear, single causal models, but rather in terms of networks of causality. Systems are understood as nested within other systems in interconnected, mutually influencing webs of interaction that can exhibit emergent behavior. Order and innovation emerge spontaneously from the interactions within/of these nested systems. Social systems, individuals, communities, and organizations are comprised of networks of relationships within specific historical, socio-cultural, political, and economic contexts (Varela, 1991). From such a relational understanding of the world and humans in the world, the role of language is critical in shaping and calling forth our subjectivities and our experiences of the world and each other. Viewed in this way, although disasters are disruptive and the cause of much suffering, they are also invocations to change that are shaped and embedded in the language and social practices of disaster response.

To explore the complexity of disaster recovery and be open to the potential of emergence, I wanted to have a better understanding of the process of recovery grounded in the experiences/subjectivities of those engaged in the process. As a starting place, therefore, the question I explored was: (a) How did residents of two rural communities affected by a forest fire describe and explain the process known as disaster recovery? Having developed a picture of the recovery process from their accounts, I then wanted to engage critically with the dominant
discursive construction of the recovery process and considered the questions: (b) What
discursive practices were evidenced in their accounts and in the social practice of disaster
recovery? (c) What possibilities did the available discourses constrain or support? (d) What
emergent processes and possibilities arose in this context? and (e) What were the implications of
the dominant and transgressive constructions of disaster recovery for the health and well being of
individuals and communities and their ability to meet future crisis?

Overview of the Study

In order to consider the research questions in as full and comprehensive a way as
possible, I engaged in an ethnographic study of the discursive practices of disaster recovery
identified in: (a) the accounts and social practices of recovery of residents of two communities,
Barriere and Louis Creek, affected by the McLure Fire; (b) the public discourse of disaster
recovery as found in the local news-media accounts within those two communities; and (c) my
personal reflections as an active member of the Canadian disaster response and planning
community. The methods employed included the visceral methods of multi-sited ethnography
(Marcus, 1998), the constant comparative analytic strategies associated with the grounded theory
method, particularly from a constructivist perspective (Charmaz, 1990, 2000; Pidgeon &
Harwood, 1997), the deconstructive approach to knowledge arising within critical discourse
analysis methods (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Willig, 2001), and the kinetic knowing of poetry
(Richardson, 1997). The use of poetry throughout this text reflects both its role as a method of
analysis and as a tool of reporting my findings. Poetry highlights moments of free play in my
analysis of the disaster recovery process and the dominant and alternate discursive practices of
“suffering,” “loss,” and “stress” in these collective events. Poetic thinking transcends reason; it is
a letting-be, a surrendering into knowing and a leap out of the certainty of authorized knowing
into the groundlessness of other possibilities.

It achieves a relationship with the world which is more simple and primordial than
reason; it is in touch with things long before the demand for reason arises, and, indeed, is
so deeply tuned to things that the need for reasons never arises. (Caputo, 1987, p. 224)

These poetic offerings make visible my interest in exploring the radical hermeneutic
(Caputo, 1987) potential of the creative and disruptive pause in the “normal” that disasters open
up; the evocative possibilities of a reconsideration of our relationship to moments of disruption and discontinuity.

The text I have written is a tapestry that weaves together the strands of my own process and the scientific and poetic threads of my analysis. In this multi-threaded mapping process, my goal was to produce a dis-closure rather than a closure, a text that opens space for new questions and possibilities in our understanding and experience of disasters and trauma. As such, this text is unabashedly incomplete and written in the awareness that the act of writing itself represents a temporary fixing-in-place of knowledge, a resting place, albeit not a final destination. In this way, this study represents an attempt of walking the path, or coming to know, while understanding the path, the knowing, exists only in the walking (Varela, 1991, 1999); we are simultaneously constituted by and constituting the world through our embodied engagement with/in it.

In this introductory chapter, I have contextualized the present study in the emergence of my own curiosity about disasters, suffering, stress, and traumatic stress, and the discursive practices that shape these experiences. I have offered some reflections on my experiences as a disaster responder and described the ways in which these experiences resonated for me with the ongoing, emergent shifts in dominant paradigms defining much of how we think and what we call reality. I have identified a particular interest in and curiosity about the taken-for-granted constructions of disasters and disaster recovery and the assumptions they imply about dominant cultural construction of change and suffering. The poem that follows was written as I reviewed my experiences in New York and contemplated beginning this doctoral research project.
SCATTERED SENTENCES, 9-11

Sentences scattered in unfinished journals,
marking moments of contemplation,
stolen shadows
traced through poetry and dreams,
on these pages of hesitations
and false starts.

Learning to swim,
by letting go of the bank,
creating poetry with each choice,
writing songs of openings and closings,
in the borrowed words and rhythms
of a deeper longing.

Shaping this circular dialogue
into a square format,
disembodied and painfully embodied
in this late-night,
neck twisting interaction
of my mind and my screen.

Liberated and constrained
by the authority of theory,
schooled in the form of expert knower,
I listen to these sacred tales
of loving and losing, faith and fear,
and incomplete journeys still underway.

I sit with/in these vibrating biographies
and this circling exploration
of the sharp-glass shattering of self,
watching, as the passion of our grief
is replaced by the management
of our self.

Encouraged to tread carefully,
We step away from death’s edges,
the frozen residue of mind’s fear
like the winter’s hardening,
scrapes our hearts
drawing unexpected blood.

In these moments
we are glued to the images of
permanence’s illusion crumbling,
invited to trust the untrustworthiness of it all
as we watch you hold hands and fall
in your own leap of faith.

Death, medicated, domesticated,
is silenced no longer,
fear has no meaning
consciousness quickens
and dreams of distant possibilities
give way to now.

Mind’s tight-fisted hand,
itches open,
to the heart’s wisdom and movement

expand contract
self other
inhale exhale,
death rebirth
in out

As we walk these path of our deaths.
Studying the discourse of disaster recovery requires an analysis of the dominant ideologies shaping our understanding of the recovery process, the ideological effects of the discourse as evidenced in social practices and the subjectivities of those involved, and the ways in which these constructions support or transgress the status quo. I begin this chapter, therefore, by outlining two of the key discursive nodes of this project, "discourse" and "natural disaster."

Both of these constructs can be defined in multiple ways with implications for their use in this text. These abstractions, or conceptual categories, are grounded in our embodied experience of the world, shaped by our particular historical, cultural, and geographical locations. They are indicative of our cognitive inclination to reduce the complexity of our experiences into coherent, conceptual categories, to make meaning (Bruner, 1997). Following the deconstruction of these terms, I describe the state of existing research on natural disasters, paying particular attention to the psychological framing of these events as collective stress events, and offering a brief and critical analysis of the limitations of this framing. I examine the research on the "recovery" process following a natural disaster, and the relevance of choosing to focus on this process as it unfolds in a rural context.

Discourse

There are many ways of interpreting the word "discourse," each associated with a particular epistemological and disciplinary perspective. Many of the words we use are polysemic, meaning different things in different circumstances. One of the defining circumstances influencing the meaning of a word is the lexical field in which it is used. Stress, for instance, a construct about which I say more later in this chapter, can refer to the physical force exerted or acting upon a material object in the lexical field of engineering science, or it can refer to an adverse circumstance that causes distress or that interrupts normal physiological or psychological functioning in the lexical field of psychology (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002). Each meaning can be construed as metaphoric, enticing us to culturally mediated abstractions of complex processes and subjectivities that reflect our shared and individual histories, cultural and geographical location, and the complex web of power relations that make certain meanings more
or less available at any given time. The way we use words is indicative of our cognitive inclination to reduce the complexity of our experiences into coherent, conceptual categories, to make meaning (Bruner, 1997).

In this study, I draw on a post-structuralist understanding of the term ‘discourse’ to mean “broad constitutive systems of meaning” or “interpretive” frameworks (Sunderland, 2004, p. 6). From this perspective, we both understand and act in the world according to particular, shared meanings and associated social practices that reflect historically and culturally specific dynamics of power. We engage in the world through language and actions that are influenced by and from within these patterned and structured conditions of meaning (Parker, 2002). This structuring is temporary and partial. No discourse ever exhausts all the possible meanings; rather, it constructs temporary closures that marginalize or exclude other possibilities. We draw on, invoke, produce, reproduce, and transform available discourses in order to make sense of the world and act within the culturally and historically specific context of our lives (Sunderland, 2004).

From a poststructuralist perspective, the world is discursively constituted; we both create and are created by the conceptual categories, the metaphors in which we live (Lackoff & Johnson, 1980). In other words, our use of language and the social practices associated with particular configurations of language use, construct human subjectivities. This, in turn, implies a mutually constitutive or dialectical relationship between discourses and social events, institutions, and structures. “The discursive event is shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). This perspective does not deny the existence of an external reality with material and embodied consequences; rather, it suggests that this external reality can only be understood and experienced through socio-culturally and historically contingent discursive practices — “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). It further argues that these practices of making meaning are inseparable from our experience of the world. The overarching premise in this theory is that meaning is socially constructed and contingent; resulting in and arising from competing and conflicting definitions of reality, society, and identity that are locked into particular relationships, or discourses, with each other (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 25). Or as Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p. 108) described this notion:

An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of 'natural phenomena' or 'expressions of the wrath of God' depends
upon the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of emergence.

Because within a given context, certain discourses are privileged or carry more truth value than others, discourses also reflect and constitute particular relations of power and domination (Sunderland, 2004). Foucault (1980) argued that knowledge and power were in fact inseparable and mutually implicative and that disciplines of knowledge (e.g., psychology, sociology, medicine) were the result of power-knowledge dynamics in the service of the modern state. Further, these systems of knowledge, while tending to produce and reproduce the status quo, at the same time contribute to the revision or transformation of the status quo. Discourses are open and overlapping systems that, although stable at some level, are also continually being revised as they are put in practice.

The inseparability of knowledge and power suggested by this interpretation of discourse has consequences for how we understand the ways in which power is exercised in a given society at a given point in history. Discursive practices have “ideological effects” that “can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). Identifying the underlying assumptions guiding the discursive practices of disaster recovery can illuminate the ways in which the dominant practice of disaster recovery may produce and replicate such inequities, thus allowing for an exploration of alternatives.

Natural Disasters

The term, “natural disaster” is commonly used to refer to catastrophic events caused by, or at least determined by nature, and resulting in social and economic disruption, and human suffering and death. For the most part, the dominant disaster discourse attributes such events to natural forces, portraying them as “a departure from a state of normalcy to which a society returns to on recovery” (Bankoff, 2001, p.24), commonly evoking a perception of unpredictable destruction and devastation caused by a powerful, external agent: Mother Nature. How we understand what constitutes a natural disaster is embedded in discursive practices that constitute our experiences and imply a host of explicit and implicit socio-cultural assumptions and norms.
The Oxford English Dictionary (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002) defines a disaster as a “sudden or great misfortune, mishap, or misadventure, a calamity,” and natural as something “determined by, conforming to, or based on nature.” Depending on the disciplinary discourse or the lexical field in which it is used, the term may evoke a more specific understanding of the event as: (a) a collective crisis placing demands on a community or social system that outstrip its ability to respond (Bolin, 1989); (b) a social phenomenon rooted in social structures and systems of power (Echterling & Wylie, 1999); (c) a collective and complex stressor event resulting in specific acute and sometimes chronic psychological and psychosocial problems (Norris, Friedman, & Watson, 2002a); (d) a global policy problem involving land use, population distributions, and environmental degradation (Comfort et al., 1999); or (e) a particular example of the condition of suffering that defines human existence (Tendzin, 1987). No one definition is more or less accurate but point to the disciplinary distinctions in the focus and attention given to various aspects of natural disasters. In keeping with the complexity orientation of the present study, I understand disasters as complex, collective crisis involving individual, social, political, economic, and cultural structures and systems associated with specific forms of suffering that have come to be defined through psychology as stress.

Although natural disasters arise in connection with environmental (e.g., flood, earthquake, forest fire) or hydrometeorological events (e.g., lightening, tornado, hurricane), what turns an environmental event into a disaster involves a complex and temporally specific web of historical, social, economic, political, and psychological processes and practices involving individuals, communities, industries, and multiple levels of government (Comfort et al., 1999; Echterling & Wylie, 1999). The fire that impacted Barriere and Louis Creek, for example, was officially the result of a discarded cigarette. However, the fact that this cigarette ignited such a devastating fire was a product of a complex constellation of circumstances that include global, environmental changes (e.g., drought conditions, increased global temperatures), settlement patterns (e.g., where communities locate in relationship to wilderness), the economics of fire fighting (e.g., decisions on where and when to allocate firefighting resources), and a myriad of other human decisions that shaped important variables such as the choice of building materials for homes, insurance, and emergency planning strategies, for example.

From this perspective, the term “natural disaster” is both metaphoric and anachronistic, conflating as it does the natural or environmental event with the impact of that event on humans
and reducing this to an inevitable occurrence. The discursive framing of a disaster as natural obscures the assumptions that shape the response to that disaster and what follows. Changes in this shared script can have an impact on the availability of resources, social action, and individual and collective subjectivities. Higgins (2001), for example, described the significant shifts in local and national disaster policy and practice in Australia with the government’s decision to change the official definition of droughts from that of “a ‘natural disaster,’ a variable event that could not be totally planned for by producers and that could be best responded to through collective forms of support” to “a ‘manageable risk’ that farmers could predict, plan for and control through the adoption of particular business management techniques” (p. 300). This discursive shift resulted in significant changes in the relationships between farmers and their governments, not the least of which was an expectation of a greater degree of self-reliance in managing the environmental consequences of droughts.

A natural disaster, therefore, needs to be understood as a discursive practice at the complex intersection of various discourses with different disciplinary associations (e.g., sociology, psychology, biomedicine, emergency management, cultural studies) (Shweder, 1995). The discursive construction of natural disasters and disaster recovery through psychology is of particular relevance to this study both because it reflects my own location within the field of counseling psychology and because psychology’s construction of disasters as stress and coping events has become ubiquitous. The discursive field of psychology now influences many of the policies and practices that determine the social-psychological response to disasters in Canada, the Unites States, and internationally given the influence of highly economically developed nations on the emergency management practices in less developed countries (Bankoff, 2001).

Natural Disasters through the Lens of Psychology

Much of the literature on natural disasters is based in either sociological or psychological conceptual frameworks. From a sociological perspective, natural disasters are the result of a triggering event, an environmental hazard, and a complex web of social, political, and economic forces that shape the context in which that event occurs, and the nature of what follows (Blaikie, Cannon, Davis, & Wisner, 1994; Cannon, 1994; Hewitt, 1983). Psychology, on the other hand, views disasters primarily as collective stress and/or traumatic stress events, defined by their ability to overwhelm coping capacities and the resources of communities of individuals, and

**Stress Discourse**

The term stress originates from distress, which arises from the Old French term estrecee, meaning narrowness, or oppression (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002). In its original usage, stress signified an oppressive external power that forced someone to do something against his or her will. During the 16th century, the term stress was adopted within the physical sciences and it lost its connection with the original, personalized sense of oppression. It came instead to describe the effect of an external force on a material object (e.g., the stress of the weather on a ship), and eventually was reshaped within the engineering mentality that originated as a scientific discourse with Galileo’s examination of the strength of materials, and then extended into other domains including medicine as it redefined itself in the 19th Century.

A growing number of authors have written critically about the stress discourse, tracking its origins and its implications for our understanding of such things as work, health, and identity. Doublet (2000) examined what he described as the myth of stress exploring some of the contradictions and confusion as to the nature of stress in what has become an extensive body of research on the psychological phenomenon. Wainwright and Calnan (2002) examined the ways in which stress discourse contributes to a disempowered, individualized, subject-as-victim in work environments. In his dissertation on stress, Brown (1997) tracked the history of stress discourse, describing its cultural emergence, its relationship to the “changing representations of the human body, its powers, and ‘nature’ itself” (p. ix) and emphasized the role of technology in our experience of stress and stressful environments.

A smaller number of authors have explored stress from a more critical perspective, examining the origins and dominant constructions of stress and traumatic stress discourse (Brown, 1997; Young, 1996). In his treatise on stress as an engineering discourse of grief, Kugleman (1992) offered an intriguing and provocative examination of the stress discourse. In this work, he suggested that stress acts as a metaphor, derived from engineering, for a particular kind of grief that arises in modernity. He pointed to the origins of the stress discourse in the 19th century discourse on strain, which embodied that century’s emergent “will to progress.
economically, socially, and scientifically,” while also “express[ing] the anguish and anxiety over the losses that such changes entail” (p. 134).

Within modernity, Kugleman suggested that stress came to metaphorically name our experience of living in a constantly shifting, changing world, in which technological change and an understanding of time as a commodity resulted in the dissolution of temporal and spatial boundaries and social dislocation. The discourse of stress replaced the discourse of suffering, which, until this time, had historically been the provenance of religion and philosophy (Young, 1996). I use the term suffering here and throughout the text to describe subjective experiences of pain, both physical and psychological/emotional. It is a term that in some important ways is out of fashion at least within psychology where psychological pain is more commonly described in terms of disorders such as depression or anxiety; or as grief, loss, and, if one follows Kugleman’s (1992) rationale, stress. Suffering is also a term associated with Buddhist doctrines of impermanence, in which suffering is understood as a condition of being alive that results from our dissatisfaction with the fact that all existence, including our own, is characterized by impermanence and change. I used the term ‘suffering’ therefore, as a more general way of describing psychological pain and one that is not as frequently used or associated with dominant discourses of psychology in the way that other terms (e.g., loss, grief, stress) might be. Further, by using the term suffering I am also drawing attention to the associations within dominant, Western culture between psychological pain and our ambivalent or avoidant relationship with impermanence and change.

With this biomedical construction of psychology, the focus shifted from the spirit or soul to the mind. It was, in effect, the medicalization of suffering and it resulted in the development of a taxonomy of cognitive disorders that required professional intervention. Psychologists, as scientific professionals, attempt to manage, control, and prevent mental illness. Stress and stress management came to stand in for the most common experience of suffering, the unacknowledged and unexpressed suffering associated with modernity’s rapidly accelerating experiences of impermanence. “Stress is a bad habit we have developed for making sense of our time-scarce, energy-hungry life style,” and “points in a distorted way to a grief endemic in the contemporary world” (Kugleman, 1992, p. 165).

Disembodied, displaced, and numbed by the rapidity of changes, we have adopted the stress discourse to describe our experience of attempting to be everywhere and nowhere
simultaneously. It has become an invocation of our desire to escape the limits of our embodied/fleshed existence, the limitations of time and place (Kugleman, 1992). In the discourse of stress and stress management, grieving is replaced by problem solving. The individual is posited as the mechanism of change with the implication that the experience of helplessness, loss of control and despair, although endemic in dominant Western society, is not a social issue but an individual one. Stress management is an invitation for the individual to regain control through taking charge; it is an invitation to adapt.

Despite the collective nature of the impact of disasters, and therefore of the disaster recovery process, the stress and coping framework continues to dominate in disaster research and practice within psychology. This tends to reinforce an individualized, problems solving approach to the distress associated with disasters that limits options for collective interventions and alternative understandings (Norris et al., 2002a).

**Traumatic Stress Discourse**

As with the term stress, traumatic stress has a metaphoric connotation, subsuming a host of unspoken assumptions, historical and cultural influences, and meanings. Some of the ways in which the construct "traumatic stress" is defined in psychological research include describing it in terms of power relations, "an affliction of the powerless" (Herman, 1997, p. 33). It is also referred to in terms of the nature of the precipitating event, as "an inescapable stress event that overwhelms people's coping mechanisms" (Van der Kolk & Fisler, 1995, p. 505) and in terms of the magnitude of the stress experience, as "extreme stress" (Ford & Kidd, 1998) or a "terrifying experience" (Van der Kolk, Van der Hart, & Burbridge, 1995). It is also defined by the nature of the psychological and emotional responses to such events as "fear, horror and helplessness" (Herman, 1997).

The history of the discourse of traumatic stress is intimately connected to the history of biomedical discourse and the increasing sophistication of science's ability to trace the neurochemical and neurophysiological pathways of psychological and emotional responses (Sapolsky, 1994). Since its inception as a criterion in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual III (American Psychiatric Association, 1980), Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has become the most commonly diagnosed anxiety disorder. Definitions of what constitute trauma have grown to
include hearing about trauma, indirect exposure to trauma through hearing the stories of direct victims of trauma, and even watching traumatic events unfold on television (Kroll, 2003).

Hacking (1995) argued that trauma today has the same explanatory power as demonic possession had in the Middle Ages and has become Western society’s dominant metaphor for psychological suffering and distress. If stress is the modern discourse of our struggle to escape the bounds of physicality, trauma is, potentially, the passionate expression of this desire. According to psychodynamic psychologist Bernd Jager (1989), passion “announces the coming into being of radical discontinuity” within this world of doing (p. 223). As a passionate expression of stress, in which passion implies movement or transformation, the discourse of traumatic stress points to an enormous desire to experience an “infinite passion,” to “become pure energy, to flee the flesh” (Kugleman, 1992, p. 27).

As a more profoundly unsettling construction of stress, the traumatic stress discourse focuses attention more explicitly on loss and fear. Traumatic stress also invites a reconnection with the body, and through it to suffering in a way that everyday stress does not. A personal or collective disaster, a catastrophe, grabs our attention, throws us out of our numbness, and temporarily disrupts our ability to convert the psychological pain, or suffering, into more energy with which to function. By becoming temporarily dysfunctional we arrive in our bodies and are invited to look behind the ways in which the stress construct masks the ongoing experience of uncertainty or chaos3 of living. In these moments, we are faced with illusion of the apparent order and stability we cognitively construct in order to navigate the world and our lives (Cohen & Varela, 2000).

Consistent with the stress discourse, the dominant psychological framing of trauma, although it points more explicitly to experiences of loss and therefore suffering, still does not invite us to examine these experiences in any way other than as a problem to be resolved. Despite this relatively constrained framing, mainstream psychology’s construction of disasters as collective traumatic events make disasters an important site of inquiry into the dominant Western discourse of suffering that extends, through the expansion of Western ideology, to the expression of this relationship in other parts of the globe.

3 Chaos or Khaos was the ancient Greek name for the primordial state from which the first gods appeared and is more literally translated as the gaping void, abyss, or the first state of the universe (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002).
The research on traumatic stress is one of the main sites of psychology's engagement with the body and embodied experience. Whether it is research on the psychobiological aspects of traumatic stress (Scaer, 2001; Schore, 2002; Yehuda & McFarlane, 1997), somatic approaches to addressing traumatic stress (Ogden & Minton, 2000; Van der Kolk, 1994), or research into the biological foundations of dissociation (Rothschild, 2000), the focus of the research is pointing to mind-body connections (Van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996). Research on traumatic stress also engages with narratives, meaning-making, and spirituality (Harber & Pennebaker, 1992; Pennebaker, 1995; Sewell & Williams, 2001; Varela, 1991). In this light, traumatic stress is a nexus of multi-disciplinary, multi-theoretical research that unites biomedicine, cognitive psychology, spirituality, and philosophy in the examination of suffering. Traumatic stress, in this sense, is a doorway in psychology to the exploration of the disciplinary splits that emerged as psychology worked to distinguish itself from philosophy and metaphysics and establish itself as a science (Coon, 2000).

Psychological Research on Disasters

Within the psychological framing of disasters, there is a consideration of the long-term and multi-dimensional nature of natural disaster events and an acknowledgement that disasters and their effects involve a cluster of complex stressors that cut across economic, social, political, psychological, and spiritual domains (Echterling & Wylie, 1999). Despite the complexity, however, much of the disaster research in psychology continues to examine the effects of such complex events in ways that attempt to control that complexity rather than enter into it (Norris et al., 2002a). The social and discursive contexts of disasters have been considered primarily as influencing variables in the individual psycho-emotional reactions of those directly and indirectly affected (Norris et al., 2002b).

This work draws principally on Lazarus's transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), or Hobfoll's (1989, 2001) Conservation of Resource theory. In Lazarus's model, psychological stress is defined as a transaction between the person and the environment that is appraised as taxing resources and threatening wellbeing. Social resources and contextual factors are considered; however, they are seen primarily as influences on the individual stress and coping process (Lennon, 1989; Pearlin, 1989). Despite its theoretical framing of the person-environment as one system, the research arising within this framework has
continued to reflect the dualism inherent in mainstream psychology resulting in research that can continue to be criticized for (a) focusing on the individual, (b) narrowly defining coping strategies, (c) dualistic assessment of person and environment, (d) and limited attention to the social cultural context (Long & Cox, 2000). A large body of disaster research has drawn on this model to focus on a wide range of psychological outcomes associated with disasters, including posttraumatic stress symptoms and posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, somatic health problems, and problems in living.4

Hobfoll’s (1989) theory, which is embedded in community psychology’s ecological research perspective, also draws on Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) transactional model of stress but places a greater emphasis on the socio-cultural aspects of stress and coping transactions. Within this framework, stress is considered to be the consequence of a person-environment transaction. It is largely culturally and socially shaped and scripted, and determined by a process of resource loss and gain in a complex, multi-layered social context. Individual appraisals play only a proximal role. Conservation of Resource theory posits that the personal subjective component of stress has received too much weighting. Instead, it is argued, non-idiographic aspects of the appraisal process, that is, the shared, socially and culturally scripted component of appraisals play, a more central role in determining the stress and coping process. This model has been used to examine the impact of the loss of various psychosocial resources on individuals’ experience of disaster-related stress and strategies of coping (Kaniasty & Norris 1993, 1995; Norris & Kaniasty 1996; Palinkas, Russel, Downs, & Pettersen, 1992; Pennebaker & Harber 1993).

Within this body of research—based on either theory—disasters have most often been examined with a focus on the psychopathological consequences of traumatic stress, tracking the course of various disorders associated with experiencing traumatic events (Norris et al., 2002b; Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998). Disasters are explored as events having the potential to cause high levels of psychosocial disruption and enduring psychological impacts in individuals, such as (a) psychological problems (e.g., PTSD), generalized anxiety disorders (GAD), depression), (b) non-specific distress and health problems (e.g., somatic complaints, sleep disturbances and increased alcohol consumption), (c) chronic problems in living (e.g., secondary stressors

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4 For a review of the empirical research on disasters including natural disasters, see Norris et al., 2002a.
associated with work, interpersonal relationships, continued disruption), (d) psychosocial resource loss (e.g., loss or disruption of social support networks and other social resources), and (e) problems specific to target populations (e.g., youth, children, seniors) (Norris et al., 2002b; Raphael & Wilson, 1993).

The result of this particular framing has been an exponential growth of research focused on PTSD, the extreme end of the continuum of stress experiences (Raphael, Wilson, Meldrum, & McFarlane, 1996). The bulk of research, as outlined by Norris et al. (2002b) in their review of the empirical research on disasters, identified PTSD as an outcome measure of the stress and coping process. Moreover, these researchers have examined the relevance of specific disaster characteristics (e.g., disaster type and location, nature, scope, and magnitude of impact) and individual risk factors and characteristics (severity of exposure, coping styles, gender, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) and the prevalence of PTSD (e.g., Bravo, Rubio-Stipec, Woodbury, & Ribera, 1990; Freedy, Saladin, Kilpatrick, Resnick, & Saunders, 1994; Galea, Nandi, & Vlahov, 2005; Tobin & Ollenburger, 1996).

The narrowness of this research has been shaped by what is, in some ways, a myopic and individualistic gaze within psychology and the culture more generally, and a legacy of positivism in research socialization and journal practices (Trickett, 1995, 1996). Although it is clearly important work given the personal, social, and economic costs of PTSD, this body of research has done little to address the diverse and complex mental health needs of the majority of disaster-affected individuals — those who do not have clinically significant symptoms but who may benefit from interventions that facilitate their individual and collective recovery. For some time now, there has been a call for a shift in focus from traditional top-down, hierarchical intervention models in disasters to more client-centered, bottom-up models that incorporate local expertise and adopt a community-as-client approach (Cox & Espinoza, 2005; Hobfoll, Briggs, & Wells, 1995; Hobfoll & Lilly, 1993; King, 2005; Norris et al, 2002b). This shift reflects both an awareness of the need for a contextual approach to addressing the complex array of individual and collective stressors that arise as a result of the disruption and loss caused by disasters and a need to engage affected communities as active participants rather than passive recipients of services (King, 2005; Milgram, Sarason, Schönpflug, Jackson, & Schwarzer, 1995).
Posttraumatic Growth

A comparatively new area of psychological research on traumatic stress has focused attention on the transformative potential of a more active engagement with suffering. This smaller but growing body of literature builds upon a much larger, multi-disciplinary, historical recognition of the transformative potential of engaging consciously with suffering as articulated in various religions (Varela, 1999) and by various philosophers including Kierkegaard (Hong & Hong, 1983) and Caputo (1987).

One of the earliest researchers into stress, Hans Selye (1956, 1976), posited that there were two types of stress, ‘eustress’ or good stress, and ‘distress’ or bad stress. Despite this early theorizing there is very little in the stress literature that addresses the concept of ‘eustress’ (Doublet, 2000). Herman (1997) in her seminal tract on trauma and recovery, speaks of the possibly of transcending the pain of trauma within a ‘survivor mission,’ a term she coined to refer to the possibility of moving out of a victim stance to a more agentic, empowered subject position in relation to the traumatic event.

Only recently, however, with the growth of positive psychology (Snyder & Lopez, 2002), have researchers begun exploring and building on existing models of trauma and recovery to develop theories and models that incorporate trauma’s potential for positive outcomes (Affleck & Tennen, 1996; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998; McMillen, 1999; Park, 1998). Some of the concepts put forth to describe this alternate aspect of trauma include “post-traumatic growth” (Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998), “thriving” (O’Leary & Ickovics, 1995), “stress-related growth” (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996), and “adversarial growth” (Linley & Joseph, 2004).

This work has broadened the reach of psychology to a consideration of a range of outcomes of trauma that would include so called positive outcomes. The challenge to dominant psychological paradigms is limited, however, and with few exceptions does little to extend theory or practice beyond the individual to explore collective outcomes or interventions. Sandra Bloom’s (1998) work is one such exception, extending the exploration of positive outcomes of trauma to the social arena and to collective outcomes, what she calls “social transformation” (p. 208). On the whole, these researchers have argued for a more modest shift, as some of the key proponents of the model stated:

Although there may be a need for a general paradigm shift in the study of health and stress our proposal is more modest...A shift in perspective is needed, so that psychological growth is recognized as a routine possibility when individuals struggle
with highly disrupting life events. It is not a question of dismantling one paradigm and substituting another for it, but simply widening the focus of the lens so that both negative and positive consequences are investigated. (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998, pp. 234-235)

Further, in the absence of a more critical examination of the discourse of psychology, more generally, the research on posttraumatic growth extends the psychological focus in a way that has the potential to make the notion of the benefit of trauma prescriptive. By using the terms ‘positive’ and ‘growth,’ a directionality of process is suggested that may further stigmatize those who fail to find positive or growth aspects in their experiences, increasing the likelihood that they will be pathologized.

Disaster Recovery

As with natural disaster, the term disaster recovery is loaded with social assumptions and implications. Typically, it is used to refer to a period of time following a disaster that ranges from 3 weeks to over 3 years. As described in the literature, this period is characterized by individuals’ and communities’ attempts to rebuild, allocate resources, repair or re-establish social and economic networks in the community, and enter into the individual and collective process of incorporating the disaster into the history and identity of the community (Bolin, 1985; Norris et al., 2002a; Steury, Spencer, & Parkinson, 2004).

On its own, the notion of recovery implies a returning to, or regaining of, something that was lost. In the context of health, it implies a return to, or restoration of health. Associated as it is with illness and a return to well being, it both implies a potential pathological outcome from disasters, and a potential returning to, or regaining of, something that was lost. It is often used in the literature and in policy documents in conjunction with the notion of a return to “normal” functioning (e.g., social, psychological, economic) after the disruption of a disaster.

The complexity of disasters is reflected in the complicated and convoluted process of recovery and rebuilding following disasters. The effects of disasters cut across economic, social, political, psychological, and spiritual issues at both the individual and collective or community levels (Gist & Lubin, 1989). From a psychosocial perspective that focuses on the psychological and sociological aspects of disasters, the recovery period\(^5\) can involve a myriad of hardships and

\(^5\) Also known as recovery and reconstruction. Staged or phased process models of disasters have been called into question as an artificial delineation that oversimplifies the complex and
challenges that some posit may be more significant to the well-being of individuals and the community than exposure to the impact of the disaster event itself (Flynn, 1999). Many professionals and victims involved in disasters cite the chronic and systemic stressors associated with the recovery process (e.g., coordination and cooperation, dealing with meta-institutions, and other systems-level factors) as some of the most frustrating and stress-inducing factors in their disaster experience (Call & Pfefferbaum, 1999; Maltais, 2001; McFarlane, 1995; Norris, Phifer, & Kaniasty, 1994; Norris et al., 2002a).

Researchers studying community responses to disasters have studied the ways in which disasters create and exacerbate patterns of social support, family, and community cohesion (Drabek & Key, 1984). This work described an initial surge of support during the post-crisis phase of a disaster that is characterized by mutual helping, a mobilization of social support from within and without the community, and an increased sense of community and belongingness in the face of adversity (Kaniasty & Norris, 1995, 1999; Norris & Kaniasty, 1999, Norris, Perilla, Riad, Kaniasty, & Lavizzo, 1999). In a follow-up study of the survivors of the Buffalo Creek disaster, Green et al. (1990) described this so-called “honeymoon” period as transitory in the face of the long-term process of recovering from the losses incurred in that disaster. Likewise, Kaniasty and Norris (1990, 1993) found support for a gradual deterioration of social support following natural disasters as the initial euphoria of having survived gives way to the harsh realizations of what the losses resulting from a disaster will mean to individuals and to the community as a whole.

Using Hobfoll’s (1989) Conservation of Resources theory, Kaniasty and Norris (1995, 1999) described a deterioration of social support during the recovery period in which individuals receive or are able to access varying amounts of support depending on a variety of factors including pre-disaster resources, gender, and ethnicity. They, and other researchers, have argued that the degree to which individuals are able to access support during the recovery period will predict their long-term post-disaster well-being. This research shows that as the crisis-response gives way to the recovery and rebuilding phases of a disaster, individuals are often left to face the long struggle to rebuild their lives, homes, and community on their own, often encountering overlapping social and psychological processes arising within a disaster. Other process models using mobius strips, spirals, and 2-dimensional Cartesian plane structures (see Kelly, 1998) exist,
disillusionment, frustration, and a host of secondary stressors (Echterling & Wylie, 1999; Erikson, 1976a, 1976b; Pearlin, 1989).

Although the consensus seems to support the importance of the long-term disaster recovery period for the health and well-being of those affected, relatively little of the significant body of research on disasters has focused on this period. In their review of the literature, Norris et al. (2002b) examined studies of 160 disaster-related samples composed of over 60,000 individuals, natural and human caused disasters, and drawing from a research database incorporating research in 29 separate countries or territories. The authors concluded that there was a need to extend the research focus within psychology to include longer-term studies that considered both the effects of disasters over time and that integrated greater consideration of family-systems and community-level processes. The need for longer-term studies of the recovery period was also supported by Shrubsole (1999) in his review of the disaster literature with a focus on the recovery period.

An extensive search of the research literature on disasters in Canada also identified relatively few specific studies that examined the psychosocial aspects of disaster recovery. Caine’s (1989) survey-study examined the relationship of pre-event demographics, event characteristics, and informal sources of help with the recovery process of survivors of a tornado in Edmonton, Alberta. Caine’s study offered a comprehensive picture of the variables affecting recovery that supported previous research that identified social support, economic factors, quality of life, and emotional variables as key elements in the progress toward recovery. Gaudin, Legault, and Marcoux (2002) offered a case-study of the implementation of emergency measures to meet the psychological needs of disaster victims in response to the flood in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region of Quebec in 1996. They concluded that an efficient and coordinated response plan was necessary in order to meet the needs of disaster-affected populations over the long-term recovery period. McMurray and Steiner (2000) employed a questionnaire with patients in a community treatment programme to study the delivery of services to individuals with severe mental illness following natural disasters. They found that individuals with severe mental illnesses prior to a disaster would fare well following a disaster with adequate access to ongoing and flexible psychiatric services.

but the notion of stages and/or phases continue to dominate disaster/emergency management policies and practices.
Finally, in what constitutes perhaps the most extensive research on the disaster recovery period to date, Maltais and colleagues (e.g., Maltais, LaChance, & Brassard, 2002, 2003; Maltais, LaChance, Simard, Brassard, & Picard, 2002; Maltais, Robichard, & Simard, 2001) conducted several large-scale survey and structured interview studies of the recovery in rural areas from the Saguenay floods in Quebec, 1996. These studies provided a comprehensive picture of the effects of the floods on the citizens of two rural communities, highlighting the complexity of the recovery process and its impact on the health and economic stability of affected individuals and families. These studies have provided a greater understanding of the complexity of the disaster recovery process and the need for flexible, coordinated, and comprehensive post-disaster psychological and health services.

Overall, this research has moved the field beyond the narrow focus on post-traumatic stress to examine other health outcomes associated with disasters, and to consider these outcomes in their complexity and diversity. Despite this, however, the disaster research in Canada and the United States continues to perpetuate, for the most part, the individualistic and pathological focus of dominant models of psychology. As with the vast majority of research on disasters, the aforementioned studies also promote an uncritical examination of the construct of recovery that leaves unexamined the ideological assumptions that guide the social response to disasters and the psychosocial process of recovery that ensues.

To a large extent, current psychosocial interventions informed by disaster research in psychology focus in the short term, on providing what is termed “psychological first aid” to displaced persons (BC Ministry of Public Safety & Solicitor General, 2005). The latter term is used to refer to psychological interventions that focus on increasing the ability of individuals to effectively cope with the acute stress and traumatic stress of a disaster, and mitigate the potential for longer-term psychological impairment associated with this stress (National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder [NCPTSD], 2005). Even within the dominant discourse of psychology, the focus and scope of these interventions and the research upon which they rely have been called into question as being too narrowly focused on the short term and individual interventions. As Norris et al. (2002b) concluded in their meta-analysis of the disaster literature, what we need are studies that shift the focus to the study and development of collective and societal-level interventions that support the recovery process of the vast majority of disaster affected individuals who, by and large, do not require clinical resources.
Some researchers, particularly those in community psychology, have argued for more holistic models and theoretical frameworks of disaster-related stress and recovery informed by a broader range of research approaches and theoretical models (Freedy & Hobfoll, 1995; Hobfoll, 2001; Scanlon, n.d.; Trickett, 1995). This includes a more considered approach to the reciprocal influences and dynamics of individual and collective coping over time. It also includes a shift in focus in order to address systemic factors impacting the response and recovery environments (e.g., coherence, supportiveness, coordination of services, communication) (Hutton, 2001; Kaniasty & Norris, 1999; Norris et al., 2002a; Van den Eynde & Veno, 1999). Salzer and Bickman (1999) go as far as to theorize that facilitating a community’s efforts to reestablish and enhance social networks and community identity should be a primary focus for disaster mental health research and response.

In the present study, I have problematized accepted notions of disaster recovery in order to expose and explore aspects of the process not typically considered in previous research. I have combined methodological strategies less typical of psychological research on disasters such as ethnography and critical discourse analysis. This strategy has allowed me to undertake an in-depth examination of the disaster recovery process and a critical deconstruction of the discursive practices that shape the nature and direction of this process. I have focused on individual subjectivities within the disaster recovery process as it unfolded in Barriere and Louis Creek, and the ways in which these subjectivities have intersected with and been influenced by collective aspects of the recovery environment (e.g., economic disruption, availability and access of aid, and the nature and role of formal and informal community leadership).

Relevance of Researching Disaster Recovery in Rural Communities

My choice to conduct this study in Barriere and Louis Creek is, in good measure, a function of the relevance of the disaster recovery period and the gap in the existing disaster research of a critical analysis of the recovery process. The choice also reflects the importance of the McLure Fire in my life, in particular, given my involvement in the response to it and my location as a participant on a variety of committees and practice groups focused on developing and improving the response to disasters in this province. Focusing my research in these communities as opposed to others affected by the fires of the summer of 2003 also reflects my interest in addressing the gap in research on disasters in rural communities. In the following
section, I briefly outline the relevance of the rural context. In order to do that, I begin by examining the term “rural community.”

Rural Community

Throughout this text, I have referred to key sites (e.g., Barriere and Louis Creek, BC) of research as communities, or communities within communities (e.g., the ranching community, the community of disaster responders). Similar to the terms natural disaster and discourse, the terms “community” and “rural” are contested. An understanding of community as some kind of coherent, holistic, unified, and geographically defined location can no longer be assumed in the shifting context of a postmodern/post-structural understanding of identity as fluid and partial (Giddens, 1991; Taylor, 1989). A community may be bounded by geography, time, profession, or any number of characteristics that themselves shift over time and place (Williams, Zinner, & Ellis, 1999).

Within the modernist paradigm, place came to be synonymous with space, defined through geometric measurements as a physical site and relative position (Casey, 1993, 1996). The term community, within this framework, has been used to signify a localized social system defined by a geographic boundary and characterized by some shared economic, social, political, and cultural interests (Winson & Leach, 2002). Community, in this modernist sense, was most often used to signify a material location, a physical backdrop for the psychosocial processes under study (Agnew, 1993). Within a post-structural framework, community, and indeed place are understood as embodied, social experiences, and sites of shared (communal, cultural) and disparate meanings and rituals.

In light of this more complex, meaning-based understanding of community, the meaning of the term rural is also complicated. Definitions in the literature range from the poetic and symbolic, to the more mechanical and pedantic. Governments often use population statistics as what Looker and Dwyer (1998, p. 9) refer to as a “mechanical shorthand” to define rurality. In Canada, for instance, only those communities with less than 1,000 people and population densities of fewer than 400 per square kilometer are considered as rural (Bollman & Biggs, 1992). Those living in rural communities, on the other hand, often use the term to signify a lived experience incorporating a slower pace, a valuing of community and nature, and the material
realities connected to living at geographic distances from urban centers or larger towns (Winson & Leach, 2002).

Within Barriere and Louis Creek, there were multiple communities defined by shared and contested definitions of community and rural that relied on geographical markers, dynamic social relations, and the resulting social practices and subjectivities of various individuals and groups. Some of the communities that were identified, for instance, included the ranching community, the logging community, the community of ex-Tolko employees, the Louis Creek-as-distinct-from-Barriere community, and the Louis Creek-as-part of Barriere community, to mention just a few. The intersection of place, gender, power, and identity, and how these relations were reconstructed and sometimes revised in the aftermath of the McLure Fire was a crucial consideration within the ethnographic exploration of trauma and disasters in the present study.

Rural Communities in the Consideration of Natural Disasters

During the first half of the twentieth century, urbanization resulted in significant decline in rural populations (Hughey, Heppner, Johnston, & Rakes, 1989). In 1950, it was estimated that just over 60% of the North American population lived in urban centers. By the early 1990s, this had increased to 80% and most statistics indicate a continued if slowed trend towards urbanization (Cahill & Martland, 1996; Stabler, 1999; Winson & Leach, 2002). The centralization of employment and educational opportunities continues to result in a net out-migration of young people under the age of 24, and young families from rural areas and an in-migration of older adults (often closer to retirement or in retirement) (Statistics Canada, 2001b). Rural areas tend to be characterized by fewer job and training opportunities, and technological gaps that combine to create employment barriers to those who do remain or return to rural communities (Cahill & Martland, 1996; Marshall, 2002).

Recent statistics on the health and well-being of rural communities in Canada and the United States paint a complicated and troubling picture of a rural/urban economic divide with these communities lagging behind national averages in employment growth and health indicators (Alasia & Rothwell, 2003). Rural communities are characterized by higher rates of unemployment and underemployment and, according to a recent report on the state of rural economic renewal in Ontario, the absence of a vision and the attendant strategies to ensure
economic renewal (Winson & Leach, 2002). The rural context often includes chronic shortages of childcare, counseling services, and mental health providers (Fox, Blank, Rovnyak, & Barnett, 2001; Hartley, Bird, & Dempsey, 1999; Horvath, Bissix, MacLeod, & Barr, 2005); jobs and training opportunities (Cahill & Martland, 1996; Marshall, 2002); computers and access to high-speed internet (Parker, 2000). Each of these conditions has economic, social, and health implications for those living in rural communities even before disasters strike. Their traditional reliance on primary industries (e.g., forestry, fishing), agriculture, and open-field activities (e.g., farming, ranching) or single employers makes rural communities even more vulnerable to severe economic and social disruption from natural disasters and extreme weather events (e.g., drought in Central Canada and the U.S; forest fires in BC, 2003 and Montana, 2001; Hurricane Katrina, 2005) and the increasing vagaries of international markets and globalization. In fact, statistics indicate a steady increase in the magnitude of the economic and social costs of such events as human settlements encroach further into rural areas and population density increases (Shrubsole, 1999).

According to these recent statistics, rural Canadians and their American counterparts are also facing increased health risks and poorer overall health as compared to those living in urban centers. From a population health perspective, poorer health equates with reduced employability, and potentially exacerbates what some researchers describe as a rural deficit in a ready workforce, one with the right mix of skills and abilities and availability to be gainfully employed when opportunities emerge (McBride et al., 2002). Those who choose to stay in rural communities today face greater challenges than ever.

Relevance of Researching Media Coverage of Natural Disasters

The notion that media can influence public opinion and attitudes to health and other social concerns is not new (e.g., Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Lyons, 2000). Media texts produce and reproduce meaning in the choice of topics covered and the way those issues are represented through relative positioning, choice, and use of language, reproducing dominant ideologies or discourses (Ewart, 1997; Hall, 1992; Lupton, 1992). There is growing awareness of the increasingly powerful influence of media on social attitudes, health-related behaviors, and concerns regarding health (Davidson, Hunt, & Kitzinger, 2003; Hodgetts, Masters, & Robertson, 2004; Huckin, 2002; Lyons, 2000). Moreover, the influence of media extends even further
through its implicit conveyance of cultural assumptions and imperatives, regarding what is accepted as normal in terms of social attitudes and behaviors (van Dijk, 1988).

West and Smith (1997) argued that media coverage of natural disasters serves a social, moral function of reminding citizens of their collectivity, performing the role of “reaffirming social morality and solidarity in the face of an unexpected and unprecedented challenged from nature” (p. 205). The media is also found to play a significant role in sustaining public morale in a disaster and the aftermath to a disaster (Quarentelli & Dynes, 1985). Through the use of inclusive and collective pronouns this coverage signals reassurance, solidarity, and a common future purpose. Media coverage also sustains hope by constructing the response as heroic, emphasizing the commitment to rebuilding, and suggesting a better future lies ahead (Dynes, 1974). Plougman (1996) applied a content analysis of the media coverage of the Love Canal and six other disasters concluding that a hierarchy of credibility existed such that local voices were heard less frequently and given less credence in the news media coverage.

This and subsequent research supports the idea that media accounts play a crucial role in constructing the salience or relevance of a disaster to the public, and in shaping attitudes and evaluations of the official response to disasters (Gaddy & Tanjong, 1986; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Garner, 1996, 1997; Sood, Stockdale, & Rogers, 1987). Gortner and Pennebaker (2003) applied a social stages of coping model to examine and compare local and regional student news media coverage of a deadly fire in Texas. Their findings suggested that the disaster had generated a collective experience of trauma and grieving that was reflected in and influenced by media coverage (e.g., how a community talks about a disaster) with implications for collective health issues.

One of the most commonly examined topics in the analysis of media discourse has focused on the construction of risk and vulnerability (Allan, Carter, & Adam, 2000). Stallings (1990) found that only a limited construction of risk and safety was available in news accounts, a finding supported by other similar research (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Garner, 1996, 1997). The research on the role of media in shaping risk discourse also has extended to include an examination of the ways in which risk and vulnerability discourse tends to frame underdeveloped nations in ways that reflect Western ideological and cultural biases (Bankoff, 2001). The uncritical framing of disasters tended to depict disasters as exceptional events for which there could have been no planning, and the response to those disasters as taken-for-granted. This
construction concealed the role of government policies and donor and development programs in contributing both to the disaster, and to the reproduction of power dynamics that favored state and business elites (Bankoff, 2001; Harwell, 2000).

Hall (1992) suggested that regional papers play a particularly central role in the production and maintenance of cultural values because of the heightened sense of trust engendered by the locality of their coverage. From this perspective, the newspaper coverage of the disaster recovery process in the local paper in Barriere and Louis Creek (i.e., North Thompson Star Journal) would play a central role as a cultural resource to residents in determining the "correct" way of responding to the disaster. Given that news media functions at least in part as an instrument for the dissemination and reinforcement of dominant ideologies, the picture of recovery presented by this paper could be predicted to reflect and constitute the dominant discourse of recovery. For this reason, a critical discourse analysis of the local news media coverage of recovery provides a window into this construction as it unfolds specifically in the context of the McLure Fire.

In the present study, I address the lack of research on media discourse and disasters by examining the North Thompson Star Journal's coverage of the McLure Fire as a specific site of the discursive construction of disaster recovery. Of interest were the ways in which the discourse was broadly constructed, whose "voices" were most and least represented in that construction, what was said and what was left unsaid (van Dijk, 1998). I examined the specific social discourses (e.g., expert discourse) called upon in the media's construction of recovery and the ideological assumptions inherent in their use. I also explored the ways the construction of disaster recovery facilitated certain meanings and behaviors and reinforced particular material and social arrangements within the two affected communities. In this process, I considered how individuals and groups of individuals were subjectively positioned as a result of this construction, and the ways in which the discourse facilitated or constrained both individual and community responses. Finally, I considered the potential health consequences of this media discourse.

Summary of the Context and Rationale

In presenting this summary of the research on disaster recovery, I have highlighted the need for research that addresses the complexity of these events/processes and that moves beyond
the reductionism that characterizes most psychological research. In order to address this complexity, a research method was required that transgressed some of the traditional divisions between medical-psychological studies and sociological studies, and that focused on the intersection of individual- and community-level processes associated with disasters. This overview of the research on disasters also pointed to a need to explore disasters in rural contexts, given the growing economic and social vulnerability of rural communities with the rise of global economics more generally and natural disasters more specifically. It illuminated the possibility of an expanded discursive construction of disaster recovery that might incorporate a broader range of outcomes and the potential for a different, perhaps more generative relationship with suffering.

The intersection of the rise of traumatic stress discourse and the growing incidence and magnitude of natural disasters make the discursive construction of disaster recovery an important site of inquiry within psychology, in part, because these experiences may offer an opportunity, as Kugleman described it (1992), to “de-engineer,” to make “un manageable” the grief that is masked by the stress discourse, and explore instead “how the ground of our hearts can be prepared for grief.” Also, because disasters are so inherently and explicitly collective experiences, the examination of the discursive structuring of recovery may offer some insights into the collective nature of processes that are typically individualized in psychological discourse (e.g., traumatic stress).

Drawing on the language of quantum science and complex systems theory, one could argue that all experiences are collective – everything in a system is connected such that “what we call a part is merely a pattern in an inseparable web of relationships” (Capra, 1996, p. 37). The system of the living world and we humans as part of this system, consist of a network of relationships that is extremely sensitive to even the minutest of changes, a fact known as the ‘butterfly effect’ (Lorenz, 1963). In light of this connectivity, every traumatic event/process could be seen to affect all of us in some way, and to have collective and cultural implications. The step required to examine the collective nature of events that are traditionally framed as personal is enormous, however, and involves a significant level of abstraction. Disasters, because they are collectively experienced in the social, material realm, do not require such a leap. We do not have to struggle to imagine their impact as being influenced by and influencing the collective.
This perspective is also congruent with evolving post-structural frameworks within psychology that challenge mainstream psychology's theorizing of the self as separate from its socio-cultural context (Shweder, 1990, 1995). These theoretical approaches extend the notion of culture to include a more narrative, holistic, and meaning-based understanding of culture as a "system of contested meanings in which 'societies' and 'individuals' are (re)produced and transformed...within a nexus of social relations around domination and subordination" (Griffin, 2000, p. 20). Viewing the mind as inextricably constituted by and constitutive of its context, cultural psychology seeks to develop an interpretative framework of psyche that reflects the interdependence and interpenetration of intentional worlds and intentional lives. It seeks, in other words, to situate its inquiry in the complexity of life by transgressing disciplinary boundaries and remaining open to the ways in which culture and psyche inform, shape, and manifest each other.

In the following chapter, I outline the methodological framework of this study, and the specific methods of data collection and analysis. I begin the chapter with a poetic reflection of my research process from its inception in my work as a responder to 9-11 and the McLure Fire through the contemplation and analysis reflected in this study.
WHAT IF?

I struggle to encompass my intentions,
in the concise, bordered language
and painful contractions of this process.

Entangled in a discursive limbo,
I am adrift in shallow water,
swimming with emergent thoughts.

We, the shamans of modernity,
practitioners of the new mythology,
have it wrong it would seem.

We supply an ideology of exchange,
to a culture seeking transformation
on the curves of a roller coaster.

Searching for meaning,
we launch into doing
describing, explaining, reducing.

The luminous roots of science consigned
to mechanical equations
and our lexicon of accumulation.

What if we considered differently
these testimonials of emergence,
these planetary convulsions
arising from a single thought,
triggering earthquakes in our certainty?

How then, might I hear these visceral echoes
of a possibility beyond the either or
of reading the bible as prose or poetry?

How then might I feel these ghostly branches
falling like summer snow,
under this orange clouded sky of your home?
Might we dance the ‘metta/phor’ of trauma,
  fondling the fabric of unpredictability
  as we twirl?

Might we explore these inflection points
  as gardeners watching seeds,
  watered by the passion of suffering?

Let us fall forward into our questions,
trust the crucible of their possibilities,
  as we forge relationships as findings.

Let us enter each conversational dance
  as a foray into co-emergence,
  on this narrow ledge of academia.

Let us learn by going where we have to go.\(^6\)

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\(^6\) Line borrowed from Theodore Roethke's *The Waking (1968)*
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY - A CRITICAL, MULTI-SITED ETHNOGRAPHY

How, precisely, is a garrulous, over determined, cross cultural encounter, shot through with power relations and personal cross purposes circumscribed as an adequate version of a more-or-less discrete 'otherworld' composed by an individual author? (Clifford, 1988, p. 25)

*If you wish to drown, do not torture yourself with shallow water.* (Zen Buddhist Koan, author unknown)

As Clifford (1988) pointed out, no matter how rich or thick the description, how meticulous the methodology, all research can do is produce partial, imperfect representations of the complex web of relations and meanings of our research encounters. In keeping with this humble understanding of the outcome of research, I position this text openly as a site of “the failure of representation” (Lather, 2001, p. 203), an interpretive, partial account of the process known as recovery following a disaster. It reflects my attempt, through the use of a variety of methodological strategies, to evoke a rich description that includes some tentative theorizing about what we mean by recovery and some of the assumptions and ideologies that underlie and support the dominant policies and practices of recovery. The overarching goals of this study were to: (a) explore how residents of two rural, communities in British Columbia understood and explained the recovery process in the 2 years following a natural disaster, a forest fire named the McLure Fire; and (b) critically examine the discursive construction of the social practice of recovery as evidenced in the news media and solicited (interview) textual accounts of the process; (c) explore the constraints and affordances of the dominant or most available construction of recovery; (d) consider other emergent constructions and possibilities identified in residents’ accounts; and (e) consider the implications of the dominant discursive construction of recovery for the health and well-being of those individuals and communities affected by natural disasters.

Methodological Approach

For this study, I chose to adopt a methodological approach that I have termed a "Critical, Multi-sited Ethnography." Ethnography has not been a standard methodological approach within psychology but is congruent with new cultural psychology as outlined by Shweder (1990, 1995)
and with critical discursive psychology (Parker, 2002). These approaches to psychology draw from post-structural and feminist theorizing in order to address some of the critiques of mainstream psychology’s tendency to adopt an individualistic, de-contextualized, and reductionist frame of reference. It distinguishes itself from other forms of psychology by virtue of its rejection of the core premises of psychic unity, universal and generalizable truths, and objective context-free research. In other words, it rejects the tenets of positivism that have tended to dominate mainstream psychological research. This approach seeks to understand the human psyche by illuminating the connections between the individual and her/his context, based on an assumption that we are inextricably constituted by and constitutive of our context.

The underlying assumptions of this study are congruent with these post-structural approaches to psychology. These include the assumption that: (a) all phenomena are socially constructed; (b) physical reality exists, but that it only acquires meaning through discourse; (c) such meaning is historically, culturally, and politically contingent resulting in and arising from contested definitions of society, identity, and reality; (d) it is possible to track the links, ruptures, and course of these discursive relations through analyzing various texts for the ideological content that informs them; and (e) discourses are dynamic, constantly in struggle for dominance, while also opening up spaces for resistance and alternative constructions. This latter point highlights the possibility within critical discourse analysis for identifying not only the ways discourses constrain but also how they introduce or afford possibilities for change (Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

In deciding to adopt an ethnographic approach to studying disaster recovery, I identified a version of ethnography that is consistent with these assumptions. Ethnography is used to describe an overarching research method committed to examining the context or culture of groups of individuals. It describes an all-embracing approach to qualitative research with roots in sociology, anthropology, philosophy, phenomenology, and hermeneutics (McLeod, 2001). In combining discourse theory within a multi-sited ethnographic project, I make the assumption that it is possible to explore the process of disaster recovery as it unfolds, in context, while also tracing the ways in which this context is constitutive of and constituted by those involved in the process and the larger society. Further, I assert that doing so provides some insights into the

7 I interpret "texts" here in the broadest sense to include all the ways in which we fix meaning: conversation, writing, art, visual media, etc.
culture or shared assumptions and ideologies that motivate dominant modes of responding to such collective traumas.

With this in mind, I begin this section by briefly describing some of the key theoretical assumptions and epistemologies that inform this study. I then go on to describe in more detail about my methodological approach, describing multi-sited ethnography as a qualitative methodological approach to studying individuals in context, and the use of critical discourse theory as a tool for exposing and examining some of the ideological influences in this context. Following this, I describe in some detail my methods for data collection, sources of data, and analytic strategies employed.

**Ethnography**

The term ethnography describes an evolving theoretical approach and a method of inquiry. Labeling this study as ethnographic situates it within a long, diverse tradition of qualitative research. Despite, or perhaps because of its long history, ethnography is, as Wolcott (1995) pointed out, “not only remarkably adaptable but maddeningly ambiguous, except that in its discipline of origin the underlying rationale for doing ethnography is understood to be cultural interpretation” (p. 83). Ethnography is a broad term describing an all-embracing approach to qualitative research with roots in sociology and anthropology, and prior origins in philosophy, phenomenology, and hermeneutics (McLeod, 2001). It has been described as “the art and science of describing a group or culture” (Fetterman, 1998, p. 1); “the ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller, more meaning context” (Tedlock, 2000, p. 455); “that form of inquiry and writing that produces descriptions and accounts about the ways of life of the writer and those written about” (Denzin, 1997, p. xi); and a “storytelling institution” (Van Maanen, 1995, p. 3). Maurice Bloch (1991) used the term, *visceral learning* to refer to the nonlinguistic, intuitive, and embodied learning that occurs in the process of doing fieldwork, claiming that this accounts for much of what researchers learn in the course of doing ethnographic studies.

Traditionally, ethnography has involved the study of a small group of individuals in their own environment, producing research that provides a detailed descriptive and interpretive account of that group, or what Geertz (1973) termed *thick description*. Ethnographic researchers are best known for embedding themselves over time in the lives of those they study on the assumption that doing so will allow them to better understand and describe the beliefs, practices,
values, and artifacts of that group/culture. In fieldwork, the researcher positions herself as a participant observer, utilizing various methods of inquiry (observation, formal and informal interviews, participation in daily activities), and the systematic recording of observations and emergent theorizing in field notes (Agar, 1996; Clifford, 1983; Dewalt, Dewalt, & Wayland, 1998). The aim of ethnographic analysis is to produce "historically, politically, and personally situated accounts, descriptions, interpretations, and representations of human lives" (Tedlock, 2000, p. 455).

In the past decades, ethnographic research has been transformed, reflecting the diversity of disciplines—cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, education, epidemiology to name a few—and epistemologies—classical, modernist, postmodernist, poststructuralist—in which it is now used, resulting in a multiplicity of ethnographic genres. These influences, and the postmodern climate of contested meanings and subjectivities have resulted in a growing understanding of ethnography as an interpretive practice (Denzin, 1997). The text of this study is interpretive. As such, it reflects the multiple layers of interpretation involved in listening to and interacting with community members, with the transcribed texts of interviews and the memos generated in the analytic process, with my situation as an academic researcher, as an active member of the disaster response community, and the many subjectivities I bring to this work. This is the "messy" text that Marcus (1998) described as multi-sited, open-ended, and refusing theoretical closure. In it I have attempted, as Denzin (1997) described, "to reflexively map multiple discourses that occur in a given social space" (p. xvii).

*Multi-sited Ethnography*

This study is more specifically located in what Marcus (1998) described as a multi-sited ethnographic approach or a "mobile" ethnographic approach to "tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity" (p. 80). In speaking of the specific ways in which a multi-sited ethnography is constructed, Marcus (1998) talked of the "chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions" in which the ethnographer has a physical presence, making the analogy to a form of constructivism that positioned the artist as engineer, combining a creative and functional role within a social change framework.

Multi-sited ethnographies define their objects of study through several different modes or techniques. These techniques might be understood as practices of construction through (preplanned or opportunistic) movement and of tracing within different settings of a
complex cultural phenomenon given an initial, baseline conceptual identity that turns out to be contingent and malleable as one traces it (p. 90).

Given these multiple practices of construction, multi-sited ethnography can be distinguished from other more traditionally place-based ethnographies, by constructing narratives not only around people, but also ideas, metaphors, plots, allegories, and conflicts. 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. As Martin (1994) outlined in her multi-sited inquiry into the immunology discourse, it is the mutually constitutive process of interaction between the formal learning of analysis and this more intuitive learning that informs and supports the richness of the ethnographic report.

The work of such ethnography involves a hermeneutic inquiry process that shifts focus from the local foreground (e.g., the individual or community being studied) to the global background (e.g., the cultural discourses in which and through which action and meaning are constituted). Michael Agar (n.d.) used the metaphor of the fractal to describe the need for this type of circling analysis. Local discourse, he stated, provides an iterative reflection of transnational events/discourses but does not explain these larger patterns. To identify local fractals in research requires examining data from multiple sites closer to the source of their production such as media and other global data sources, resulting in a text that “remain[s] ethnographic in its epistemology, but not ethnographic in its genres of primary data” (Agar, n.d.). By contrast, my primary data is more in keeping with traditional ethnography in that it consists primarily of local discourse (i.e., interview texts, local news media). I bring to this local data the critical lens of discourse analysis and my subjectivity as a disaster responder immersed in the dominant discursive practices of disaster response, in order to identify the intersections between the local and global discourses of recovery.

In keeping with the post-structural epistemology of this study, I have adopted what Caputo (1987) described as a “radical hermeneutics” understanding of research and knowledge. Radical hermeneutics suggests that the “dialectical tacking” (Geertz, 1973, p. 39) described above is an interpretive approach that begins and ends with questions. Truth is in motion, constantly changing, moving and being reworked. The value of any knowledge is in its ability to keep meaning in motion as a means of trying to understand people in their life-world rather than attempting to define an endpoint (Moules, 2002).
By adopting a critical, multi-sited ethnographic approach, I have intentionally chosen to reflect on the subjectivity of those engaged in the process of disaster recovery and the discursive context of this process. I have used the term subjectivity instead of experience to foreground a post-structural sense of self as being comprised of both the experiences or sense of self most people in dominant Western culture feel, and to the ways in which that self is constructed in our being-in-relationship through/in language (Parker, 2002). The purpose of this research is to open a space in which the ideological assumptions that shape disaster recovery may be exposed and questioned. The research is embedded simultaneously in “a belief in the interpretability of the world and in a willingness to allow ourselves to be read back to us” (Moules, 2002, p. 24) and the belief in the creative potential of identifying and/or constructing radical discontinuities in the established understanding of disaster recovery.

Grounded Theory Analytic Strategies

Although I have not undertaken a grounded theory study, within the context of this multi-sited ethnography I have drawn on several of the analytic strategies of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory is a qualitative research method designed to aid in the systematic collection and analysis of data and the construction of a 'mid-range' theoretical model. It was developed to theorize localized social psychological processes, with the aim of clarifying and explaining the processes and their consequences by examining the lived experiences of participants (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). Social constructionist versions of grounded theory are a recent development (Charmaz, 2000; Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). Although they acknowledge the epistemological limitations of a purely inductive version, they argue that categories and theories do not emerge from the data as the originators of grounded theory proposed; rather, they are constructed by the researcher through an interaction with the data. According to this version of grounded theory, “With grounded theory in particular, what appears to be ‘discovery’ or ‘emergence’ of theory is really the result of a constant interplay between data and the researcher’s developing conceptualizations, a ‘flip flop’ between ideas and research experience” (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997, p. 255).

Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) suggested that utilizing grounded theory strategies can provide ethnographers with important tools that can “sharpen the analytic edge and theoretical sophistication of ethnographic research” (p. 161). They argued that drawing on such grounded
theory strategies as the simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis (i.e., constant comparison), developing analytic codes and categories from the data rather from previously determined hypothesis, writing memos as a bridging process between coding and writing first drafts and demonstrating relationships between concepts and categories can help ethnographers became as systematically involved in the research enquiry or analysis as they are in the research setting.

This notion of combining or adapting grounded theory strategies within ethnographic research is consistent with Pidgeon and Henwood's (1997) description of the use of an intermediate stage of analysis for focused projects using these methods. They described this stage as one of theoretical reflection and comparison rather than theory development, which is the goal of fully developed grounded theory projects. For the purposes of this study, I have used constructivist grounded theory in this way, as a means of developing a conceptual framing of the 'disaster recovery' process that is constructed from my close and detailed coding of the data and (b) reflects concepts I believe are missing in existing theories of this process.

Discourse Theory

In this study, I draw on the intersection between versions of critical discourse theory (Foucault, 1972, 1981; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) and critical psychology, known as discursive psychology (Parker, 2002). As with any stream of psychology, discursive psychology includes a range of theoretical orientations and forms of analysis. In general, the field distinguishes itself from traditional psychology by shifting from the latter's focus on the individual abstracted from his/her social context, to focus on the individual as embedded in webs or systems of meaning and relationships. In so doing, it incorporates a critical engagement with language as an object of study with an emphasis on exploring and explicating the constitutive role of language in forming our understanding of each other, the world, and ourselves.

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8 I have included Foucault within the tradition of critical discourse analysis although some methodologists/theorists would contest this, arguing that his theory, because it is based in part in a critique of Marxism and neo-Marxism, excludes him from being considered truly critical. Others claim that Foucault's genealogical and archeological approach to analyzing discourse was not sufficiently linguistic in nature to be considered critical discourse analysis (CDA). That said, Foucault is included in much of the work describing CDA and is frequently referenced in texts where CDA has been employed as a method (see, Fairclough, 1992, 1995; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Parker, 1992).
Consistent with this epistemological foundation, I employed a critical discourse analytic (CDA) approach in this study. The aim of critical theoretical approaches to research is “critique, transformation, restitution and emancipation” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 166). Congruent with these aims, the focus of CDA is to critically examine social issues focusing on the “non obvious ways in which language is involved in social relations of power and domination” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 229 as cited in Sunderland, 2004, p. 10). CDA involves a recursive process of deconstruction and interpretation of texts in which text is used both narrowly to mean the physical texts of transcribed interviews, for instance, but also more broadly to refer to the social production of meaning and relationships of power and domination (Fairclough, 2003). The goal of using CDA in this study was to illuminate the dialectical relationships between the discourses and social practices employed in the construction of the recovery process in Barriere and Louis Creek (Sunderland, 2004). Accordingly, the focus of this analysis was on what Mills (1997) described as the discursive structure (cited in Sunderland, 2004, p. 31) or the ideological themes or assumptions and the ways these are put into action through language use and social practices. CDA relies on identifying both linguistic traces in the corpus of texts, but also, on the subjective insights of the researcher about the wider social context:

The analyst can, indeed must, rely not only on available discursive ‘traces’ in the data, but also on her own informed insights about wider discursive and social practices – though always with reflexivity and always documenting her stance. (Sunderland, 2004, p. 11).

Unlike linguistic forms of discourse analysis, CDA focuses on systems or networks of diverse discourses (Sunderland, 2004). The criteria outlined by Parker (2002) defined “the system of statements” required to identify “discourses” as the object of study of CDA (p. 145). In the following section, I briefly outline these criteria and their methodological implications for this study.

**Criteria Required to Identify Discourses**

**Coherence.** There is a certain measure of coherence to statements within a discourse, the result of which is to construct objects and various subject positions (Foucault, 1972). This structuring is temporary and partial; no discourse ever exhausts all the possible meanings, but
constructs temporary closures that marginalize or exclude other possibilities. Tracking these similarities (coherence) in the construction of discourse(s) is an important aspect of discourse analysis. The researcher’s engagement with a text is influenced by her own subjectivity (shaped in my case as someone living in and identified with dominant Western) and requires drawing critically on her “knowledge of discourses from outside” in order for any example of discourse “to become part of a coherent system” in the analysis (Parker, 2002, p. 147).

**Texts.** Discourses become apparent in texts. The term text here draws its meaning from a post-structural understanding that nothing exists outside of text (Derrida, 1976). From this perspective, text includes not only spoken and written words, but also actions and other symbolic representations (e.g., provision of aid, photographs): “Texts are delimited tissues of meaning reproduced in any form that can be given an interpretive gloss” (Parker, 2002, p. 147). The initial step in CDA is to identify what texts will be studied, which is then followed by an exploration and interpretation of those texts and “the connotations, allusions, implications which the texts evoke” (Parker, 2002, p. 148).

**Multiple layers of meaning.** Discourses assert certain positions/constructions and in so doing, establish opposing or contradictory positions or implicit meanings. Working to uncover and explore these “hidden meanings” (Parker, 2002, p. 149) requires reflection not only on the discourse(s) being studied, but also on the terms the researcher uses to describe these discursive themes. This, in turn, requires relating texts to other texts and considering how other texts (or persons) would understand or refer to these themes.

**Chains of interconnection.** Discourses are interrelated and the only way to describe a discourse is to draw on other discourses. As Parker (2002) stated, “Discourses embed, entail and presuppose other discourses to the extent that the contradictions within a discourse open up questions about what other discourses are at work” (p. 150). This means that tracking the interrelationships between and amongst various discourses is also a component of the analysis. It also brings up a related point that discourses are located in time and history. Discourse analysis also involves examining and connecting current iterations of discourses under study to initial, historic iterations and the ways in which discourses intersect and have become conflated over time.

**Objectification.** Foucault (1972) described discourses as forming the objects or the reality to which they referred. Discourse analysis requires, as Parker (2002) stated, “some degree of
objectification” that involves an understanding of discourse as a “representational practice” (p. 151, citing Woolgar, 1988, p. 93). To say the world is discursively constructed is to highlight the mediated nature of how we make meaning of reality, not to render that reality as illusion. As Woolgar (1988) stated, “When we sit on a chair, lean on a table, and see print on chapter is to say ‘there isn’t any less than this, but there may be more’ (p. 151). In employing a discourse analysis, we are both studying the objects constructed through/within discourse, those that may exist independently of the discourse but are known through discourse, and discourses as objects in of themselves.

**Subjects.** One of the objects constructed through discourse is the subject, or the way in which the discourse positions “the subject who speaks, writes, hears or reads the texts where discourses live” (Parker, 2002, p. 152). Discourse analysis therefore, needs also to explore what subject positions are made available and/or constrained through discourse(s) and what actions are expected of us from these subject positions. This requires exploring who has the right to speak in a discourse, in what contexts, and how subjects are positioned in relation to the discourse (e.g., who is the expert). This latter demands paying attention to who and how subjects take up a proscribed position (e.g., congruent with or resisting) within a discursive context.

**Institutions, power, and ideology.** Through their practice in the material world, some discourses are implicated in the construction and maintenance of institutions which, in turn, implicates them in the production and reproduction of power relations. Because they privilege certain meanings over others, discourses and discursive practices are embedded in, and have consequences for power relations. Discourse analysis needs to examine the ways in which discourse(s) support, facilitate, and reproduce existing institutions and power relations (and transgress these). This includes examining the ideological effects of discourse(s) wherein ideology is viewed not as an object but as description of relationships and effects in a particular place and historical time. This again requires some examination of the history of discourses and leads to a further argument made by Parker (2002) that discourse analysis has transformative potential or the possibility of serving progressive ends. This statement is also bound up in the cultural discourse of progress:

Discourse analysis should become a variety of action research, in which the internal system of any discourse and its relation to others are challenged. It alters, and thus permits different spaces of maneuver and resistance...The advantage of discourse
analysis is that it reframes the object – individual psychology – and allows us to treat it not as truth, but as one ‘truth’ held in place by language and power (p. 158-159).

Description of the Study

In this next section, I describe my specific methods of inquiry. I begin by providing an overview of the research context and the sites of inquiry, Barriere and Louis Creek, BC. I go on to describe in detail my data collection strategies and sources of data. Although all the data are ethnographic, because I have chosen to study both the personal accounts of affected residents and the public discourse as evidenced through the news media, I have divided this section on data collection and sources in two: (a) Ethnographic fieldwork – informal and formal data collection; and (b) Ethnographic media documentary data collection. This section is followed by a description of the analytic strategies I employed. Again I have divided this section in two: (a) Ethnographic fieldwork analysis; and (b) Ethnographic media documentary analysis. The order of the descriptions of my analytic strategies is arbitrary as the analysis of ethnographic field data and media data overlapped. I begin the first section with a brief description of the sites of inquiry before moving into a detailed description of the data collection and analysis strategies.

Sites of Inquiry

My inquiry has drawn heavily on the experiences, insights, and observations of the community members of Barriere and Louis Creek. I have gathered both individual and community or collective narratives (Rappaport, 1999) in both individual and group interviews with residents of those communities. I have also drawn on local media accounts as another site of inquiry, this focused on the public discourse of recovery. I also situate myself as a site of inquiry, drawing on my personal narrative, or reflections, as a disaster responder in Barriere-Louis Creek, New York post 9-11 (October, 2001) and a participant in various emergency management practice and policy committees. I have used a variety of methods and modes of participation within these various sites to examine, describe, deconstruct, and reconstruct the discourses of disaster recovery, exploring some of the interdependent, dialectically, and relationally constituted processes subsumed in the dominant discursive construction of recovery.
My choice to do fieldwork was prompted by theoretical, methodological, and pragmatic reasons as well as several of the gaps identified in the research on disasters. In order to begin to address the dearth of research on the longer-term recovery process, I chose to employ an ethnographic approach that would allow me to conduct ongoing data collection and analysis over an extended period of time in situ. In keeping with my theoretical goal, I chose to focus my ethnographic field research in the communities of Barriere and Louis Creek, BC, because both communities were actively engaged in recovering from a disaster, the McLure Fire (2003).

Barriere and Louis Creek are situated side-by-side at the confluence of the Barriere and North Thompson rivers, approximately 350 km northeast of Vancouver, BC. They are located in the Thompson Nicola Regional District in the interior of BC. This district accounts for approximately 120,000 people distributed over approximately 45000 km of land. Both towns were unincorporated at the time of this study. As with many small rural communities, their geographic boundaries are somewhat fluid and definitions of where one community ends and the other begins are contested and idiosyncratic. There are no specific population statistics for either community but Statistics Canada (2001a) census data for the region encompassing Barriere and Louis Creek is listed at a little over 3,200. The Thompson Nicola Regional District (TNRD) supplies both communities with services such as building inspection, zoning and community planning, cemeteries, public library services, parks and fire protection. The TNRD in conjunction with the BC Ministry of Health’s Interior Health Authority also supply a medical center located in Barriere.

Louis Creek is the older and smaller of the two communities and was the site of the Tolko Fadear Sawmill, the economic engine of the region. At one time Louis Creek had a school, grocery store and other amenities, but over the years as Barriere and the mill grew, and as the population demographics shifted, most of the amenities and infrastructure in Louis Creek disappeared. Until the McLure Fire, the community consisted primarily of scattered residences in a number of loosely defined neighbourhoods, some ranches, and a small retail area that consisted of an antique store and a small post-office. Many residents who lived in Barriere considered Louis Creek to be a suburb or adjunct to their larger community.

Barriere is larger and more developed than Louis Creek. Its name probably makes reference to the Barriere River that flows into the North Thompson River just north of the town.
Defined as an improvement district, it supplies its residents with public goods and services including water, garbage collection, a community hall and a number of schools. Barriere accounts for the majority of the population statistics for the area. It consists of multiple residential neighbourhoods, an industrial park, a multi-street retail and business area (approximately 115 businesses) in the center of town, a health center, a number of churches (i.e., Anglican, United, Baptist, Pentecostal, and Roman Catholic), two elementary schools and a high school, a fire department, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police detachment, and an ambulance service.

North Thompson Star Journal

The North Thompson Star Journal (NTSJ) was a weekly, regional paper published in Barriere and distributed free of charge to households in both Barriere and Louis Creek, and throughout the North Thompson region (circulation approximately 2500). This small local paper drew primarily on the voices of residents (e.g., editorials, letters to the editors) and news articles written by local reporters. Unlike larger newspapers, the NTSJ was less mediated by the ethics of professional journalism, thus providing a unique expression of the recovery discourse as it unfolded in the North Thompson Valley.

The Researcher

Contemporary ethnographic texts need to unmask the authorial presence, as Patti Lather (2001) described it. The patterns of my own interests inform the reader of my presuppositions and locate myself as a site of research. These presuppositions, influenced by my experiences as a responder in New York during the response to the 9-11 and in the interior during the McLure Fire, 2003, have led me to this layered, deconstructive exploration of disaster recovery.

My own interest in tracking the discourses shaping disaster recovery also resulted from my intersecting interest in Buddhist philosophy, complexity theories, cognitive science, and a long-standing suspicion that the dominant discourse of psychology is both a barrier to and an entry point into a new understanding of consciousness. For over 15 years I have been a consistently inconsistent student of Buddhist philosophy and meditation. I have listened to many teachers, participated in guided and solo meditation retreats, and contemplated the Buddhist teachings regarding suffering, mindfulness, and the selfless-self. At the same time, reading texts
describing non-linear dynamic theory and field theory (albeit popularized texts that translate quantum science into language for non-physicists), I have been intrigued by the resonances between the root metaphors and interpretations of the world, cognition, and consciousness within these texts and the spiritual texts of Western iterations of Buddhism (Batchelor, 1983, 1995; Gyatso, 1975; Ricard, 2004). I have also tried to follow some of the developments in cognitive psychology/science, and in particular the work of Varela and his colleagues (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991; Varela, 1999) in research and theorizing on consciousness and the ways in which Buddhist teachings can inform and complement the teachings of cognitive science.

As I have explored this emerging dialogue between cognitive science, Buddhism, and physics, I have also observed the discourses of stress and traumatic stress as they have emerged as defining discourses of late modernity. I have been curious about the growing use of trauma discourse to describe experiences that seem, at least on the surface, to be far from the understood definitions of traumatic. I have been curious about the emergence within psychology of trauma as a disciplinary interest that has spawned a multitude of conferences, professional associations, journal articles, and clinical specializations. At the same time, I have watched trauma research become a dominant site of inquiry into the mind-body connection in psychology, a place where neuroscience, neurochemistry, and psychology are in a dynamic intercourse that challenges the classic Cartesian split between mind and body. Tracing the diverse but interpenetrating discourses of Buddhism, complexity, trauma, and cognitive psychology, and experiencing intimately and at a distance the continued unfolding of the ripples of 9-11 has led me to this ethnographic inquiry into disaster recovery and the discursive patterns as they are illuminated in local and global interactions.

Informal and Formal Data Collection: Ethnographic Fieldwork

In this section, I describe the research context and data collection strategies (informal and formal) used in ethnographic fieldwork: (a) participant observation; (b) access to the field; (c) recruitment and sampling strategies; (d) interviews and interviewing; (e) description of participants; and (f) chronology of the fieldwork.
Research Context: The McLure Fire.

The McLure Fire began on July 30th, 2003 ignited by a discarded cigarette. On July 31st a weather cell with high winds combined with the intensely dry, hot conditions caused the fire to break through efforts to contain it and the fire quickly spread northwards up the North Thompson Valley. A series of rolling evacuations occurred as the fire continued towards Louis Creek and Barriere.

Figure 1. Aerial of the North Thompson Valley and smoke from the McLure Fire. Photo courtesy of the North Thompson Star Journal
Early in the morning of August 1st, 2003, burning embers began falling in the communities and residents were evacuated on a circuitous route through Little Fort and 100 Mile House to Kamloops. Approximately 3,500 North Thompson Valley residents were evacuated. By mid-day, August 1st, the McLure Fire had virtually destroyed Louis Creek, burning through 73 homes and businesses and the Tolko Sawmill, one of the region's biggest employers. The destruction of the Tolko mill resulted in the loss of approximately 200 of the valley's top paying jobs. Fire fighters managed to hold the fire line at the outskirts of Barriere saving most of that town with the exception of an industrial park and some outlying homes.
By the time the McLure fire had been contained it had burned through significant tracts of forest land worth as much as 5.6 billion dollars (Thompson Nicola Regional District, 2003) and destroyed approximately 28-thousand hectares of range- and forest-land and fencing. Prior to the fire, forestry had been the predominant industry in the region with 75% of the labour force directly or indirectly dependent on it (Barriere Chamber of Commerce, 2003). Other key industries included tourism, agriculture (primarily hay) and ranching. The region is known for its recreational opportunities (e.g., fishing, camping, riding, snowmobiling).
Figure 4. Remains of Tolko Mill at Louis Creek. Photo courtesy of S. Garland & R. Rutten.

Figure 5: Charred slopes near Louis Creek. Photo courtesy of the North Thompson Star Journal.
The loss of the mill and the destruction of the forests occurred in the context of an already precarious timber industry. The industry had been adversely impacted both by trade barriers imposed by the United States on softwood lumber imports from Canada and also by the centralizing of forest industry infrastructure, this latter an expression of the ongoing trend of agglomeration characteristic of global economies. Likewise, the loss of cattle, range, and fencing created additional hardship for the area’s ranchers who were already struggling with the impact of several years of severe drought and the devastating effects of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy outbreak on the Canadian beef export industry.

**Participant Observation and Fieldwork**

Participant observation is a defining feature of ethnographic methodology (Agar, 1996; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983), including multi-sited, ethnographic research (Martin, 1994). As with so many of the terms used in this study, the terms “participant observation” can imply a range of ways of engaging with/in a community or culture. Participant observation is inherently a relational process, and as Dewalt et al. (1998) pointed out, is a balancing act between understanding the viewpoint of participants, or natives as they have traditionally (and problematically) been referred to, and “going native and becoming the phenomenon” (Jorgenson, 1989, p. 62). In this study, I intentionally and reflexively engaged in establishing relationships with community members by participating in social activities, attending public events and community meetings, and living with community members rather than the local hotel when I engaged in fieldwork. Geertz (1995) highlighted the ways in which participant observation involves a willingness on the part of the researcher to walk the line between inserting herself in the community and culture and opening to that community and culture, allowing it to insert itself in the researcher. In this spirit, I put myself in the way of the culture of recovery as it unfolded in the target communities. I recorded my impressions of this process in field notes and evolving theoretical memos as the analysis and data gathering continued simultaneously.

**Access and Informal Data Gathering**

In order to conduct ethnographic fieldwork, entry into a community is an essential first step (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). As a responder to the McLure Fire, I had already
established some contact with the community. In the first week of August 2003, I was one of thousands of volunteers who responded to the McClure, BC fire as part of the Emergency Social Services disaster response teams. I arrived August 6th in Kamloops, the nearest urban center to the evacuated communities and the site of the largest concentration of evacuees from the North Thompson valley.

During this time, my work was focused primarily on offering psycho-emotional support to disaster workers and evacuees and producing information pamphlets on disaster-related stress, what to expect, and ideas for coping. On August 9th, 2003, the evacuation orders were lifted and residents of Barriere and Louis Creek were able to return home. Though the fires were still burning throughout the valley, residents and response agencies began the transition into the recovery process. During the period of approximately 10 days, I traveled between Barriere and Kamloops, spending time in the newly established recovery center in Barriere, meeting with residents, and providing psychological support to them, and to forestry service fire fighters.

Having responded to other disasters and being familiar with the disaster research literature, it came as no surprise to me that in those early days of return to the community people needed to talk, to tell their stories, to meet and connect and begin the process of returning to what some would later refer to as the 'new normal'. I was not formally engaged in research at this point, and in my role as a responder, I entered into the stories of various community members, listening, offering support where I could, providing information if I had it, and observing this dynamic process as it unfolded before me, around me, and in me.

As I listened to the stories and observed the community grappling with the enormity of the process in which they were unexpectedly involved, questions began arising for me that fueled my existing curiosity about collective trauma and the ways in which disasters and traumatic stress are viewed and studied in mainstream psychology. Residents talked about the services they were or were not receiving, their interactions with the various aid and response organizations with which they were interaction, leadership issues, and what the loss of the Tolko mill meant to the identity and economy of their communities. During this time, I wrote extensively about my experience and, in particular, about some of the questions that were raised for me as I listened to the discourse of recovery unfold in the stories of residents and other responders, and watched the discourse in practice.
Mobile community kitchens and a temporary recovery center quickly became community gathering spots where people were able to get a meal or a cup of coffee, and to share their stories of the fires, the evacuations, and the personal and collective losses that had resulted from the fires. Recovery, at least as defined by the influx of psychosocial relief assistance, was underway even though the fires still burned. There was an emphasis on meeting basic needs and conducting needs assessments with residents. These were conducted as helicopters flew overhead, and the smell of smoke hung over the valley, and in the context of the continued presence of hundreds of firefighters from around the province.

Already I was negotiating, internally at least, the lived and sometimes conflicting subjectivities of being a responder, an academic researcher, and a PhD student. I recognized that, in some ways, I was already engaged in the research process just by virtue of being in those communities. The questions and reflections about traumatic stress, disasters, and the recovery process that had brought me into the PhD program, came vibrantly alive in the participation in the process.

**Formal Data Collection**

I formalized my intent to continue this process of inquiry in my PhD research through a grant application process and the UBC Behavioral Research Ethics Review process. In November 2003, I began my formal recruitment of participants the process of which I outline below.

**Recruitment and Sampling**

In November and December 2003, I made telephone contact with individuals I had met or whose names had been given to me during my time as a responder in Barriere and Louis Creek, or whose names had appeared in various news media accounts subsequent to the McLure Fire. I attempted to find individuals who seemed to be formally or informally participating in leadership roles during the recovery process. In these initial contacts, I described my research goals and my intention to do ethnographic fieldwork and offered to mail and/or email them a letter describing the study (Appendix A, Letter of Initial Contact). During this period one of my contacts suggested participating in a telephone interview. I conducted this interview with her December 10th, 2003 by phone from Vancouver.
In the process of making these initial contacts, several community members spontaneously began acting as informal sponsors (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983), introducing me to other community members, and ultimately offering to have me come to stay with them in order to initiate fieldwork in the community. In keeping with ethnographic research strategies, I worked closely with these informal sponsors to identify other potential participants in the semi-structured interviews (Fetzerman, 1998). With each participant, including these sponsors, I began by reviewing the goals of my research, discussing ethical considerations, and reviewing confidentiality. Prior to any formal discussions, I had participants read and sign a letter of agreement (see Appendix B, Informed Consent Form) outlining confidentiality and my intentions regarding dissemination of the research outcomes. Each participant chose a pseudonym and all references to and quotes from participants are identified by that pseudonym.

The ongoing recruitment strategy involved purposive sampling, a strategy consistent with the constant comparison method from grounded theory (Glaser & Srauss, 1967). This latter method describes a process in which data are continuously analyzed as they are collected so that the ongoing analysis guides data collection strategies. In keeping with this method, my deliberate recruitment of participants was guided by the evolution of the data analysis process. 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. See Appendix C for a demographic profile of those residents who participated in semi-structured interviews, including the specific dates of those interviews.

*Interviews and Interviewing*

Consistent with ethnographic research and the constant comparison method, I incorporated a range of interview situations characterized by the degree of formality and structure framing the interview (Bernard, 1994; Kvale, 1996). I used several styles of interviewing that reflected the storytelling and co-constructive aspect of interviewing (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998, 2002; Mischler, 1986) and the emphasis within ethnography on flexibility and a willingness to meet each situation with what seems most likely to elicit “thick” (to borrow Geertz’s famous phrase) information while maintaining “thick” relationships. Throughout the study I conducted what Bernard (1994) described as unstructured interviews, and what I have called semi-structured interviews. These were intentional interviews based on my interest in the
disaster recovery process and the ongoing data analysis but also characterized by a certain free-flowing quality. Such interviews emphasized an interviewee-centered approach, allowing for residents to introduce new material, concerns, issues, and perceptions into the interview. Most of my interviewing for this study fell into this category. I also engaged in many informal and unstructured conversational interviews with residents during and in between field trips. These unstructured interviews provided additional opportunities for relationship building, supplementary information, and often arose from my participation in various community activities (e.g., attending community meetings).

All semi-structured interviews were audio-taped. Audio-taping of interviews did not commence until after an informed consent form was signed. My responses during the interviews included active listening, minimal encourages, and emergent questions. My unstructured research conversations were not audio-taped. Information from these discussions was constructed from memory and documented in field notes, the writing of which became part of my practice at the end of each day in the field. These notes shaped my thinking and analysis throughout the research (Dewalt et al., 1998).

**Focus of Interviews**

Based on my initial conversations in the community, I had developed an interview protocol (see Appendix D: Interview Guide) to loosely guide my initial telephone interview. During my fieldtrip in February 2004, however, it became clear that questions about the nature of the impact of fires on ranchers and their families might lead the interviews in directions sometimes quite different from those conducted with, for example, ex-Tolko employees, or women working in their homes. As my analysis developed and themes began emerging from the interviews, I dispensed with the interview guide. I continued to enter into interviews with an initial open-ended question, asking the participant to describe their sense of their individual and collective or community recovery process thus far, and then allowed both the content of their response and the already identified themes to guide subsequent questions. In this process, I continued to follow the lead of the interviewee(s) as they storied their experiences, as per Bernard’s (1994) description of unstructured interviews, while also keeping in mind questions pertaining to the emerging themes.
My interviews, both those that followed the interview guide and those that did not, incorporated questions designed to elicit a mixture of descriptive, structural, contrast, and evaluative information (Willig, 2001). Initial questions were open-ended in order to minimize any guiding of the participant’s responses and were followed up with subsequent prompts designed to further explore the content of the initial questions. Questions such as: “Can you tell me about your experience of the fires?” “What has been your experience since your return from evacuation?” “How have the fires affected you or your community?” were used to elicit a general description of their experience of the fires and of the period of time following the fires.

Structural questions were used to prompt an accounting of categories and frameworks of meaning such as: “How have the fires influenced your understanding of community?” and "How did you decide to rebuild?” Evaluative questions were used to elicit a sense of how participants were feeling about the recovery process in general, how decisions were being made, and the interventions and services being offered. These included questions such as: "How has this experience been for you?", "What stands out for you about this experience?", "What is your sense of how key decisions, decisions affecting the process for you and the community, have been made?", "What has the process been like for you in terms of accessing services and support?", and "If you were talking to another community or family facing a process like this, what would you tell them?" The interview questions were re-conceptualized as appropriate in order to explore emerging themes from the data analysis, and participants’ understanding of social structural features that had influenced their experiences post-disaster.

Audio-taping and Transcription

In this text, I have identified participants by using their self-selected pseudonyms and, when quoting, I have made reference to the number of the interview I conducted with them (e.g., 01, 02) because I did multiple interviews with some residents. All the semi-structured interviews for this study were audio-taped and back-up copies were dubbed. All audiotapes were stored in a locked filing cabinet.

All but the final five (August 2005) of the audio-taped interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber who was coached in the specific transcription requirements. These transcriptions were verbatim, using a subset of simplified transcription symbols as outlined by Silverman (2000, 2001): (a) (long/short)--parenthesis with “long” or “short” denoted pauses, (b)
I reviewed each of the transcripts upon receipt by listening to the audio-tapes and proofreading the transcribed texts to ensure their accuracy. I partially transcribed the final five interviews. These interviews were third interviews of residents I had interviewed on previous field trips. I listened to the tapes of these interviews in the field and transcribed, verbatim, sections that were relevant to the themes that had developed through the analysis to that point.

**Reflexive Practice**

Throughout the fieldwork process, I continued to query and document my own subjective experiences, analyzing my experiences for tacit biases. In field notes and memos, I documented my observations and my emotional/visceral responses to the interviews and the environment. I also engaged in an ongoing contemplative practice (i.e., meditation) as another method of reflection. In keeping with the post-structural epistemology of this study, my intent was never to achieve objectivity. I engaged in these practices, rather, as a disciplined method of staying open to what was arising in the field and to limit any foreclosure on emergent topics or ideas that may have arisen as a result of my previous readings or disaster response experiences. As part of my reflexive practice I also wrote poetry. I say more about this later.

**Description of Participants**

The participants in the semi-structured interviews were primarily residents of Barriere and Louis Creek, although I also interviewed several non-resident service providers and regional government officials. Although there was little ethnic diversity in these communities, with the exception of First Nations most residents were of European descent, there was nonetheless a good deal of diversity based on geographic location, occupation, degree of loss, and community identity, for example.

In order to attempt to be inclusive and incorporate as broad a range of experiences as possible, I looked at various characteristics to guide my selection of participants. I did so even though I recognized that the categories I identified as salient were subjective and not necessarily reflective of residents’ own subjectivities. The categories I developed were: (a) work/job
I succeeded in recruiting a range of participants that crossed all the identified categories with the marked exception of ethnicity. 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. My attempts at recruiting in this community did not result in any semi-structured interviews. See Table 1 for a summary of the participants recruited.
Table 1. Identity category profile of research participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Category</th>
<th>Total Loss</th>
<th>Partial Loss</th>
<th>Evacuation</th>
<th>Minimal impact</th>
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<td>F</td>
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<td>Louis Creek</td>
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<td>Ex-Tolko workers</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriere</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis Creek</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non resident regional government</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>representative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total loss =</th>
<th>Partial loss =</th>
<th>Evacuation =</th>
<th>Minimal direct personal impact =</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loss of home, loss of home and business/job</td>
<td>Loss of job/place of employment; partial loss of property and/or livestock</td>
<td>No substantial material losses</td>
<td>Involved in recovery process but not directly impacted except in work load/role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chronology of Fieldwork

In Table 2, I outline the timeline of my fieldwork. I have included the initial informal fieldwork during the response to the McLure Fire (15 days), my initial phone contacts with the community, and the four field trips that occurred during the 2 years following the McLure fire. These trips included a total 65 days of fieldwork. With the exception of my initial access during the response, I boarded with residents in the community during all my fieldwork visits. As the work continued, and in keeping with the constant comparison method, I was simultaneously analyzing and collecting data and so my field records included field notes and theoretical memos. I interviewed several of the residents multiple times as the recovery process unfolded. This resulted in a total of 49 interviews with individuals and couples, and 1 group interview with 6 service providers.

Table 2: Chronology of field work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Duration/Dates</th>
<th>Field Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>15 days</td>
<td>Psychosocial support, observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August 10-19, 2003</td>
<td>Kamloops, Barriere, Louis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August 26-31, 2003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial contact</td>
<td>November – December, 2003</td>
<td>Send letters of introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Initiate telephone contact to initiate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>snowball recruitment strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Initial telephone interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
<td>February 08-16, 2004</td>
<td>Participant observation, interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August 06-28, 2004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December 05-13, 2004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July 21 – August 31, 2005</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fieldtrip February 2004. In February 2004, I spent a little over a week living with Sam and Shish in their newly rebuilt home in Louis Creek. Sam and Shish included me in various
social activities (e.g., dinners, various gatherings in community settings) and described various organizations, and community groups involved in and sometimes emerging from the recovery process. As I got to know the communities and as members of the community go to know me, I also took advantage of natural opportunities to meet with community members, and attended various community meetings. *Sam* and *Shish* were very involved in different ways in their communities and I benefited from what Fetterman (1998) described as the halo effect of being introduced by someone the community trusted and respected. I also participated in various community and social gatherings, and spent time walking around various neighbourhoods in Louis Creek introducing myself and my research to the various people I encountered.

Both *Sam* and *Shish* introduced me to a range of individuals with different social identities (e.g., those who lost homes, and those who did not, ranchers, ex-Tolko employees, homemakers, residents of Barriere, residents of Louis Creek, community volunteers, community leaders). They did so by first phoning/talking to the individual, describing my research to them, and then asking their permission to have me contact them. If the individual agreed, I then contacted them, most often in person, described my research in greater detail and asked if they would be interested in participating in an audio taped interview. During this field trip I conducted nine semi-structured interviews with residents from both communities.

*Fieldtrip August 2004.* Prior to returning to Barriere and Louis Creek, I made telephone contact with *Abe,* whose name had been provided to me by one of the contacts I had made during the previous fieldtrip. *Abe* was a resident of Barriere who was also very involved in the community as a businessman and informal leader. Similar to my experience with *Sam* and *Shish,* *Abe* and his wife invited me to board with them during my fieldwork. I spent 3 weeks in the two communities with my hosts once again acting as informal sponsors. They introduced me to a wide range of community members with whom I conducted 32 semi-structured interviews with residents and non-resident government representatives. These interviews included individual participants and joint-interviews with spousal partners. I was also a participant observer in a number of social settings, some in the home of my sponsors, some in the community at various community events and meetings. As a participant observer, I was able to engage in many informal interviews with community residents. My participant observations are reflected primarily in my poetic representations.
I also conducted a group interview with six service providers involved in the recovery process and working in Barriere. Participants in this group interview were recruited through my initial contacts with a key response organization during the response to the disaster (Canadian Red Cross). The group provided an interactive environment (Morgan, 1988) that focused on themes that had emerged in the individual and partner interviews conducted in February and August 2004. Participants were invited to describe their experiences offering services, and to share their insights as to how the recovery process was unfolding, how and what services were being offered, and what they saw as unaddressed or under-addressed aspects of the psychosocial recovery process in the communities. During this fieldwork, I also conducted 2 semi-structured interviews with regional government officials involved in the recovery process and planning for the North Thompson Valley.

Fieldtrip December 2004. In December 2004 I returned to the field and was once again billeted with Sam and Shish. The purpose of this trip was primarily to further engage as a participant observer and to have an opportunity to conduct informal check-backs with various participants with regards to my ongoing analysis and theorizing of the recovery process. During the week I spent in the field during this trip, I engaged in only one semi-structured interview, with Sam, and in many informal conversations with community members. I had the opportunity to observe and participate in the community’s Christmas preparations including a parade, a community bonfire, and various open houses.

Fieldtrip August 2005. My final fieldtrip spanned July and August 2005. At this time I was billeted by a resident who had not participated in the study but who had offered the use of a family cabin for an extended stay. Over the course of this fieldwork, I spent a total of 29 days in the communities. During this time, I continued to further my analysis and conducted five more semi-structured interviews with existing participants in keeping with my purposive sampling strategy.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Anonymity and confidentiality were discussed with my informal sponsors and with each research participant. I encouraged my informal sponsors to exercise caution in inviting others to participate by suggesting that they provide potential participants with my letter of introduction and approach them in such a way as to avoid any feelings of coercion or obligation. Anyone
identified by these sponsors as wishing to participate was contacted by the sponsor and asked whether they would be amenable to my following up with a phone call inquiry. If the answer at this stage was negative, no further contact was initiated. If the answer was affirmative, I made phone contact. In that initial call, I again described the research, my role as a researcher (including my affiliation with the University of British Columbia and my prior role as responder to the McLure Fire), and asked the resident whether they were interested in participating in an interview. If they wished to participate, I offered several options for the location of the interview including a neutral community location (e.g., North Thompson Volunteer and Information Center, Barriere Chamber of Commerce, local café), their home or the home of my informal sponsors.

Interviews were primarily conducted in residents’ homes, but some were conducted at the North Thompson Volunteer and Information Center and the Barriere Chamber of Commerce. All interviews began with a review of the research intentions, protocols (e.g., audio taping and transcribing), and confidentiality agreements. After signing the consent form, I asked participants to select a pseudonym that would be used in all references to or quotes from them. Several residents expressed their desire to be referred to by their real names. Even when that was their preference, I asked them to select a pseudonym, suggesting that because of the duration of the project and their relative lack of involvement after data collection, I wanted to ensure as much as possible that I had minimized any possibility that their comments would have negative repercussions for them. I also discussed the limits of confidentiality given the smallness of the communities and the visibility of those that participated in interviews.

The only exception to the face-to-face review of the study was the one telephone interview I conducted with Kay, in December 2003. In this case, I reviewed these aspects over the phone, received verbal consent, and then faxed a copy of the confidentiality and consent agreements for her review prior to conducting the interview.

**Media Data Collection**

Media document collection focused on the local media coverage of the recovery process in the North Thompson Star Journal (NTSJ) over the 3-month period following the McLure Fire (August 1, 2003 to October 31, 2003). I chose the period of coverage under study because most of the disaster recovery services arrived and/or were set up during this time. During this period,
organizations and officials established protocols that defined the response and set the tone for the recovery process that unfolded.

Because the NTSJ was available exclusively in print, I obtained hard copies of the issues and manually reviewed relevant articles. Criteria for selection required that the article refer directly or indirectly to the McLure fire and the recovery process (e.g., effects on individuals, communities, and processes) in response to or as a result of the fire. Texts not included were advertisements or articles in which the term wildfire or fire was referenced but focused on an unrelated topic. I identified 250 articles (42 in August issues, 146 in September issues, and 62 in October issues). News articles (43%) and Letters to the Editor (24%) accounted for two-thirds of the texts, whereas Feature Stories (18%), Editorials (4%), Captioned Pictures (4%), Advertisements (4), and Columns (3%) made up the remainder. Copies of articles and editorials were stored electronically.

Data Analysis

Fieldwork Data Analysis

In analyzing the fieldwork data, I drew on (a) open and selective coding and memo making (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001); (b) the constant comparison strategies described in social constructionist iterations of the grounded theory methodological approach (Charmaz, 1990; Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997); and (c) the principles of post-structural critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995; Foucault, 1980; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

Stage 1: Open and Selective Coding and Constant Comparison

I employed an iterative approach to coding data, the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in which I continuously cycled through the data (repeated readings of the transcripts and listening to the audio-tapes), making comparison between the data and the code and categories that I developed. All audio taped interviews were listened to in the field (usually within a day of recording). After they were transcribed they were again listened to, and read, as an unfractured whole. In this initial analysis, I listened both for the temporal story of the disaster experience, and for any particular passages that spoke evocatively of any aspect of the process. During these readings I identified key segments, and/or entire interviews for more intensive analysis. I made notation on transcripts of passages or phrases of note highlighting key
words/phrases as initial codes. I also wrote memos describing my conceptual analysis as it developed and the ongoing development of themes constructed during the analysis. I also used reflexive memos to document the interplay between my reflections as a researcher in the target communities and my previous experiences as a disaster responder and member of various disaster planning committees. This strategy was congruent with ethnography’s emphasis on personal experiences and reflexivity, and the acknowledgement that ethnography is “located between the interiority of autobiography and the exteriority of cultural analysis” (Tedlock, 2000, p. 455)

Coding strategies. I used a mix of hand coding, Microsoft Word, and the Atlas.ti (Muhr, 1994) qualitative data analysis program (see Appendix E: Description of the Atlas.ti Program) to manage the texts. I employed an iterative approach to coding the data, the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in which I continuously cycled through the data (repeated readings of the transcripts and listening to the audio-tapes), making comparisons between the data and the derived categories.

My initial coding of the interviews involved an open coding process in which I drew in vivo codes from the residents’ accounts. The analytic process was based on immersion in the data and repeated sortings, codings, and comparisons. Initially I used line-by-line coding of the interviews in order to stay as close to the data as possible. I applied this coding strategy to the 10 interviews gathered in my initial fieldtrip (February 2004) and a subset of interviews gathered in my second fieldtrip (August 2004). These were chosen because they proved to be exemplars of wider themes/categories constructed from my analysis thus far. In this process, I listened for consistent and contradictory aspects of participants’ accounts, identified new or contrasting dimensions of a theme, and continued to refer back to the corpus of transcripts.

As my analysis developed, I began using selective coding focusing on specific ideas and aspects of the interviews with more conceptual codes (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). In this process, I developed categories that were initially descriptive, drawing on the language of the participants to guide the development of labels or meaning labels, which were identified with short descriptors. 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. Throughout the progression of the coding process, I paid particular attention 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 & Hardy, 2002).

Given the wide scope of the interviews and the range of other data considered in this study, my decision to stop collecting new data and to finalize the analysis was made partly on reaching a level of saturation with the specific themes being studied and in part on the pragmatic considerations of conducting a study as part of a doctoral dissertation program. Although recovery was and is ongoing in the target communities, I chose to limit the focus of this study to the 2-year period following the McLure Fire. The last interviews I collected were gathered at this 2-year mark. My analysis continued until November 2005 at which point I had reached saturation with the key themes and categories identified in the analysis process.

**Stage 2: Critical Discourse Analysis**

The second stage in the analysis of the interview texts involved a CDA (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wetherall, Taylor, & Yates, 2001). My goal was to develop a critical awareness of 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 the media texts. I was interested in how these constructions (the use of language and the social practices supported through this construction) reinforced or transgressed the status quo of power relations and social dynamics in the communities following the fire. I tracked the ideological threads that characterized this construction of recovery and influenced the practice of recovery (Sykes, Willig, & Marks, 2004).

**Step 1.** The first step involved identifying the discursive objects—the interview texts—by selecting a subset of the available interview texts. In having conducted the constant comparison, I had listened to and read the texts multiple times. My choice of texts was subjective and determined by interpretation of particular texts as exemplars of the dominant themes of recovery identified in the consideration of the reorientation process and which accounted for ideas, ways of knowing, beliefs and practices evident within the texts consistent with these themes (Sunderland, 2004). I also attempted to select a sub-sample that represented residents from across the range of participants (see Table 1). This selection resulted in 10 interview texts: five
residents from Louis Creek (Pam, Richard, Jan, Sam, Thompson) and five residents from Barriere (Marg, Ken, Brian, R, Timber). These texts included representatives from the ranching communities, the ex-Tolko workers community, those who had lost homes, and those in decision-making positions.

**Step 2.** The second step consisted of repeated readings of this subset of texts in order to identify the discursive structuring of recovery within the texts by examining the linguistic traces. Given the broad focus of the interviews, a wide range of discourse was apparent even within the subset of interviews selected for analysis. I focused my analysis on a partial set of discourses, those that dominated or accounted for the "the greatest proportion of linguistic traces" (Sunderland, 2004, p. 29) and considered these for variation, cohesiveness, and similarities and differences. Thus, discursive constructions that were commonly adopted and those that were resistant or transgressive constructions were identified in the texts. Once again, to illustrate the key aspects of the discursive construction, I have included verbatim quotes from the texts.

**Step 3.** In the third step, I read the texts again in order to identify the subject positions made available through these discourses and consider their consequences for social action. In this process, I also paid attention to the incidence of metaphors and similes that seemed evocative and relevant to the themes identified in the construction of the reorientation process.

**Step 4.** The final step involved considering the interconnections and historical context of the discourses represented in the narratives of residents, and their connections to and interrelationships with the discourses as evidenced in the media texts.

**Media Data Analysis**

**Stage 1: Content Analysis**

In order to examine how the discourse was broadly constructed and whose "voices" were most and least prominently represented in the NTSJ texts, I conducted a content analysis consisting of a modified version of Huckin’s (2002) 4-step analysis of newsprint media. The purpose of the content analysis was to identify thematic patterns in the media discourse of disaster recovery. Of particular interest was the identification of what Huckin referred to as
"textual silences" (p. 356). The coding process involved two additional coders who met on a weekly basis to discuss their coding.

**Step 1.** A review of the NTSJ texts, relevant disaster literature (e.g., Hutton, 2001; Norris et al., 2002b; Shrubsole, 1999), and the ethnographic field data (interviews, observations) led to the identification of four main categories (see Figure 4) addressed in the discourse (i.e., effects of the fire; public response to effects; needs explicitly identified within the texts; issues explicitly identified within the texts). Using these categories as a guide, the texts were submitted to a second, detailed reading that further defined each category (i.e., 18 to 25 subtopics were identified), which were used to form a Content Matrix (Appendix F). The Content Matrix was used to conduct a more detailed content analysis of the NTSJ texts. The Matrix itself evolved as the research team's analysis progressed in order to capture all relevant and significant topics.

![Figure 6: Main Categories of the Content and Identity Matrices in the Media Data Analysis](image)

9 The two additional coders consisted of an undergraduate student in psychology and my dissertation supervisor. After developing a coding procedure I reviewed the procedure with my supervisor and the three of us met to practice by simultaneously coding the same text and then reviewing it. The three of us met as a research team on a weekly basis to discuss coding and analysis.
The four main categories and the corresponding number of subtopics formed the Content Matrix. Themes were then identified to determine patterns in the media discourse. The Identity Matrix was made up of geographic and occupational identifiers that revealed textual silences and the construction of subject identities.

Step 2. An Identity Matrix (Appendix G) was similarly developed to explore the ways in which subject identities were constructed in the texts, the subject positions available to them as a result, and the textual silences that resulted from the absence of certain voices (Huckin, 2002). The identifiers used to describe subjects in the texts included the most common geographic identifiers (e.g., Barriere, Louis Creek, North Thompson District) as well as occupational identifiers (e.g., rancher, Tolko mill worker). The final Identity Matrix consisted of 8 geographic identities and 18 occupation identities.

Step 3. The Content and Identity Matrices were then used to conduct a more thorough coding of the texts based on this conceptual analysis rather than simply a scan for keywords. We used the Content Matrix to identify whether the subtopics were present or absent for the four thematic categories. Coders used the Identity Matrix to identify the geographic and occupational identities of the primary subjects in the text. This coding schema accounted for all relevant and significant topics.

Step 4. As the analysis progressed in the Content Matrix, I grouped the subtopics into six major themes: (a) Psychological/Emotional; (b) Spiritual/Contemplative; (c) Economic/Material; (d) Environmental; (e) Information/Knowledge; and (f) Other (e.g., fire fighting efforts, other communities). The frequency of occurrence of these themes and the subject identifiers were then summarized and examined to highlight their relative contribution. The frequency of each theme and subtopic in each main category was determined.

To strengthen the validity of the coding process and the representation of the themes, an alternate rater\(^\text{10}\) reviewed the coding. Ten percent of the articles from each of the three original raters was randomly selected and independently coded by the alternate rater. Despite the

\(^{10}\) The alternate rater was a graduate student in Counselling Psychology. As with the previous coders, I trained the student in the coding procedure by simultaneously coding the same text and comparing and discussing our coding decisions until I was satisfied she understood and was able to apply the coding procedures systematically and in keeping with our established coding strategies.
interpretive nature of the analysis, the reliability check revealed that there was relative consistency in the coding of subtopics, and high overall consistency in the identification of six themes.

Stage 2: Discourse Analysis

As a second stage in the data analysis, I used critical discourse analysis (Wetherall, et al., 2001) to examine the language used in the 250 NTSJ articles. Consistent with a Foucauldian (Foucault, 1981) approach to discourse analysis, our goal was to understand the representation of discourses in the newspaper and “how these discourses may influence how people think or feel and what they may do” (Sykes, et al., 2004, p. 133). My goal here was to understand the discursive practices of recovery evidenced in the newspaper texts and the potential influence of this construction of recovery on the actions and subjectivities of those involved. I followed a modified version of Willig’s (2001) approach to discourse analysis. The first step involved reading in order to identify the dimensions of the discursive construction and passages that exemplified those dimensions. I then collapsed these into broader discursive themes. The themes were then examined for variation and coherence. Thus, discursive constructions that were adopted by all or most of the NTSJ texts began to emerge. The discursive themes were identified and developed in discussion with the research team who participated in the content analysis coding and discussions. To illustrate the key aspects of the discursive construction, I once again include verbatim quotes from the texts. These texts are referenced in more detail in Appendix H.

The second step focused on how the construction of the discursive objects and dominant discourses made available particular subject positions. This included examining the use of pronouns, and the ways in which the various identity categories developed in the Identity Matrix were constructed and used within the texts.

As a final step, I reviewed the texts again to identify specific discourses, asking the question, what specific discourses were called upon and what was gained by this particular construction of recovery? This process of identifying, and exploring the use of discourses once again involved the research team.

Writing as Method

As Richardson (1997, p. 87) said, “writing matters.” Richardson reminded us that writing is not merely reflective, but constitutive, shaping our knowing both in the crafting of the text,
and the crafting of our interpretation of texts as readers. She positioned writing as a method, a means of knowing, a process rather than a product. In keeping with this sentiment, acknowledging my need as a doctoral student to conform to some of the dominant expectations of this dissertation, I have woven poetic representation into/through the more conventional academic prose of this text. In this way, poetry has served as another method of reflection, analysis, and representation. I drew on my reflective praxis, my visceral, implicit knowing, and my evolving theorizing of the process and discourse of disaster recovery in order to write this poetry. It was written at various stages in the process of this study and its placement in the text, in part reflects this, and the relevance of each of the poems to the content of the prose.

In discussing her use of poetry as an ethnographic strategy, Richardson (1997) made several other arguments for the use of poetry. She noted the way in which a poetic representation invites the reader into a more active interpretive relationship with the text. She argued that poetry, because it uses figurative language and a concentrated blend of sound and imagery, evokes an emotional response in the reader, and opens up the potential for multiple readings of the text.

Like the lived experiences they represent, poems are emotionally and morally charged. Lyric poems concretize emotions, feelings, and moods—the most private kind of feelings—in order to re-create experience itself to another person. A lyric poem "shows" another person how it is to feel something. Even if the mind resists, the body responds to poetry. It is felt. (p. 180)

Poetry invites a different reading, in part because it steps out of the normative constraints of academic writing. Because it is less familiar, less expected, it foregrounds its own construction in a way that academic prose does not. I, as the researcher/writer, am more evident in my poetic writing. No longer the detached author, speaking with the scientific authority of conventional academic prose, I offer my own intimate experience of the field, the data, and my emerging interpretation and theorizing of the disaster recovery process. In this way, and in keeping with the post-structural epistemology of this dissertation, I have emphasized the constitutive role of language and the relational ground of research.

11 Richardson (1997) actually uses the more forceful word "demands" in her description. I am not as convinced of the ability of a text to demand anything of a reader as an active agent in their own engagement with the text.
Poetry has invited me, as a researcher, into a different relationship with myself and with the data. As I have written the poetry represented in this text (and others not represented but also constructed during the research), I have moved in my intuitive knowing, my embodied knowing, sidestepping for a moment the linear and reasoned approach of the more conventional analytic strategies in this study. In keeping with the radical hermeneutic goal of ‘keeping the play in play,’ I have positioned my poetry as evocative prequels to other forms of analysis, and constructed these poems as posing questions rather than suggesting answers. In form and content, poetry has called upon my willingness to play with the patterns of language and knowing. It has provoked an opening into my experience rather than a foreclosing around it. To write poetry, I have had to be willing to sit and reflect and allow. It was and is not a form to be forced. Rather, it has been a way of being in the experience, spiritually, intellectually, and physically.

Rigor, Trustworthiness, and Limitations of the Study

As with any interpretive study, this text reflects the limitations of my own ability to be reflective, to challenge my own interpretations in a meaningful, comprehensive, and theoretically sound way, and my willingness to produce a messy text. Given my blending of epistemologies and my desire to sit in complexity in the process, content, and writing of this research, there were many possibilities for failure where “the practice of failure...signaled the need for new ground versus repetition” (Lather, 2001, p. 203). Additional limitations included drawing on relatively small and locally specific sites of inquiry to analyze the transdisciplinary, transtheoretical discourses of disaster and disaster recovery.

Other potential limitations arose from the nature of my ethnographic inquiry, which relied on and arose from pre-existing interests and experience. Although this study was very explicitly interpretive and subjective, I also relied on my ability to be self-reflexive about my previous experiences so as to stay open to participants’ opinions and subjectivities, particularly where they differed from my own. My access to and representation of different cultural groups within these communities was certainly limited by my own subjective location as a white, middle-class, academic, and woman/researcher from an urban environment (this may have been particularly relevant in my failure to generate interviews with residents of the Louis Creek reservation). This may also have been exacerbated by the limitations of my ethnographic
interactions, which, in the lexicon of ethnography, were relatively brief (e.g., intermittent periods over the course of 2 years, as opposed to an extended stay of 1 or more years).

The use of multiple methods dictates a mixture of criteria for accessing the rigor (i.e., dependability) and trustworthiness of this study. The criteria I propose draws on work by Lather (1991), Willig (2001), and Phillips and Hardy (2002), and reflects the epistemological positions of the methodologies I have proposed.

Critical Generativity

Critical generativity refers to a combination of criteria that allows this research to be evaluated by how useful it is in generating critical insight and reflection in either scientific communities, or amongst those who have participated in the research. This concept is congruent with descriptions of validity proposed by both Potter and Wetherell (1987, p. 172): “The ability of research to generate new scientific explanations of the phenomenon under study” and with the notion of transferability from grounded theory (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). In this study, I have proposed a new way of understanding the social-psychological process of recovery that exposes some of the unquestioned ideological assumptions that inform dominant models of disaster recovery.

In so doing, I have suggested that applying a more critical lens to the study of disasters and disaster recovery would focus more attention on the emergent and potentially transgressive discursive practices following a disaster. One possibility suggested by this approach is that it might unsettle the tendency of dominant models to re-inscribe the status quo of power relations following a disaster. I also examined alternative constructions and emergent discourses in the narratives of affected residents, theorizing how these constructions might open more space for more creative, generative, and transgressive responses to the individual and collective suffering associated with disasters. The findings of this study also support the need for future research to critically examine not only the discourse of disaster recovery in other contexts but also other examples of the influence of neo-liberal ideology on our relationship to suffering in the developed world.

In keeping with the social-action orientation of critical research, I continue to draw on the findings of this study in my volunteer work developing policy, protocols, and training for psychosocial disaster response in BC, and in my front line work as a responder. To this end I
have also written an article based on the practice recommendations made by residents of Barriere and Louis Creek, who expressed a keen interest in passing on to other individuals and communities the lessons learned through their process. The article was an attempt to honor the residents' impulse to participate in this research in order to influence and improve emergency management practices in BC. This article was submitted January 2006 to the *International Journal of Emergency Management* for peer review and the recommendations included in it are summarized in Appendix I. I have also written, at the request of the Editor of the North Thompson Star Journal, a short (i.e., approximately 350 words) article outlining the findings of this research and my dissemination of those findings as of June 2006.

Further, I organized and participated in a national symposium on psychology's role in the disaster recovery process (part of the program for the 2006 convention of the Canadian Psychological Association) in order to prompt a more considered and comprehensive approach to working with individuals and communities affected by disasters across Canada. I have also committed to continue my dialogues with residents of Barriere and Louis Creek in order to support in whatever way I am able their desire to consider the recovery process and what it means to them and their communities.

In May 2006, I made contact once again with some of my informal sponsors in Barriere and Louis Creek to share some of the findings of this study with those who so generously gave of their time and attention by participating in interviews and opening their doors and their lives to me. I began by sending a copy of several sections of the findings (Chapters 4, 6, and 7) and the Discussion chapter inviting their feedback, positive and negative. I also sent a copy of the article I wrote based on the practice recommendations residents had made in the course of the interviews. At the time of writing, one of my informal sponsors had responded with feedback (provided in a phone call) that was generally positive. She stated that she found the article easier to read and thought the practice recommendations were particularly relevant and important because they had the potential for informing the practice of disaster recovery. She elaborated by saying that she believed that she and others who had participated had done so in the hope that in some way their participation would ease the recovery process for others living in small, rural communities and also contribute to the development of more effective emergency management practices. Further, she expressed regret at what she described as the "many lost opportunities" she saw that had resulted from an "undemocratic" "non-inclusive" process and from a "lack of"
vision” on the part of those in charge. She expressed gratification that this was in some ways reflected in the findings of this study. Based on this feedback, I decided to summarize the findings in a letter to other participants in the hopes of making the material a little less daunting to read. A letter of thanks with an attachment that summarizes the findings and the dissemination strategies to date was sent in June 2006 to all those who participated, inviting their feedback and comments.

Systematization

The present study can also be evaluated in terms of the rigor of my approach to data gathering and analysis (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 173). I followed a systematic analysis using strategies from grounded theory, content analysis, and discourse analysis. In engaging with the data from multiple methodological angles, I have stayed close to the data and have made my process as transparent as possible through my field notes and process memos. In describing this research as comprehensive, I do not refer to any notion that the research is complete or that all aspects of the texts have been analyzed, but rather that the questions posed to the text have been comprehensively considered and that the complexity of the analysis (contradictions, multiple interpretations) is accounted for. I have provided an example of these memos and their reference to my processing of some of the ethical and methodological issues that arose while engaged in this study. (See Appendix J).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is another measure of the rigor of this study. I understand reflexivity in this context as a way of foregrounding my presence as a researcher – my ability to be self-aware, self-critical, and willing to reveal my presuppositions and theoretical and methodological struggles in the research – and my constitutive force in the production of the research findings and this text (Burr, 1995; Hall, 1996). I inhabited a complex mix of subjectivities as I moved in and across the various geographic and identity locations of this research (Marcus, 1998). In the context of negotiating my identity as a researcher, volunteer disaster responder, disaster planning consultant, and observer, reflexivity was an essential ingredient of my ethical practice (Martin, 1994). It required a willingness to question the ways in which this shifting subject position complicated issues of consent and access. It also invoked a practice of questioning notions of
ethnographic authority and legitimacy (Clifford, 1983), and a commitment to foregrounding the limitations and missteps of the ethnographic process, to make the text a "site of the failures of representation" (Lather, 2001, p. 203).

Throughout my fieldwork and analytic process, I engaged in a systematic practice of mindful practice (meditation, contemplation) and vulnerable reflexivity in keeping with Bakhtin's (1990) notion of writing as a creative responsibility that engages one in a dialogue with self and other. While in the field, I attempted to be as self-aware and self-exposed as possible including reminding people of my role as a researcher and disclosing my responsibility to conduct the research in as ethical and inclusive a way as possible. I documented my process in field notes and memos (example provided in Appendix J) and engaged in discussions about these issues with my supervisor and other members of the research team. I also engaged in dialogues with key informants in the two target communities, explicitly discussing the differences in relations of power between myself, as researcher, and them, as the objects of the research. In these conversations, I also shared my thoughts, questions, and insights into my ongoing analysis and encouraged them to share their ideas and feedback.

My praxis of reflexivity was also documented in my poetic reflections and analysis that thread through the text as strands of the theorizing and the rigor of the research process. My decision to integrate textual forms other than the bracketed prose of research texts draws on an understanding of methodology that balances the rules of methodology with a more fluid, and deep understanding of method as the way we engage with a topic. This latter understanding addresses the ways in which we keep ourselves in motion with our knowing through engaging intuition and insight as complements to reason (Caputo, 1987). By including my poetry I have also attempted to encourage the reader, by example, to engage consciously in the interrogation of my interpretations and thus in the meaning-making process while engaging with this text (Hall, 1996).

Kinetic Validity

I offer the notion of kinetic validity as a final measure of the trustworthiness and rigor of this study. The term refers to the radical hermeneutic epistemology underlying this study, the notion that research should "stay in play" (Caputo, 1987, p. 293) through engendering openings rather than closings. I have created a text that attempts to reflect the complexity of the object
under study and encourages new questions and includes contradictions (Phillips & Hardy, 2002).
By drawing on several methodologies in order to critically analyze the term disaster recovery
and by offering some alternatives to the dominant construction of this process, I have invited
debate. I have made explicit my belief that this study of recovery is unabashedly incomplete, and
points to unanswered and perhaps, as yet unasked questions. I suggest this as a form of rigor,
congruent with a post-structural analysis in which any text is understood as partial, positioned,
tentative, and open-ended (Lather, 1991), but which by virtue of its being a text, is also
understood as a temporary closing. A text fixes meaning in some temporary way, according to
Laclau and Mouffe (1995) and other discourse theorists.
HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN TO WRITE POETRY?

Think of this poetry as the raisins in the apple pie,
each one a surprise.
We buy the apple pie for the apples.
Perhaps because you can’t count on the raisins,
Each one is, if not a delight, a difference,
the contrast by which the apples introduce themselves
redolent in the surety of their centrality,
they would be lessened by the raisins absence.

I will bake you an apple pie,
I have told you how I will make the pastry,
this crust of familiar ingredients,
and I have told you which apples I will use
how many, and from what orchard,
but the raisins will not be counted.
They will introduce themselves as you taste this offering,
Little nuggets, plumpened in the baking.
As much a surprise to me as to you.

You can bring the cream.
OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

In the following five chapters, I present the findings of my post-structural ethnographic analysis of disaster recovery. The process of recovery in Barriere and Louis Creek was characterized by complexity and diversity. It included a wide range of emotional and psychological responses, individual and shared meaning making, and a discursive construction of events that drew heavily on the dominant discourses of modernity, while also suggesting other transgressive or emergent possibilities.

The goals of this research included: (a) exploring how residents described the process of recovery in which they were engaged; and (b) a multi-layered, critical examination of the discursive construction of recovery evidenced in their accounts and in local news media texts. Although it would be more typical to present these findings in the same order as that which I employed to describe my data collection and analysis methods, that is, the findings from the ethnographic fieldwork data first and those from the media analysis second, I have chosen to present the findings in an order that provides a more coherent and readable narrative.

I begin, therefore, by establishing the context for the disaster recovery process with two chapters, The Horseman Cometh: The Fire through Residents Eyes and The Sequestering of Suffering in the Media Accounts of Recovery. These two chapters set the material and discursive stage, as it were, for the subsequent chapters. Disorientation and Reorientation: Shifting Frames of Reference describes the key social psychological process identified through the analysis of the interviews and observations conducted in the field. There’s No Place Like Home: Place as an Orienting Framework elaborates on this process by focusing on place, a key framework of disorientation and reorientation, and finally, Echoes, Transgressions, and Silences: Residents’ Construction of Recovery describes how residents took up or resisted the discursive themes identified in the analysis of the media accounts.

In Chapter 4, The Horseman Cometh: The Fire Through Residents Eyes, I outline the experience of the fire, or the initiating event, through the eyes of several residents from Barriere and Louis Creek. Although I had originally not intended to gather these stories, almost everyone I spoke to, in the context of an interview or a conversation over coffee, wanted to tell me their story of the fires and the evacuation. This was particularly true in the early stages of my fieldwork during the first year following the fire. Asking about their experiences became an easy
way to enter into relationship and to begin the interview process. As well, it seemed important to provide a context for understanding what they later described as their experiences of the recovery process. The fire was still fresh in their memories and the effects of the fire were evident all around (e.g., blackened hillsides, smell of smoke). As I listened to these stories I began not only to hear the fire-story, but also to realize that my understanding of the recovery process began here, in response to the question, "What precipitated this process known as recovery?" It was not as though I had thought that the disaster itself was irrelevant but rather that I had fallen into the common trap of reductionism. I thought that I could focus on one phase of the disaster without addressing the other phases. I had, in effect, reduced what was an integrated process to separate stages. The findings in this chapter also include a description of the general categories of loss and several of the most significant social practices influencing the process of recovery.

In Chapter 5, *The Sequestering of Suffering in the Public Discourse of Recovery*, I present the findings of a critical discourse analysis of the local print news media. The analysis focused on the public accounts of the fires and the early stages of the recovery processes as presented in the North Thompson Star Journal. As a local community newspaper, the voices in the paper were almost exclusively those of residents, some of whom worked for the paper, and many of whom had submitted material as concerned and involved citizens. This period of media coverage constituted and was constituted by the discursive practices of recovery as they initially unfolded in Barriere and Louis Creek, in effect setting the discursive stage for the process as it unfolded during the 2 years under study. This analysis explored the question, "How is recovery discursively constructed in public discourse?" The findings of this analysis provide insights into the underlying "rules" of the discursive practice of disaster recovery, and the way power is exercised through the discourse. Hook (2001) described this as "the bases of power that underpin, motivate and benefit from the truth-claims of the discourse" (p. 525).

In Chapter 6, *Disorientation and Reorientation: Shifting Frames of Reference*, I describe a social-psychological process of recovery identified in my analysis of the texts based on the ethnographic interviews with residents, service providers, and regional government representatives. In my time in the field, I became aware that I was witnessing aspects of the recovery process that were not reflected in the dominant discourse of recovery evidenced in the research literature. I posit that Disorientation and Reorientation are processes of collective and
individual identity negotiation that occurred as part of the recovery process from the McLure Fire. I do not position these processes as substitutes for the notion of recovery, but rather as key components of the recovery process that have been largely ignored in the research and practice of disaster recovery. As I engaged in the analysis and theorizing of this process and continued to observe and participate in the communities, the issue of place and identity became more and more salient as key orienting frameworks within reorientation.

In Chapter 7, *There's No Place Like Home: Place as an Orienting Framework,* I elaborate on the theme of place and identity. I explore in greater detail the connections between place and identity evidenced in resident’s accounts of recovery by drawing on the broad-based research literature on place and identity. Although there is little mention of identity or place in the literature on disasters, the meaning of place as an anchor for identity was evident throughout my analysis of the interview texts. It was in good measure why the terms disorientation and reorientation seemed the best fit to describe the process I identified in my analysis as it seemed such a critical and at times amorphous framework for orientation.

Finally, in Chapter 8, *Echoes, Transgressions, and Silences: Residents' Construction of Recovery,* I return to the analysis of discourse by presenting the findings of a critical discourse analysis of residents’ accounts of recovery. In particular, I examine the ways in which residents took up or resisted the public discourse that was evidenced in the media accounts in the NTSJ during the first 3 months post-fire. Key discursive strands are named and explored, as are the subjectivities facilitated or constrained through and within these discourses, and some of the transgressive or alternative discursive constructions of recovery offered by residents.
PATTERNS

To weave my stories as you unravel your yarn
I sit and listen into
stillness
I live in a corner of your lives,
squirrelling away your offerings,
stashing your lives in my stories.

I weave the strands of this net by unraveling it,
pulling at the threads,
searching
amidst each day’s catch
for the knots and the holes,
and the pattern they throw.

To sit in the suggestion of what is there,
I watch the shadows
thrown
by a certain light,
as the ground moves to meet the sun,
knowing the patterns will shift.
In this chapter, I begin to address the question of how residents of Barriere and Louis Creek described and explained their experience of the McLure Fire and its consequences in their lives. When residents spoke of the fires, they often employed very visual and evocative language that conveyed much more of the psychological impact of the fire, evacuation, and subsequent recovery period. The rich descriptive language employed by residents in their accounts and the intensity of the delivery of these stories begged for the story of the fire to be told in a corresponding way. I begin this section, therefore, with a narrative compilation crafted from residents’ stories of the fire. I present a story in three stanzas, using the residents’ own words drawn from the many stories of those with whom I spoke over coffee, meals, with and without tape recordings, in homes, offices, restaurants, and on walks through their communities. Although I have used their words and tried to retain the emotional and sensory qualities of their telling, this is not their story of the fire, but my story of their story. I have chosen to feature the words of these six residents because, of all the stories of the fire, theirs were the most evocative, and because they represent in some way the diversity of the locations and experiences of the residents I interviewed.

Timber, a local rancher did not evacuate but stayed to fight the fire. He and his family lost significant tracts of grazing land, miles of fencing, and some livestock; Ann, a housewife and mother, lived in the heart of Barriere. She was evacuated but her home and property were untouched by the fire; Shish, a long-time resident of Louis Creek, lost his home and his business in the fire. Sharonna and Ned lived in Barriere. The fire burned the forested land on the edges of their property and destroyed their business located in the Barriere Industrial Park. Marg, a relative newcomer to Barriere, lived with her husband on the outskirts of the community. The fire came close to, but did not burn her property or harm her horses that had been relocated to a neighbouring farm.

I follow this construction of the residents’ fire story with some of the details of the nature and extent of the material losses and changes incurred and the overarching social practices that influenced the recovery process.
The Approaching Threat

As the McLure Fire approached, residents in Louis Creek and Barriere were put on evacuation alert, and then on the morning of August 1st, 2003, as the threat to the communities came closer and became more apparent, they were told to evacuate. Many of the residents had vivid memories of the 24 hours leading up to their evacuation. They spoke of a sense of unreality, in which time was both suspended and condensed as they waited and watched.

By Thursday evening, August 30th, the fire’s smoke had filled their valley. An intense weather cell earlier in the afternoon had contributed to the fire jumping established guards to the south and racing north and east up the North Thompson Valley toward Louis Creek and Barriere. By Friday morning embers began dropping on Louis Creek and Barriere. Electrical power throughout the valley had gone out and the towns were evacuated door to door by local Search and Rescue personnel.

Figure 7. Smoke-filled sky over Louis Creek. Photo courtesy of S. Garland and R. Rutten.

Timber Smoke and flames coming from McLure, but it’s a long ways a way and you don’t think that it’s gonna be so ugly. Friday it just lit up and by the afternoon you could hear it, coming in like a storm, coming to the edge of the place. People were leading animals up the highway, like a wave. Police were throwing horses onto the green fields hoping they’d be fine there, or as fine as they were gonna be. Chunks of bark falling from the air, everything’s going dark and trees are shooting up the side of the mountain. That’s how fast it hit.

Ann The wind was so strong it was blowing salt off the plates. Big chunks of ash blowing into the swimming pool, and you could see the orange blob in the sky as ash is coming over. We were waiting for gas because there was this huge lineup, and I don’t have gas. The kids are with me and I started to get a little panicky. But you’re still thinking, this is Canada! They’re not going to let the town burn!
Shish
Friday morning and it started to roll with the heat of the day. The fire fighting hasn’t happened, the wind picked up, and away she went. We’re using hoses to fill garbage cans, the water-tank truck’s parked next door and mill workers, armed with shovels, are walking the perimeter. The lights are out and the fire is coming. The lady from Search and Rescue comes and says, “You gotta go, you’ve got an hour to get out of town.” But picking out treasures stretches an hour into two, before we head up the Squambay Road.

Ned
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.

Watching as the smoke rolled in and the sky and moon both red. Ash is landing, then branches–needles intact but completely incinerated, like a snow flake, they would land and be gone, because they were already gone.

Sharonna
Left alone it just seemed like a long time and every now and again I’d have a little weepy weep, but then it’s ‘straighten up and fly right’ cause I’ve got to get this done. Walking around every room, how do you know what you’re packing? What pictures do I want? What are my girls going to ask for? All their overseas stuff that couldn’t be replaced. Placing steaks into the Styrofoam cooler and cases of wine. It’s our anniversary weekend.

Ned
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. It takes 6 hours to get to Kamloops.

Marg
Stuff is falling from the air, dropping from the fire and the guys are soaking everything down. Flames, shooting 3 or 400 feet in the air, sounding like a jet plane taking off. The whole sky was like fire, and the sun through it, red, with flames and orange reflected in the clouds. So horrifying to be underneath it, on the fringes, waiting for it to come our way. Expecting it to come. Sitting on the edge of town watching everyone else leave and I’d say, “Okay, well Bill still hasn’t left.” Just the feeling of not knowing.

People, like ants running around, with horse trailers, working together to get these animals moved. Friends jumping in their vehicles with lambs and dogs and cats. I’d never seen so many people working together in my life, giving a helping hand. That’s when I decided this was a place I could be part of.
Waiting!

By early afternoon, August 1\textsuperscript{st}, the fire had swept through Louis Creek and ExLou (a small community just south of Louis Creek) and had reached the edges of Barriere where it was held at bay by local and forestry service fire fighters. Although most of the residents of the two communities had been evacuated, some had defied the order to leave and continued to fight the fire and save the town of Barriere. The fire had continued to grow, sweeping around Barriere, burning through an industrial park on the outskirts of the town, and up into the hills to the North and East of the town.

Those who stayed described a continued sense of disbelief at the size and intensity of the fire. They spoke in awe of the incredible ferocity and amazing speed with which it moved. They talked of sleeping “with one eye open” unsure whether they would have to suddenly flee but ready to do so at a moment’s notice.

\textit{Figure 8. Hayward home in Louis Creek Burns. Photo courtesy of the North Thompson Star Journal.}

Timber I slept up by the side of the road, in contact all the time. I told them, “If we have to go we have to go, just grab me.”

The night was long, it looked like it was gonna ball right in. You could see it in there burning, just a constant bang, bang, bang. The fire so loud you could hardly hear. Barry went up to his house on the hill I expected him to stay till the falling trees chased him out, but he came back 10 minutes later saying “it’s bigger than me.” “It’s gone.” And he just headed up the road.
In the week that followed, those who had been evacuated were given little information about what had occurred in their communities. Many described the "not knowing" as the most difficult part of the entire experience. The uncertainty fueled rumors—the mill had burned, all of Barriere had burned—and those who had managed to travel into the fire affected areas through back roads and unused logging roads brought back incomplete and often inaccurate information limited by where they had been able to get to, and what they had been able to see.

Ann  The most difficult part was the not knowing. We heard on the radio the mill had burned down, and somebody would come in and say “The fire has jumped the highway.” And I started crying. You can’t imagine just having everything go, having nothing left.

Shish  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.

![Figure 9. Louis Creek after the fire. Photo courtesy of S. Garland & R. Rutten.](image)

Sharonna & Ned  News is Barriere’s burned and they're not letting anybody through. At the road block – SWAT team in black with their big, black van. “Where do you think you’re going?”

Everybody’s sitting on pins and needles. Not knowing. It’s an incredibly terrible feeling of powerlessness. It’s powerlessness, helplessness, and just mass confusion. Not knowing what to do.
Marg We took back roads; beat it around the back roads. They didn’t know that all these people were crawling around. Feeling like a criminal because you wanted to go home. Like we were doing all we could to bet back in, to our own community and there’s all these people keeping you from doing it, like we lived in a third world country. Like they were gonna leave you no room to exist.

Coming Home

When residents were finally allowed back into the evacuated areas, or when they managed to get in via routes unknown to officials, they were met with widespread devastation of forest and range-land, and, depending on where they lived, by the grace of being spared or the shock of losing everything.

Ann Then driving up, seeing the devastation. I’ve never been totally enamored with Barriere as a town, but its beautiful. Green trees and the mountains, it was how I imagined Canada would be. And it just wasn’t there anymore, so ugly, and depressing, and awful. It’s never going to be the same, it's gonna be a long, long time. I was really disheartened.

Shish Long before I hit the turn off 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.

I was thinking well, there. That’s gone. I could have broken down. It’s curious how well I took it. At least we never had to be tortured with "I wonder." We knew right away.

Figure 10. Devastation in Louis Creek. Photo courtesy of S. Garland and R. Rutten
Sharonna The fire raced right by and up to our house, but the house is still standing. The horses are on the front lawn. The bottom 60 acres just flattened, black sticks standing everywhere, blackened fields and the trees all burned. It was, it was so treed down there, you could get lost and now it was like you looked at, actually I haven’t been down there since.

Ned We were hearing all these reports that Barriere was burned, you know, and so anyways, you know, figured the shop, okay there was smoke coming out of the eaves so it’s probably, you know, burning inside. I knew what was inside and it’s tons of flammables. The shop was gone, steel beams sagging like they were plastic. A 45 gallon drum blew a hole in the roof.

Marg Not knowing what happened with my horse… Well the fire never hit there but the smoke was just terribly bad. She broke out, made her way up the road, and found herself a place. Once I found her and found she was alright, that gave us a little bit of slack. I stayed out on the property, stayed out in the bush and hunkered down. Didn’t have a radio. I just waited, just out there, it was quite extreme. Are we ever gonna be safe? Can we ever feel safe again, you know, was that just false security when you think you go from day to day and think everything’s okay.

Detailing the Losses

Because the fire was still burning, and continued to do so well into September, the region was kept on evacuation alert. Hot spots flared up on the hills surrounding the communities and thick smoke continued to fill the valley. The province’s largest ever integrated fire fighting force, which included forestry service and structural firefighters from around the province, continued to camp in the Fall Fair grounds of Barriere throughout August. There was a constant noise of helicopters as the firefighting efforts continued until the McLure fire was contained late in September. Residents spoke of living with an ongoing sense of threat, fear, and uncertainty.

As suggested by the words of these residents, the lives of everyone in Barriere and Louis Creek were in some way altered by the fire, some more dramatically and comprehensively than others. The McLure fire swept through Louis Creek, destroying 73 homes and many outbuildings, thousands of hectares of range-land and forests in the surrounding hills, and obliterating the Tolko Fadear sawmill situated in the heart of the Louis Creek community.

The fire’s trajectory resulted in a wide range of losses. The pattern of these losses in some way differentiated residents into "loss groups," for instance those who had lost their homes and those who had not, those who were insured and those who were not. However, distinguishing social groupings on the basis of material loss is simplistic and reductive. It does
not address symbolic losses (e.g., sense of safety, sense of home) or tangential losses (e.g., loss of business and customers due to the evacuations, loss of tourism, and the economic downturn). It is also problematic in that it frames the disaster only in terms of adverse outcomes and fails to capture the full range, complexity, or overlapping nature of the effects of the fire on pre-existing subcultures within the communities. Nonetheless, it provides a way to discuss some of the differences in the reorienting process. In the following section, I outline some of the key "loss groups."

**Louis Creek Residents—Extensive Loss**

Many residents in the small community of Louis Creek lost their homes, a large part of the physical manifestation of their community (e.g., the mill, the neighbouring homes, the greenery and gardens within the community, the small number of local businesses including a post-office and an antique store), and the surrounding environment/landscape. The hills around their community, charred and still smoldering when they returned, were covered with blackened toothpick trees and an almost complete absence of organic material, birds, or animals. Many of these residents were uninsured or underinsured and had to turn to relief organizations and the funding provided through public and private donations to reestablish and rebuild. Many of those who lived in Louis Creek and lost homes also lost their source of employment. A small number worked at the Tolko mill (approximately 10), and many had home-based businesses, farms, or ranches. These individuals and families lost and their immediate and long-term sources of income including projected retirement income (e.g., standing timber).

**North Thompson Indian Band—Louis Creek Reservation**

Louis Creek also included a small reservation that was home to eight families from the North Thompson Indian Band. The reservation was affiliated with the Chu Chua reserve just to the north of Barriere, home to approximately 375 North Thompson Indians. Six of the eight homes on the reserve were destroyed in the fire, only four of which were insured. According to the band chief, the biggest impact on the band as a whole was economic. Although the government jurisdiction on the reserve resulted in differences in the administration of government disaster-aid funds, this community was included as part of Louis Creek in much of the privately administered financial and material aid provided after the fires. Several of those
living on this small reserve worked in the Tolko mill and thus suffered the loss of both their home and their employment.

**Barriere Residents**

**Evacuation**

Most, but not all residents in Barriere escaped the worst of the fires in material terms. Describing this groups' loss as stemming solely from the evacuation, however, was used as shorthand for differentiating this group from those Barriere residents who lost homes and/or businesses. Several businesses on the outskirts of the community and in particular in an industrial park were lost and along with them a few homes. Most of those living in Barriere experienced the dislocation of the evacuation (i.e., some stayed to fight the fires) and felt the broader effects of the fire on the local economy, the social fabric of the community, and the surrounding landscape. A good number of residents in Barriere had to throw away their fridges and freezers as a result of contamination from food spoiling, and a small number lost out buildings (i.e. garden sheds). All those living in Barriere experienced the ongoing threat of the fires that continued to burn in the months following their return, and witnessed the devastation to the landscape surrounding their community.

**Home/business Loss**

Several families living on the outskirts of Barriere were among those who lost their homes and/or businesses. One such family lost both their business and home as they lived and worked on the Barriere Industrial Park site. The extent of their losses was as extensive as residents in Louis Creek but because they lived in a community that had, for the most part, not shared similar losses they were in some ways isolated from the benefits of the communality of shared suffering and reorientation experienced by those in Louis Creek. Most businesses lost in the industrial park were insured, but even with insurance many owners suffered significant short and long-term financial losses as a result of their losses and the economic downturn associated with the fire.
Tolko Workers

The majority of those who lost their jobs as a result of the loss of the Tolko mill lived in Barriere or elsewhere (e.g., Kamloops). With the destruction of the mill, and the company’s subsequent decision not to rebuild, many of these individuals/families were faced with the decision of moving elsewhere to find work or reinventing themselves in some other work/career capacity in Barriere. The Tolko jobs were well-paying union jobs, and the Tolko workers were described as the top 10% income earners in the valley. The loss of their jobs resulted for many in a downward shift in socioeconomic status and continued economic uncertainty over the period of this study.

Ranchers

Finally there were the area’s ranchers from both communities, some of whom lost their homes and ranches to the fire, and many of whom suffered extensive economic losses as a result of the loss of thousands of hectares of range land, miles of fencing, hay stocks, equipment and livestock. These losses happened in the already challenging context of the economic effects of identified cases of Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis Disease (BSE) in Canadian cattle and the ongoing drought in Western Canada and the United States. In fact, most ranchers with whom I talked described the fire as the "second" disaster, attributing greater and longer lasting hardships to the BSE crisis and the drought. Their fire-related losses were predominantly economic but had ramifications for the ongoing existence and viability of their ranches many of which had been owned and lived on by their families for generations.

Social Practices Influencing the Recovery Process

Provision of Disaster Aid

One of the most significant aspects of the recovery process was the way in which material and financial aid poured into the community in the months following the fire. According to many residents, this influx of aid was at times well beyond that which was needed. By all accounts, most if not all the aid organizations that converged on Barriere and Louis Creek in the weeks and months following the fire were committed to providing relief in an equitable and nonjudgmental fashion. There was an enormous sense of gratitude expressed by those who
received help from these organizations, but again, there were differences between those who had lost their homes and possessions, and those who had not.

Residents described the generosity as “overwhelming” and a “burden” and “more than what you could handle by a town.” A number of those interviewed, for example, suggested that one of the unintended consequences of what appeared to residents at time as the indiscriminate distribution of money and goods (exacerbated by the perceived exclusion and inadequate consultation with locals) was that the very thing that was intended to help the affected communities seemed to contribute to a rancor and fracturing of the communities instead. As residents reported it, the flood of material goods seemed at times to undermine rather than enable the building of individual and community capacity.

Many criticized what they saw as a waste of resources and disappointing examples of greed. Residents described watching fellow residents “inhaling” whatever material and/or economic aid they could access. Others were also concerned about the impact of the influx of aid on social responsibility more generally suggesting that it had created dependencies and a growing victim identity characterized by “pettiness,” “greed,” and an “unhealthy sense of entitlement.” Several also thought that the aid had undermined local capacity and inhibited the natural resiliency and self-sufficiency of the community.

I would have liked to have seen more local help. To me it’s a shame that people like the Mennonite people have come from Manitoba and Saskatchewan to do things that people right here could have done. You know, more of that kind of assistance, than just, just the giving. It needn’t cost them a whole lot of time, yeah, ’cause those are the real heroes, people that just see the need and do it. (Pam 01)

The critical gaze of residents did not seem to impede this kind of hording activity, it did however affect those uninsured who had lost their homes and were engaged in the process of re-accumulating possessions and reestablishing themselves with the aid of charity. There was a common sense amongst those that I interviewed, particularly in Louis Creek, that they were expected to recover, but not too much. Several residents talked of comments from friends and acquaintances that suggested that they would have liked their homes to have burned so that they too could have everything new. Many of the residents who had lost their homes spoke of their self-consciousness in replacing their possessions and of their attempts to manage the outward expression of their recovery so that they did not look as though they were benefiting or coming
out ahead because of the fire – “There’s kind of this thing well, you don’t want it to look too nice” (Pluto 01).

For a number of those interviewed, reciprocity, the ability to help others through the process, was cited as a key aspect of their own healing and a way of increasing their sense of connectedness and mitigating their shame at needing help. At the same time, and again particularly amongst those in Louis Creek, there was a sense of frustration that they had not been able to do more for each other, especially their elderly neighbours, because they were so overwhelmed by their own process. The myopia of those engaged in addressing their own losses was also cited as one of the reasons that perhaps there had not been more help from those locals who had been less overtly affected by the fire.

The whole of Barriere was evacuated and these people are still suffering, so they probably never thought they needed to come and help someone in Louis Creek cause they were trying to get their life back together. They were living in fear of the fire. (Thompson 02)

Transformative Potential of Relationships

There were also significant differences in the perceptions of various aid organizations, much of which seemed to stem from the way in which these organizations engaged in the helping relationship. Mennonite Disaster Services was cited time and again as an exemplar in this regard. They were described as “not nosy,” “nonjudgmental,” “very practical,” and providing a sense of “dignity” in their interactions that was not always as present in residents’ interactions with other groups.

The other associations that come in they come in and tell you what to do. And they tell you what to do in italics! And that’s the problem. The Mennonites come in, join hands with you and say, we’ll help you get through this. (Thompson 02)

Many residents described feeling violated by the intrusiveness of questions they were asked (e.g., financial history and profile) and at having to offer very personal and confidential information to strangers, often in the absence of being told how the information they shared would be used, kept confidential, or whether or not they could refuse to give that information. Residents who engaged in these assessment procedures talked about their sense that they would be disadvantaged in the process had they challenged the procedures. One resident described resisting these intrusive questions, challenging the service provider as to whether his reluctance
to answer would preclude his receiving help and being told only after that challenge that his responses, or lack thereof, would have no bearing on his accessing support.

Jan spoke of her anger at being “called in for an interview” with no information of why she and her husband were being interviewed.

I don’t know why we were called in. I really don’t know why. There was this lady from Vancouver, she was with Human Resources, and she asked us every question in the book. We bared our souls, just about. And we never ever heard anything. (Jan 01)

Residents also spoke of how upsetting it was to have to tell their stories of loss over and over because of the continual turnover of volunteer service providers and organizational mandates that did not allow for the sharing of such information. They talked of experiencing logistical difficulties (e.g., lack of transportation or daycare) in getting to interviews and meetings in Kamloops (60 km away) in order to access financial and material support.

There were also cultural issues in regards to the aid offered. Ranchers spoke of feeling excluded because those in charge of such aid did not understand the culture of ranching and hence did not view their needs as relevant or valid in the context of the relief being provided. Others talked of how a lack of flexibility in ways of providing help failed to acknowledge the culture of independence and self-reliance in the rural setting, particularly amongst older community members.

Sam, a resident of Louis Creek, attributed the success of some organizations to their having a “light footprint,” which she equated with flexibility, a simpler or less apparent bureaucracy, and the ability or mandate to enact compassion more directly. From her perspective, some organizations, either because of their organizational structure or their mandate within the emergency management structure, were able to build a more direct and less bureaucratic relationship with residents. These organizations were experienced as “standing shoulder to shoulder,” “working alongside,” or “walking with” their clients rather than providing service to their clients. From Sam’s perspective, as someone receiving aid directly and also watching the effect of the aid more generally in her community, the amount of energy/compassion available was lessened both by the act of conversion to symbolic forms of compassion (i.e., money) and through the bureaucratic processes that seemed to accompany the distribution of compassion in its converted form.
Economic Agenda

Residents accounts were dominated by the economic aspects of their process as it was expressed in different locations and practices such as: (a) the framing of Louis Creek as primarily a site of economic activity rather than as a community; (b) the focus on the economic aspects of the relief provided; and (c) the recovery practices which focused more on providing material and economic resources. Some residents believed that the emphasis on the economics of the recovery process had precluded and invalidated the emotional and psychological effects of the fire.

Well what happened here real quickly was everyone here was invalidated. Like we didn’t suffer anything here because it was all being summed up in Victoria or wherever, only that you had a loss if it was a big material loss. And so any of your feelings around it were never validated, you know, that your experience that happened to you was never validated. (Marg 01)

This focus also seemed to contribute to a "striking while the iron is hot" mentality such that residents spoke of there being a “window of opportunity” on the economic front. There was a sense of having to take advantage of the increased attention on the region and influx of resources that had resulted from the fire. For those who lost their homes, there was a need to respond to the schedules of the aid organizations in order to take advantage of the aid when it was provided, whether that was when it was needed or not. These residents described feeling self-conscious of the apparent slowness of their recovery process as compared with the majority of residents who had not lost homes. They also suggested that the timing of service provision and key decisions primarily reflected the mandates and needs of the organizations providing services and funding, rather than their needs in receiving this help.

For those who lost their jobs and/or sources of economic independence, there was an urgency driven by dwindling funds, mortgages, and the loss of worth and purpose associated with the loss of work. The existential urgency of needing to feel productive and to have a defining role was particularly true for men.
Leadership

Leadership, or the perceived lack of leadership, was the most oft cited issue in the interviews. Most residents saw this lack of leadership as an impediment to their recovery process and that of the community, and most often attributed the problem to the absence of a local municipal government structure.

Rural towns without local government structure are likely to struggle initially with how to move forward, with vision and leadership because the structured leadership is not there. (Ken 01)

The small people who are movers and shakers are overloaded, totally overloaded. People have been burned out because of the fire there was so much extra that needed to be done and people are tired, they’re just tired and they need to step back. (Peaches 01)

Not everyone agreed that incorporation was the only answer. Several of those interviewed talked of the potential for more informal leadership structures and processes, citing the Forest Society and other historic community initiatives as positive examples of the potential of social leadership in the absence of municipal structures. However, when asked more specifically about who they thought should have shown leadership, almost all residents believed that leadership in disasters was the responsibility of governments – regional or provincial. There also seemed to be a consensus that leadership required skills and expertise that few believed they possessed.

Most of those interviewed believed that they had been excluded from the decision-making processes regarding how recovery and relief money was spent. The North Thompson Regional District and a small ad hoc group of individuals who formed the board of the North Thompson Relief Fund dominated the decisions affecting the direction of the recovery process including key decisions about the use of relief funds. This fund was the spontaneous idea of a Kamloops businessman and grew through private, corporate, and public donations to over $6 million. As such, it became the primary funding source for affected residents and communities.

Although there was an acknowledgement of the emotional and psychological needs and issues, and support was an integral part of their mandate, the primary mandate of the organizations involved in the post-fire recovery was the provision of food, clothing, and lodging both in the immediate evacuation context and throughout the recovery. Interviews with those providing recovery-related services suggested that there was an unmet need for longer-term psychological/emotional (psychosocial) support and more community-oriented psychological interventions.
following the fire. Initially managed by this businessman and then by a board that included him, a lawyer, and an accountant (both from Kamloops), the provincial MLA for the area, two Regional District representatives (from Barriere and Clearwater, 60 km north of Barriere), and a prominent Barriere-based businessman. All but two of these decision makers were nonresident to Barriere and Louis Creek, despite the fact that these two communities had been the most adversely affected by the McLure Fire.

Even though most residents described feeling grateful for the help received from the Relief Fund, many were critical of the lack of local representation in the decisions made by the Relief Fund board and its later iterations as the executive of the Economic Development Advisory Committee and the North Thompson Economic Development Society. Thompson (02) described the lack of voice as a “big bone of contention,” stating that it “is a big given that it’s an old boys club” running the show, and querying why “they continue to pick the same people” instead of drafting volunteers from a pool of “very talented, very knowledgeable, very worldly people in the community.” Cliff (01) echoed this sentiment, suggesting that membership on these boards went to “that person may have the biggest place and make the most money in their community so they’re on the board.” Area ranchers also felt locked out of the decision-making process and excluded from the funds, citing a lack of understanding of their ranching culture by those in decision-making positions.

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 01)

From the perspectives of many residents in Barriere and Louis Creek, key decisions arising from these non-local committees seemed to be made without consideration of local concerns or meaningful input and resulted in a squandering of some of the potential that the increased attention and resources focused in the area might have made to the community.

I think the lack of leadership has really hindered the ability of the community to heal itself or to build a stronger foundation for the future because the opportunities were lost with the funding because there was no leadership committee that looked out for the town’s interests. (Riley 01)
Some local service providers extended this critique about the lack of consultation and inclusion suggesting that it had also resulted in a lack of coordination in the provision of services that had limited the potential for long-term capacity building.

I’ve never been officially contacted by [organizational name] to ask if there’s anything that their money can do to help us provide for ourselves within the community. You know, what are we already doing that they might aid us with. You know, that question has never been asked. (Kay 01)

There seemed to be a fear prevalent amongst decision makers that involving the communities in a more inclusive process would either generate unsound decisions or would be come unwieldy and dysfunctional. The idea of generating community gatherings as a means of accessing public opinion, for instance, was framed as dangerous by one regional government representative: “You have to be careful of community gatherings because you’ll find when a community gathers without a focus it can become more of a bitch session.”

An exception to this top down approach was the Louis Creek-based Recovery Committee. It was cited by those in power and by many residents as a positive example of a community led process. The local regional district representative described it as “a phenomenally good move” attributing its success in large part to the leadership of its chair and his ability as a businessman to manage and lead. Residents in Louis Creek described it as a key component of their personal recovery and reorientation and, when asked for their recommendations to other communities facing a disaster, cited the establishment of a committee like the Recovery Committee as a top priority.

Summary of the Effects of the McLure Fire

The changes wrought by the McLure fire were reflected in the economic and social structuring of the two communities as residents adjusted to the loss of the Tolko Mill and the other economic, psychological, and social effects of the fire. There were changes in the demographic profile. For instance, in Barriere some young families moved away in search of employment after the loss of the mill jobs and other people, primarily retirees or near-to-retirement workers, moved into the community. The loss of the mill also resulted in shifts in the social and economic relationship between the two communities. For many in Barriere, Louis Creek was synonymous with Tolko. The rebuilding that followed the fire and the permanent loss of the mill in Louis Creek had the result of substantially altering the face of that community.
Almost without exception the experience of the fire had a profound effect on residents with broad implications for how they understood themselves and interacted with each other. Although the descriptions of the recovery process were sometimes very different, not one person I spoke with dismissed the fire experience as minor or irrelevant.

I preface the next chapter, *The Sequestering of Suffering: Media Analysis*, with a poem that reflects my reflections and observations as a disaster responder, and as a consumer of the public discourse of disasters and disaster recovery. The poem, although it refers to Katrina, could as easily have applied to the McLure Fire. It is based on my reflections on the observations I made about our response to and our construction of disasters in the public discourse, particularly in the news media.
REALITY INVERSION

As I watch the hurricane prep,
the hyperbole of the anticipatory horror
leaves me wondering.

Will we all be disappointed
secretly, privately,
if it doesn’t happen?

There is something alluring
about the televised anguish
of the distant other.

Contained and commodified,
our tears and our money
are all part of the program.

We stand ready to slide past the horror,
of fear’s adrenaline,
into the cool release of compassion.

We enter into the safe and jagged breach
of the managed expression
of our heart’s despair.

Buffered from suffering,
we can sense the grace of yours,
in these televangelistic reflections.

Our compassion arises so effortlessly
your resurrection passes
for our own transformation.

Fires, floods, and famine,
the sound of water
in the ears of the thirsty.13

The ripples of a stone’s wet landing
disturbs the surface
of our disconnection.

The findings from the critical discourse analysis of the local (NTSJ) print media coverage of the recovery process in the 3 months following the McLure fire (August through October, 2003) is presented in this chapter. The analysis of the media texts involved a 2-staged process. In keeping with a Foucauldian (Hook, 2001) orientation to discourse analysis, I began the analysis by considering the questions: (a) How was the discourse of disaster recovery broadly constructed in the study corpus? And (b) Whose “voices” were most and least prominently represented?

In order to answer these questions, I conducted a content analysis based on an adaptation of Huckin’s (2002) 4-step analysis of newsprint media. The purpose of a content analysis in this context was to develop a sense of the public discourse of recovery by identifying thematic patterns in the discourse. Of particular interest in this analysis was the identification of what Huckin referred to as “textual silences” (p. 356).

Stage 1: Content Analysis Findings

As a result of the review of the NTSJ from August 1st to October 31st, 2003, 250 pertinent articles were located (42 articles in the August issues, 146 in the September issues, and 62 in the October issues). News articles and Letters to the Editor accounted for the majority of texts in the study corpus. A break-down of the articles by types is presented in the Table 3.

Table 3: Breakdown of North Thompson Star Journal article types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of article</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of corpus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News Article</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter to the Editor</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature Story</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captioned Picture</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results of the content analysis consisted of the four main categories, each with 18 to 25 subtopics, ranging across six major themes that were developed in an iterative manner. The main categories included: (a) effects of the fire, (b) public response to the fires, (c) needs explicitly identified in the texts, and (d) issues explicitly identified within the texts. The six major themes identified within these categories were: (a) psychological or emotional aspects of the fire; (b) religious or spiritual matters, or invoking spiritual discourse; (c) economic, material impact of the fire, or the response to these effects; need for or the provision of relevant information; (e) environmental impact or issues arising from the fire; and (f) a catchall category of "Other" that included such topics as fire fighting, general progress of the fires, emergency management practices not specific to recovery, global complications or implications.

The six themes revealed an unfolding story in the coverage of the recovery process. The economic-material theme was clearly dominant (43%) throughout all analyzed articles in all of the four main categories. The psychological-emotional theme followed (26%), although it was significantly less proportionate than the economic-material topic. The catchall theme of Other was the next largest domain (14%), which is not surprising given that this included references to fire fighting and the ongoing fire that continued to burn through most of the period. Finally, the reference to environmental concerns (10%) outweighed those related to information-knowledge (4%) and spiritual-contemplative concerns (<1%).

In Figure 11, the themes of recovery are shown distributed across the four subject domains of the Content Matrix. The Economic/Material focus dominates in all four of the subject domains. Although the Psychological/Emotional focus is the second most prevalent, it occupies markedly less of the content particularly in terms of discussions of the effects of the fires and the public response to those effects. The catchall theme of Other is particularly evident in the domain of Identified Needs. This was accounted for mainly by the focus on the need for improved firefighting strategies and the inclusion of locals in those fire-fighting decisions. Six themes of in four subject domains of recovery were identified in the articles selected from the NTSJ.
Effects of Fires Public Identified Identified Response to Needs Issues

- Psychological/Emotional
- Spiritual/Contemplation
- Economic/Material
- Environmental
- Information/Knowledge
- Other

Figure 11: Themes of Recovery Identified in North Thompson Star Journal Articles

Through an analysis of the frequency of subtopics, a substantial textual silence was identified. There was a relative absence of subtopics related to adverse psychological or emotional effects of the fire. These effects accounted for a minimal portion of the total coverage (11%), whereas subtopics relating to economic and material aspects of the effects of the fire accounted for 56% of the texts.

The focus on economic and environmental subtopics existed in all but the first month of coverage. Public responses to the effects of the fire were also framed primarily in economic and material terms. For example, funding and practical/material support accounted for 54% of the public response, whereas psychological support was only apparent in 22% of the coverage. With respect to identified needs, during the 3 months following the fires, there was no mention of
mental health services, with only one reference to the need for health services more generally. Dominating this category was an economic focus on rebuilding homes, rebuilding businesses, and creating jobs/stimulating the economy that accounted for over a quarter of the content. The predominant subtopic issue identified in the texts was the Tolko Mill closure, once again an economic issue. This subtopic independently accounted for 24% of the content, whereas the psychological-emotional issues were represented in less than one percent of the texts, with the exception of the subtopic community supporting community (16%), a subtopic congruent with Dynes' (1974) suggestion that media coverage is geared to sustaining public morale in a disaster.

Identity Matrix

The results of the Identity Matrix analysis highlighted whose voices were most frequently represented in the NTSJ texts. As seen in Figure 6, the voices of community members dominated the texts (60%). However, who within the community was represented held some surprises. Although Louis Creek was the hardest hit by the fire, residents of Louis Creek were heard relatively infrequently (8%). In contrast, the residents from Barriere dominated throughout the texts (44%).

Also of interest was the aggregate voice—residents were often referred to as “North Thompson Valley residents” (28%) rather than identified by their specific community. This aggregate identifier was used primarily in contexts that emphasized the need for economic development in the wake of the fires and the loss of the Tolko sawmill. This focus on a regional identity blurred the significant differences between the two communities, both in terms of the disasters’ effects and the separate cultural identities of the communities. Given the significance to both communities of the loss of the Tolko mill, ex-employees seemed to be under represented (5%). In part, this may have been an artifact of the choice of data, as the announcement of the mill closure was made during October 2003. These findings support the notion of there being a hierarchy of credibility as was noted by Ploughman (1996).
An analysis of the Identity Matrix revealed patterns in the representation of which individuals were given voice in the articles selected from NTSJ. Five main categories of individuals were identified based on geographic and occupational identifiers found in the articles.

**Summary of the Content Analysis**

Broadly speaking, the content analysis revealed some distinct thematic threads in the corpus of NTSJ texts; most evident was the overall emphasis on the economic and material aspects of the recovery process. In examining the specific instantiations of the subtopics in the Content and Identity Matrices, several textual silences (Huckin, 2002) were identified including the relative silence of the voices of those who had been most materially affected by the fire, the residents of Louis Creek, and the relative absence of ex-Tolko employees. The relative frequency of the other domain was significant, as it reflected the ongoing threat of the fires during the recovery period, highlighting the fluid and overlapping nature of the evolution of a
disaster and at times, the arbitrary nature of the categories used to distinguish this evolution in terms of phases or stages.

Stage 2: Discourse Analysis

I followed the content analysis with a modified version of Willig's (2001) approach to critical discourse analysis. My goal was to understand the representation of discourses in the newspaper and “how these discourses may influence how people think or feel and what they may do” (Sykes, et al., 2004, p. 133). The discourse analysis answered the questions (a) How more specifically was the discourse of recovery constructed in the NTSJ? (b) How were individuals and groups of individuals subjectively positioned as a result? and (c) How does the dominant construction of recovery facilitate or limit possibilities for social action?

Discursive Construction: Sequestering of Suffering

The focus of this initial step in the critical discourse analysis was to identify how the discursive objects were constructed through language. The findings revealed a dominant discursive construction of the disaster recovery process that I named sequestering of suffering and consisted of four primary discursive strategies: (a) multiple eclipsing of emotion; (b) economic/material framing of loss; (c) return to normalcy; and (d) erasure of Louis Creek.

Multiple Eclipsing of Emotion

Suffering and its associated emotions (e.g., grief, sadness, anger, despair) were minimized and often rendered invisible in the texts. Two dominant strategies, sequestering of emotions and the economic framing of loss, were identified as the key strands in this discursive construction. When the emotional and psychological aspects of recovery entered the discourse, they were largely compartmentalized as either letters to the editor or in a September 29, 2003 special issue of the NTSJ. Doing well (i.e., psychological functionalism) was implicitly promoted as the responsibility of being a “good” citizen or community member. It was constructed as the need to stick together as a community, remain strong in the face of adversity, and to let go of the bad, for example, “Surely we have learned already the value of sticking together and remaining strong in the face of adversity. We must hold that thought,” (Sept. 29, p.
1: *Heartstopper, Heartbreaker, Heartfelt*); and “God bless disaster because it brings us together as a community, as a province, and a nation” (Oct. 6, p. 4: *More is not better*).

When mention was made of personal difficulties, they were immediately qualified by an upbeat addendum. Coverage published only days after the confirmation of the loss of homes and businesses in Louis Creek made mention of “grief counselors” standing by to assist “those who have lost virtually everything” (Aug. 11, p. 3: *Fire continues to spread*). In the same issue, however, the possibility of grief was immediately contrasted with “the quiet dignity, courage and resolve in the face of tragedy” (Aug. 11, p. 4: *Heroes, one and all*). Similarly, the tears of men were not moved by grief, loss, or frustration, but “by human goodness” (Aug. 11, p. 4: *Words are not enough*).

Using a variety of discursive strategies, suffering and loss were sometimes juxtaposed with positive coping. One such strategy contrasted what had been lost with what had been preserved. This positioned the latter as more important: “Fires burned homes, businesses, but not spirit,” and “the stories of personal loss were incredible, but the stories we heard of hope and strength were even more amazing” (Sept. 29, p. 19: *Canadian Red Cross shares story*). A related strategy employed downward comparison: “People have suffered in the past, much worse” (Sept. 8, p. 4: *Community must stay strong*). Another strategy employed an imagined positive outcome in which the adverse events were positioned as having prevented other undesirable events: “there are, however, a couple of things on the plus side, like not having to worry about West Nile virus this year because the fires seem to have thinned the mosquito population out” (Sept. 8, p. 13: *Rain song, fall plans*).

The sequestering of specific emotions was accomplished by positioning distressing emotions as something to be avoided: “It’s hard not to be inspired, but we also recognize that social behavior will likely now shift from the good, the warm and the fuzzy to attitudes driven by fear, grief, anger and sometimes greed” (Aug. 25, p. 4: *Hot topics*). Anger was positioned in negative terms unless it was “channeled into productive effort” (Aug 15, p. 4: *Welcome developments*). Another example of this avoidance framed the sequestering of emotions as something highly desirable and easily accomplished, drawing on the apparent resilient capacity of children as a model for how one should approach recovery: “Children continue to set the example of letting go of the bad and embracing the good” (Sept. 29, p. 31: *Buoyancy of youth an example for us all*).
Economic/Material Framing of Loss

Consistent with the findings of the content analysis, losses were overwhelmingly constructed as economic or material and explicitly or implicitly minimized. Homes were described as “framed constructions” or “manufactured homes” (i.e., houses) and evaluated in terms of their monetary rather than emotional value (Aug. 11, p. 3: Fires continue to spread). Income and households were “disrupted” and “damaged,” and people were described as having lost “jobs and assets” (Oct. 27, p. 4: Offers rational for rebuilding). This emphasis on house-as-property, rather than house-as-home, further diminished the emotional cost of losing a home: “Thank God they are only property losses...property can be replaced” (Sept. 29, p. 21: A message from your MLA). Ironically, these same texts tended to use evocative and emotional language to describe losses that were framed economically such as: “Tourism has been eviscerated (italics added) by the fire season” (Oct. 6, p. 15: Canoe down river to Kamloops); or the headline, “Tolko employees emotional, devastated, upset (italics added)” (Oct. 6, p. 1).

The language used to describe incurred losses often generalized in ways that obscured the significant differences in the geography of losses. One text, for instance, spoke of how “many suffered stunning losses” (Sept. 29, p. 1: Heartstopper, Heartbreaker, Heartfelt), referring presumably to the devastation of Louis Creek, although the loss of homes was never specifically referenced. These texts also tended to minimize the loss of homes in the context of the loss of jobs such as: “most people lost their jobs not their homes” (Sept. 8, p. 22: Disgusted by position); or “BC Hydro should be asked to explain its apparent policy giving priority on restoring power to residences over commercial users, these are people’s livelihoods we’re talking about.” (Aug. 11, p. 7: Chamber president questions Hydro’s priorities).

Although the losses were framed economically, the consequences of the McLure fire were generally dissociated from the broader economic and political context in which the fire occurred. When this broader context was mentioned, it was done so primarily in relationship to Tolko, as part of their rationale for not rebuilding, and to a lesser degree to contextualize the losses of ranchers. In the case of Tolko, “international trade agreements,” “softwood lumber tariffs,” “economies of scale,” and “global competitiveness” were all mentioned by company spokespeople and the local MLA as significant aspects of the company’s decision not to rebuild (Aug. 22, p. 1: Tolko decision will have to wait; Sept. 8, p. 3: Krueger calls Tolko workers to
meeting; Oct. 6, p. 1: Tolko employees ‘emotional,’ ‘devastated,’ ‘upset’). These same global influences were used in counter arguments to criticize recent government regulatory decisions (Sept. 8, p. 4: Create jobs, clean up forests; Sept. 1, p. 6: More is likely yet to come), or to ‘debunk’ Tolko’s rationale (Oct. 6, p. 4: True Colours). The ranchers fire-related losses were contextualized by referring to the already depressed market for Canadian beef in the wake of a recent mad cow disease scare, and described ranchers’ losses as “a double whammy” (Sept. 8, p. 5: Little hope of relief for resort owners).

Return to Normalcy

The recovery process was discursively constructed as primarily a time to return to normal apparent in the economic-material subtopics identified in the content analysis. The construction emphasized a return to productivity that was characterized by a focus on economic activity, rebuilding and repairing structures, and the allocation of material resources. The imperative of moving on and getting back to pre-fire levels of individual and community functioning was emphasized. This movement back to normal was constructed as the common goal of governmental and nongovernmental agencies, residents, and the communities:

Powerful forces are at work all around us. Agencies with names known across Canada, and around the world are working with government and community groups to begin to pick our way back toward normalcy in the North Thompson. In the meantime, we see children beginning to play in groups again, walkers out for their shared daily constitutionals, parking lots containing nearly normal numbers of vehicles. (Sept. 1, p. 4: Picking up the pieces)

The push to return to normal was evidenced early on in discussions of the importance of carrying on with annual community events as though the disruption resulting from the fire had not occurred (e.g., Fall Fair, Terry Fox run). The re-establishment of routines, such as the return to school for children, was represented as constructive and “a welcome and comforting security” after “weeks of confusion and uncertainty” (Sept. 29, p. 31: Buoyancy of youth an example).

Erasure of Louis Creek

The most striking trend in the coverage following the McLure fire was the relative absence of Louis Creek in the texts, a trend foreshadowed by the dominance of Barriere residents’ voices found in the Identity Matrix analysis. Despite the significant losses in Louis
relatively little coverage highlighted the experiences of these residents or addressed the struggles and challenges they faced in reconstructing their personal lives and that of their community. Moreover, when the texts focused on specific losses, the attention often focused on the relatively minor losses in Barriere (e.g., food spoilage, smoke smell), while ignoring the more severe losses in Louis Creek (e.g., loss of 73 homes). On the other hand, the loss of the Tolko Mill was frequently mentioned, but primarily in terms of the economic and employment effects of the loss.

In this context, Louis Creek was also mentioned, however, with the primary function of contextualizing the discussion of the mill, because it was located in the Louis Creek community.

To Louis Creek residents who feel we’re focusing too much on the future of Tolko, we say the obvious: when that firm announces its determination to continue to be Barriere’s economic backbone, we’ll all sleep easier. (Aug 22, p. 4: Patience, please)

The following editorial, published a little over a month after the fire destroyed Louis Creek, was illustrative of this erasure of Louis Creek:

Almost exactly a month ago, North Thompson residents were returning to the valley. Most came back to their homes, to smelly refrigerators, burned out lawns and faded flowers. Not everybody was so lucky. Many found homes seemingly miraculously undamaged but their future uncertain. (Sept 08, p.4: As time goes by)

In both these texts, the construction of loss engaged an economic discourse that placed greater emphasis on the importance of the loss of jobs, compared to the loss of homes, while exhorting patience from residents of Louis Creek who experienced their losses being minimized as a result of the focus on Tolko. The loss of homes, home-based businesses, and the few retail businesses in Louis Creek had far ranging implications for that community, and the absence of acknowledgement of these losses skewed the focus to Barriere. The textual silence on the specific experiences in the hardest hit community intersected with the active promotion of normalcy and the avoidance of suffering, positioning the residents of Louis Creek as out of step with the dominant discourse. Further, in texts referring to “the community,” the community, if named, was named as “Barriere,” suggesting that the latter community stood in for or assumed the inclusion of Louis Creek. Furthermore, the frequent use of the collective pronoun “we” as in “we suffered,” or “we sustained great losses locally,” implied a similarity of experience that belied the significant differences in the geography of losses between the two communities and their respective independent cultural identities.
Summary of the Discursive Strategies.

The sequestering of suffering discourse identified in the NTSJ texts constructed recovery as an accelerated process characterized by the reestablishing of routines and the overcoming of adversity. In so doing, this discursive construction minimized the distress of those most severely affected by the McLure Fire and may have inadvertently undermined the potential development and re-creation of strong relational support networks in the communities. The economic losses were contextualized within the global perspective of ongoing economic challenges in the lumber and beef industries, but the broader socio-political context was rarely acknowledged. One of the significant consequences of this construction was that it rendered as virtually invisible the devastating impact of the fire on the residents of Louis Creek.

Subject Positions

The construction of the discursive objects and wider discourses made available several subject positions, with implications for community members’ health. The subject positions most available included the disenfranchised survivor, the passive recipient of help, and the expert intervener. In the texts, residents were described as “evacuees” or “refugees,” borrowing a term more often associated with political violence and turmoil. They were variously positioned depending on the context and the nature of their losses. When referred to at all, those who had lost their homes were described as “unfortunate,” “the hardest hit,” those “in a terrible predicament.” When referring to the community as a whole, terms such as “rudderless,” “in need of redefinition,” and “crippled,” positioned the community also as victimized, leaderless, and handicapped.

However, as the recovery progressed, communities and residents alike were afforded an alternate subject position as courageous and enduring survivors. Various texts constructed the community as a family, united in their plight, their bravery, and their steadfast willingness to work together toward a better future:

Places like Barriere are defined not by their industries or sport franchises or their performing arts centers, but by the character of the people, their tenacity, and their willingness to help one another. (Sept. 29, p. 26: Role reversal leaves lasting impression).
Out of the ashes, a courageous community emerged... Although it was one of the worst natural disasters in our province’s history, it also helped bring out the best. (Oct. 6, p. 5: They say a picture is worth a thousand words).

However, within this more heroic construction, there was little room for actual agency; and to the contrary, individuals from outside the communities were positioned as experts and authorities. Residents both acknowledged and resisted their lack of agency through indirect, ironic references to the local Member of the Provincial Legislative Assembly (MLA) as “the messiah of the Liberal Party” (Sept. 8, p. 5: Says MLA engaged in political posturing) dispensing “pearls of wisdom” (Sept. 8, p. 6: Kreuger should check his facts. Quotation marks in original text) and more explicit references to their lack of representation in the process: “A committee [a regional committee directing allocation of resources] which includes exactly one member from the Barriere-Louis Creek area—is the nearest thing we’ve got to a shared voice in this matter” (Sept. 8, p. 4: As time goes by).

Consistent with the Identity Matrix findings and in accordance with Dynes (1974), collective language was often employed, implying a homogeneity of experience; “Our shared dilemma” (Aug 25, p. 4: Hot topics), and a need to embrace a unified stance in the face of adversity; “We will come together” (Sept. 29, p. 31: Buoyancy of youth an example). Collective language was also used by the local Member of the Provincial Legislative Assembly (MLA) to indicate his solidarity with residents: “The spirit of goodwill and compassion we have been experiencing throughout this crises will carry us forward through the rebuilding process” (Sept. 29, p. 21: A message from your MLA).

The discourse generally constructed the good citizen as the citizen who put on a brave face, and carried on regardless of adversity. Within this construction, there was little room for or acknowledgement of the need to contemplate or mourn the symbolic and material losses of those most adversely affected by the fire. As the recovery progressed and issues began to arise regarding relief funding, those who had lost uninsured homes or businesses and were receiving relief funding were further marginalized, positioned in a letter to the editor as “wimps taking handouts unable or unwilling to take care of themselves” (Aug. 25, p. 4: Next time, insurance). In another letter to the editor, they were offered two opposing positions, either as “whiners,” or as “those who are rolling up their sleeves” (Sept. 1, p. 4: Get that ostrich on-side).
Broadly speaking, both women and men were positioned as primarily economic beings lacking spiritual or psychological dimensionality. The emphasis on the economic material aspects of the recovery process, aspects of the public sphere of the discourse of recovery and the occlusion of the private sphere (e.g., domestic domain, relational activities) positioned women and children as an invisible background other. The texts constructed a stereotypically gendered picture of recovery in which men were positioned as authoritative, active agents in directing the process and promoting a hierarchical, problem-solving discourse aimed at creating solutions addressing domains dominated by men (e.g., forestry, business, waged-work). The sequestering and minimizing of emotions favored masculine styles of coping and socialization whereby emotions were seen as irrational, less important, and something to be suppressed or denied. Constructed as minor participants in the economic/public sphere, women and their contributions to the recovery process were effectively positioned as inconsequential.

The impact of the fires on the complex web of relational and domestic activities including familial relationships, kinship networks, and the social fabric of the community—domains of interest and activity more commonly associated with women—were absent. Male residents were more likely to be positioned as heroic or leaders contributing to their community than were female residents. Men were featured for their volunteer contribution as fire fighters and their role as business leaders, whereas women were rarely positioned in such a way. The absence of women’s voices in the direction and focus of the recovery process in Barriere and Louis Creek implied a taken for granted stance in regarding their contributions as major providers of care, healthcare, childcare, and the maintenance of domestic routines, while negating their contributions and roles within the public sphere of the recovery environment.

The use of the private-public descriptive dualism is an artifice of the dominant discourse, signifying an arbitrary delineation between what occurs within the private sphere of homes and families and in the public sphere outside the home. The notion draws heavily on Marxist theory and feminist theorizing as a means of discussing the gendered spatial manifestations of economic relations within capitalism (MacKinnon, 1989). It is useful for discussing patterns of gendered divisions in labor and economic and political power in emergency management and response structures (Fordham & Ketteridge, 1998), which has tended to be dominated by men.
Summary of Subject Positions

Overall the recovery discourse in the NTSJ texts offered limited and sometimes conflicted subject positions to residents. The predominant construction was that of the enduring but passive survivor, the individual who was meeting his/her fate with equanimity but who also had to look to experts and outside-others for advice, leadership, and solutions. This construction also eliminated differences so that there were few ways in which the different locations of residents and their resulting different experiences were acknowledged. Further, when differences were acknowledged they were done so primarily in the context of confining those who would speak out in opposition to existing practices or from emotional distress to marginalized positions as less productive and responsible citizens, weak, lazy, or in some ways, self-indulgent. This construction was paradoxically disempowering individually and collectively. It suggested agency and action, yet constructed the survivor as inadequately equipped to take action without outside support and guidance. In keeping with the emphasis on public sphere concerns, women and children were further marginalized as players in the recovery process.

Neo-liberal Discourse of Recovery

The findings revealed that an assemblage of neo-liberal discourses were called upon to construct recovery as a process of returning to a status quo in which normal or even improved economic functioning was the primary goal. As a coherent socio-political philosophy, neo-liberalism extends market ideology beyond the production of goods and services to frame social interactions increasingly in terms of market transactions (Harvey, 2003). Neo-liberalism draws on a network of discursive practices – global capitalism, workforce flexibility, competition, individualism, privatization – to ensure a mobility of capital and a construction of society that, theoretically at least, moves closer and closer to a pure free market based on an “individualist micro-economic model” (Bourdieu, 1998, ¶9). This reconstruction and reinforcing of the dominant discourse in the NTSJ is consistent with Lupton’s (1992) assessment that this is one of the primary functions of mainstream media.

A number of specific discourses associated with neo-liberal discourse were identified in the NTSJ texts: (a) global capitalism; (b) workforce flexibility; (c) the good consumer (d) expert discourse; and (e) health discourse. The latter was not explicitly drawn on but was implied
through several of the discursive strategies already discussed (e.g., sequestering of suffering, return to normalcy).

**Global Capitalism**

Within the texts, the discourse of global capitalism was used to construct the need for a regionalizing of the identity of the communities as the North Thompson Valley, consistent with the global imperative of economies of scale. In neo-liberal discourse, size matters. Throughout the texts were comments about the search for economic opportunities, “planning for the valley’s economic future” focused on “options” and “strategies” and “diversification” (Oct. 27, p. 03: *Group agrees on initial steps*). This construction rendered as fact the logic of the global economy.

**Workforce Flexibility**

Within neo-liberal economic discourse, workforce flexibility is constructed as an inevitable and desirable aspect of globalization and contemporary economics (Martin, 1994). Officials from Tolko drew on this discourse to justify their decision not to rebuild the mill, implying that workers had demonstrated a lack of flexibility that made the mill less viable even before it was destroyed by the fire. This discourse was also drawn on by government officials who suggested that workers should be ready and willing to move wherever necessary in order to find work to replace the lost Tolko jobs, as though their connection to their home communities was one dimensional, a matter of employment and economics only.

Ex-Tolko workers on the other hand resisted this framing, countering the company-as-victim of global forces discourse offered by Tolko representatives with ironic comments suggesting that the fire had simply served to cement plans for closure that had been underway prior to the fire. Their letters to the editor drew instead on a critical discourse to frame the decision not to rebuild as resulting from the greed of “monolithic companies,” and the complicity of “government bureaucracies” (Sept. 15, p. 4: *Welcome developments*).

**Good Consumer**

In the texts, the worthy citizen was the responsible citizen striking the right balance between full participation as a consumer, gaining status through the accumulation of goods,
while also saving for the future and banking against contingencies (e.g., buying insurance) in an uncertain world. The world was construed as inevitably uncertain for the uncertainty was assumed as an inherent characteristic of modernity. Those who did not insure themselves sufficiently against contingencies such as the fire were at times vilified for their lack of foresight and responsibility, at other times framed as hapless victims because of their marginal economic status prior to the fires. They were in some way failures before the fire because of their failure to participate successfully in the marketplace as evidenced by their lack of material/financial accumulation.

The framing of the recovery process as largely economic precluded a meaningful acknowledgement of and response to the distress and suffering of those severely affected by the McLure Fire. In accordance with the tenets of neo-liberal discourse, residents were framed primarily in utilitarian and individualist terms. The moral imperative of this construction of residents as primarily economic beings— as producers and consumers – was that they should focus on returning as quickly as possible to an efficient economic functionality, and perforce a psychological functionalism, individually and collectively.

**Expert Discourse**

One of the key aspects of the discourse of late modernity is the reliance on experts and expertise to mediate life and solve problems (Taylor, 1989). Giddens (1991) described expert systems as one of two key disembedding mechanisms in modernity that remove social relations from local contexts, contribute to a deskilling of everyday life and everyday social actors, and undermine local control. As knowledge becomes increasingly narrowly focused, the likelihood of unintended or unforeseen consequences increases. This requires the development of further expertise; which, in turn, further narrows knowledge, and so on.

This discourse of reliance on experts and expertise with the concomitant erosion of local control was seen throughout the NTSJ texts. It was evidenced, for instance, in the post-fire analysis of why local knowledge had been minimized or excluded in the fire fighting response and the post-fire recovery processes. Forest service firefighters were constructed through the texts as trained and experienced experts who knew what they were doing. In contrast, the locals’ specific, contextual, and experiential knowledge of the geography was minimized and constructed as potentially dangerous—“unless you are an experienced firefighter, it’s hard to
know what to do in this type of emergency” (Oct. 6, p. 13: *When fires strikes: Get out! Stay out!*). The community was constructed in need of technocratic solutions, such as task forces, management teams, “skilled support, and a trained economic development officer” (Oct. 20, p. 13: *Who will take the lead?*).

When it came to the economic recovery of the communities, a trained and experienced economic development officer was constructed as the answer to the need. Tolko’s executives were constructed as “diligently” working to “analyze opportunities” and “expedite the solution” within the context of complex international, global economic factors (Aug. 22, p. 1: *Tolko decision will have to wait*). However, resistance to this discourse was also present in the NTSJ texts. Some residents noted their exclusion from the decision-making processes and stated an expectation that they be included in decisions pertaining to the Tolko site and the distribution of relief funds.

**Health Discourse**

Although health discourse was never explicitly used in the texts, its influence in terms of a construction of what constitutes health was implied through various aspects of the discursive construction of recovery. The overall occlusion of distress and suffering and the concomitant emphasis on functionalism and a speedy return to normal are consistent with contemporary medical and health discourses. These discourses emphasize the conquering of illness through self-management and self-regulation, framing illness as something to be avoided. Within this framing, illness is something to be surmounted through active interventions, for as Clarke and James (2003) pointed out, “the very term representing modern medicine – allopathic – means against suffering” (p. 1388). The absence of specific references to health (mental and/or physical) in the texts is suggestive of neo-liberal discourse in as much as the emphasis on the entrepreneurial individual and the concomitant lack of the social frames health problems as the result of individual failures and not a social concern (Coburn, 2004).

The emphasis within the texts on a return to normal was also congruent with the equating of normal and functional in health discourse. Within this discursive construction (a construction of modernity in general), the valued self is the *normally functioning* self — productive, independent, and instrumental in determining the course and direction of their lives (Crossley, 1999). In the texts, the valued self, or "good citizen" continued to move forward unimpeded by,
in this case not illness per se, but distress, suffering, and the pause in functionality that reflection and questioning might demand. Within this construction contradictory subject positions are available to residents who were constructed, on the one hand as agentic and responsible for managing their recovery whereas on the other hand as passive recipients of the guidance and services of expert others.

The construction of recovery as a process guided by experts and outside agencies may have foreclosed the possibility of fostering individual empowerment, community development and leadership, and forms of collective processing of the fires (e.g., memorials, community gatherings). Residents were, in effect, excluded through the privileging of expert knowledge and the dismissal of local experience and meaning. According to Howarth, Foster, and Dorrer (2004), this approach “perpetuates the exclusion of [residents]...from discussions about their health problems and appropriate treatments” (p. 237). Thus, media representations focusing on expert knowledge function to maintain current disaster recovery practices with little or no acknowledgement of how these practices may or may not best serve the needs and interests of specific communities. The promotion of a reliance on experts to direct the recovery process limits the likelihood that residents would seize the momentum of the disaster response and harness it for capacity building in health and social domains.

Summary: Media Discourse of Recovery

The discursive framing of disaster recovery, as evidenced in the media coverage in the 3 months following the McLure-Barriere fire, was of an economic/material process focused on a speedy return to normalcy, with a reliance on experts for action and leadership. Furthermore, the dominant voice was male, authoritative, and institutionalized, evidenced in the comments of government level officials, and the drawing on expert discourses of firefighting, economic development, and the recovery expertise of nongovernmental organizations. Despite implicit expectations of agency and action, residents were constructed as passive victims. This framing made the experiences of women and children largely invisible and their contributions went unacknowledged for the most part.

The macro-regional economic focus did not necessarily support individuals in creatively responding to their situation, nor did it address social/structural inequities or vulnerabilities. The nexus of these discourses resonates with the dominant health discourse, which constructs good
health as synonymous with good citizenship and virtuous living, and mirrored a construction available to those recovering from illness. In both instances, survivors are encouraged to sequester their suffering and are rewarded for taking the hero’s stance and adopting an active response to illness. Disasters, like illness, stop or slow down our ability to be active producers and consumers; getting back to normal or to health is implicitly and explicitly constructed as a process of regaining, as quickly and quietly as possible, the ability to function as economic beings in the world.

The passive subject positions offered as a result of this expert discourse may have limited the potential for individual and collective empowerment and the development of emergent leadership within the communities. The lack of attention to the private sphere and the eclipsing of women in the discourse may have exacerbated this disempowerment for women more generally, further marginalizing them in terms of their actual and potential contributions and vulnerabilities. The absence of their voices in the media accounts implied a taken for granted stance in regards to their contributions as major providers of care giving, healthcare, childcare, and the maintenance of domestic routines. Women’s absence in the texts may have reflected and furthered the limited nature and breadth of roles in which they could engage in the public sphere of the recovery environment.

Overall, the discursive contexts and constructions and the subject positions identified may contribute to the individualizing of social problems and the marginalization of individuals who are most vulnerable to emotional, psychological, and social distress. The emphasis on economic and instrumental responses to the disaster may have reduced the awareness of, and response to, the health needs (e.g., psychological, emotional, and spiritual) of individuals and groups. In practice, this focus meant that relief agencies and government programs were less likely to provide psychological support services, and more likely to address the material needs of those affected by the fire based on the assumption that a return to economic functioning was the primary ingredient of recovery. 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 neo-liberal discourse (Coburn, 2004).

I preface the next chapter with a poetic construction of the process of recovery based on my observations and analysis during the research process. The poem is crafted from a
compilation of phrases and words that residents used to describe their experiences in the formal and informal conversations I had with them.
WHEN THE RUG IS PULLED OUT FROM UNDER YOUR FEET

The blackened toothpick sentinels
remind the creeping green,
of the dying into birthing,
as we talk, tentatively, then with growing momentum,
on the porches of your smoke filled valley
to the beat of your new relationship with the world.

I hear of your deepest learning,
the consciousness of choice,
as you face the mirror of deciding moment to moment.
Forced below the surface,
you struggle to catch a breath,
drowning in the open space of possibility.

Confidence erodes in the not knowing,
the recipes are gone and improv is alive.
At once you are more cautious,
and more open,
knowing differently the phrase "once burned twice shy,"
you offer your stories, and I in the listening, am honored.

Loss invades each experience,
catching at moments throughout the day,
reaching for a spanner or a recipe book,
decisions push against the current of your lives.
The difference between what is lost and what is misplaced,
demands a consideration of consumption.
You navigate a delicate balance now
between recovered, but not too much
between humility and nonchalance,
in this tallying of an equation of shifting networks,
emerging connections and disconnections,
and experiencing impermanence the hard way.

Friends become those who share the humor it all requires
when you are standing on such shaky ground,
when you are rebuilding a brick at a time.
Defined by a fire's creative influence,
they too know a new sense of dependence,
and the resonating pulse of giving and receiving.

In this thin place where the light cracks through us both,
in the floundering of the recently unmoored,
I listen to you offering your selves.
Monitored now for your vulnerabilities,
for the newness of your shells,
you lean into the universe and your new life.

You have arrived too suddenly perhaps,
in this seesawing world
of heartbreak and hope,
and the certainty of uncertainty.
Like Shroedeger's cat, emerging as a cat from the ashes,
Not knowing is prompting you to root in.
CHAPTER 6: DISORIENTATION AND REORIENTATION - SHIFTING FRAMES OF REFERENCE

In this chapter, I return to the findings drawn from residents' accounts and to the question of how residents described and explained their experiences of recovery as it unfolded over the 24 months following the McLure Fire. I offer a description of what I came to understand as the central social-psychological problem and process of recovery and how I came to understand these as related to collective and individual identity construction through orientation. I go on to provide a description of the central processes that I have termed disorientation and reorientation.

In my conversations and interviews, residents offered myriad examples of how the fire had affected them in deeply personal and persistent ways, calling into question their beliefs, what they valued as important or worthy, their anticipated life trajectories, and the networks of personal and shared social relations. As I navigated the ambiguity and fluidity of my relationship with the residents, I listened to them describe a shifting geography of identities as they navigated roles in their personal and communal recovery processes. These identities were both explicitly defined and implied in their descriptions of recovery and in their definitions of what constituted "their community," or "us" and "them."

In my interactions with those affected by the McLure fire, I observed a sense of disorientation; a profound sense of uncertainty. The referential or orienting frameworks held largely out of daily awareness, had been thrown into the foreground by the threatened or actual loss of the material and symbolic markers in which they were grounded (e.g., places, possessions, networks of relationship). It was as though the ground of their being had been both literally and metaphorically shaken.

15 Taylor (1989) proposed the notion of orientation to describe identity as a process or expression of "frames of horizon" (p. 26), or the evaluative discriminations (i.e., beliefs, values, desires and aversions) we make as relational beings. To orient means to find one's bearings, to become familiar with a situation, or to put oneself in the right position or relation (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002). Taylor (1989) intentionally used the spatial metaphor of orientation precisely because it implied, through reference to a material/spatial analogy, the notion of there being an external imperative calling forth identity in response to pre-existing questions in the same way that our embodied existence calls or invites us to orient spatially. I use the term orientating frameworks in this context to describe the symbolic frames of reference, often ground in material markers, that we draw on to define, redefine, and negotiate our identities.
In the following section, I outline the process of disorientation. Here and in subsequent quotes from residents to illustrate key aspects. I have made minor edits to quotes for readability and have identified residents by their pseudonym and the number of the interview (e.g., Pam 02).

Disorientation

I conceptualized the centrally shared social-psychological problem I heard in residents’ (those I interviewed) accounts of the McLure fire and its immediate aftermath as disorientation. In their descriptions of watching the fire’s approach, the ensuing evacuation, and their subsequent return to communities irreversibly altered by the fire, residents described being thrown from their everyday lives. During the early interviews (February, 2004), residents reported experiencing a profound sense of disruption that extended into many domains of their individual and shared lived worlds. In those and subsequent interviews (August, 2004, 2005), they spoke of experiencing a great deal of distress at the uncertainty evoked by the profound changes in their lives and communities.

Residents’ worlds were, in their own words, “turned upside down,” “the rug was pulled out from under their feet,” their “legs were taken out from under you,” and it was “as though someone had put marbles under your feet.” For those who lost their homes there was a profound sense of being dislocated – “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.” Many of the residents, whether they had lost their homes or not were, as one resident offered, “like fish out of water,” and, like fish out of water they were suddenly conscious of that which, until that point, had been largely out of their awareness: “So it seems to me that once you’re a fish out of water you’re always looking for water” (Brian 01).

What the “water” consisted of in the case of survivors of the McLure Fire included the material and symbolic markers of their relationship to themselves, others, their immediate context, and the larger world. Significant aspects of their orienting frameworks were lost as a result of the material losses – their sense of belonging as referenced by their homes, material possessions, community landmarks, and the local environment/landscape. At the same time, with the loss and/or disruption of jobs and businesses, many also lost their sense of purpose and their means of income generation. The fire also impacted residents’ sense of safety and continuity as represented by routines, predictability, and anticipated life trajectories.
The fire disrupted the coherence and continuity of residents’ personal and shared/social stories of self. The psychological and emotional intensity and suffering that characterized their disorientation was shaped in part by personal characteristics, social groupings and affiliations, and varied depending on a number of situational and contextual conditions. Given the diversity of the participants in terms of personal characteristics (e.g., gender, age, socioeconomic status), social roles (e.g., ranchers, mill workers, entrepreneurs, parents, housewives), and the degree and nature of losses, it is not possible in the context of this study to describe all of the material and symbolic aspects of disorientation or the ways in which the process differed across the various subcultures of the disaster. I have focused my discussion, therefore, on several of the most apparent and common of these aspects.

I begin by describing the extent of material loss and the devastation of the immediate locale because these material consequences of the fire were the most immediately obvious as an observer, and because they were such a defining aspect of the disaster and the disorientation that followed. I then focus attention on a number of the symbolic losses: (a) degree of disruption to routines; (b) perceived sense of ongoing threat; (c) scope of sense of dislocation arising from the evacuation, loss of homes, job loss; and (e) perceived loss of control. In some very important ways, the attempt to distinguish these as separate aspects of disorientation is artificial. It is perhaps more accurate to think in terms of a contextual network in which innumerable conditions and processes mutually and co-extensively influenced the disorientation process for residents of Barriere and Louis Creek.

**Degree and Extent of Personal Losses**

Residents identified the macro (e.g., regional and community level) and micro (e.g., individual and family level) economic and material impacts as having a profound impact on their post-fire lives (e.g., job loss, loss of businesses, loss of houses and possessions). They also reported experiencing a variety of cognitive and emotional responses to the acute and chronic stresses of the post-disaster environment (e.g., difficulty with memory and decision making, labile emotions).

In general, the greater the extent of major material losses (e.g., lost homes, businesses, or the means of employment) the greater the sense of disorientation. For these residents, so many orienting frameworks were disrupted or destroyed that for some, particularly those who suffered
the loss of their homes, much of what was familiar and routine to them was lost and had to be reinvented. Many of those residents of Louis Creek who were interviewed, for instance, expressed a profound sense of disorientation describing the feeling as one of “hanging in the air;” “waiting and not being sure what we’re waiting for;” “not belonging;” “not understanding;” and “out of control.” They described themselves as “stressed right out,” “anxious,” “going through a range of emotions, up and down, up and down,” and losing weight, not sleeping, and not eating well.

For many of those who lost their jobs, the disorientation stemmed not only from the loss of purpose and economic stability, but also from the difficult choices that seemed to flow from those losses. Many ex-Tolko workers were forced to consider moving away to find work in another mill or staying in their community and reinvent themselves in some entrepreneurial fashion. One Barriere resident talked of her anguish at having to leave her home, one spoke emotionally of how she saw herself as “an invisible victim” of the fires. Others talked of “a way of life being wiped out” as they watched close friends and their friends’ families move away.

You get into a place that’s been, you know, for 50 years has been dealing with one corporation...there’s a whole culture around that. I mean the community halls were built around that. The schools are around that. Everything is around that. When you take that away people are just devastated, they just really don’t know where to go. (Brian 02)

Extent of Devastation in the Immediate Locale

The impact of the fire on the immediate neighbourhood and environment or landscape also seemed to play a significant role in the intensity of the disorientation. For those few in Barriere who had lost their homes, there was a sense of disorientation at the distinctness of their experience, compared with that of their neighbours. They had returned to devastation, but because their community had been largely spared, they were in some important ways outliers in their community, experiencing emotions and practical and material challenges that their neighbours and friends were not, and feeling dislocated from their collective.

On the one hand, those in Barriere who had experienced the impending threat, the evacuation, and the drive back into their community through the devastated landscape and the charred remains of Louis Creek, expressed a sense of disorientation at the lack of damage in their immediate environment. They spoke of a surreal sense upon walking out their front doors
and seeing no signs of the fire, while knowing of the fires damage and still experiencing their
visceral response to the threat (e.g., fear, hyper-arousal, being on alert).

I think everyone I talked to when I first came back, and everyone still, there is this deep
seated...It's not fear but this deep seated, I don't even know how to explain it. They feel
that it did affect them emotionally, physically, and everything else. Whether they lost
anything or not. It is taking everyone here a very long time to get over that. (Peaches 01)

For those in Louis Creek, the disorientation seemed to be more complete because of the
extent of the damage, this time to the immediate surround. The forested hills that had surrounded
them were bare, charred, and denuded of foliage and the immediate environment of Louis Creek
was barren of organic material. Key landmarks, particular trees, the Tolko sawmill, the antique
store, were gone. Neighbour’s homes, once hidden from view, were now apparent in their
absence, their charred remains exposed by the lack of intervening foliage. Residents spoke of the
shock of realizing they had neighbours they never knew were there.

Ranchers who had lived in the area for all their lives spoke of their disorientation
especially in geographical terms. They described riding onto ranges they had worked for years
and which they could no longer recognize, searching for trails that were no longer there.

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 01)

Similarly, residents who had had the fire burn right up to but not destroy their homes also spoke
of the disorientating changes in their environment: “It was, it was so treed down there, you could
get lost and now it was like you looked at, actually I haven’t been down there since” (Sharonna
01).

Degree of Disruption to Routines

For those who lost their homes and/or employment, the loss of routines in almost every
domain of their lives became an enormously disorienting factor leading to a pervasive sense of
uncertainty and fatigue. In the absence of routines and familiar possessions and surroundings,
every action required focused attention. They also spoke of how “everything is a challenge” and
how “beaten down tired” they were. Many of those who lost their homes and had children at
home also described feeling out of step with the routines of the community, and described a new
lack of confidence in their parenting. Residents describe men, in particular, as “lost” and “useless” in the wake of losing their jobs at the mill.

**Perceived Sense of Ongoing Threat**

Although residents returned to their communities little over a week after their evacuation, the McLure Fire and other forest fires continued to burn well into the fall of 2003. In the following summer, the weather was again hot and extremely dry and the charred landscape, the smell of smoke, and the sound of helicopters and water bombers was a constant reminder of the ongoing possibility of another fire.

You've got to go back to your normal stuff and you couldn’t and then it would flare up again and then it would run again and it just was always there. You couldn’t do what you needed to do. (Timber 01)

Residents described a greater awareness of the unpredictability of natural forces, and, for many, a sense of violation and vulnerability that they had never previously experienced. Residents’ sense of safety, constructed to some degree through the establishment of day-to-day routines, was exposed through the threat of the fire, the ongoing fear of further fires, and the lost networks of familiarity (e.g., possessions, predictable routines, familiar environment).

**Scope of Dislocation Arising from Evacuation**

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 02)

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 01)

A number of residents told of still having boxes packed during the evacuation, 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."

Perceived Measure of Control in Addressing their Situation

The sense of loss of control that pervaded the evacuation experience continued more for some residents than others upon their return. The degree of disorientation, tied as it was to the extent of the personal and community damage suffered, meant that those who had lost more personally (e.g., homes, businesses, employment) was exacerbated by residents' ability to address, or not, their immediate situation upon return to the community. Because the recovery process was controlled primarily by individuals and organizations that were not part of the community, many of those most adversely affected experienced a further degree of disorientation at their inability to control the direction, timing, and manner of their recovery process.

People who were used to being very private were all of a sudden exposed to each other and to strangers as needy and dependent. Many residents pointed to the reliance on others as contributing to a consuming and acutely disturbing sense of not knowing, describing this as the most difficult and distressing aspect of their situation. Disorientation seemed to be less acute for who were able to establish a greater sense of control over their situation, either because they were not struggling with such extensive losses, or because of their personal coping styles, their relative positions of power in the communities and/or in the recovery process, or their direct involvement with the recovery efforts.
Summary of Disorientation

When residents returned to Barriere and Louis Creek, they returned to a changed landscape. Some faced the loss of homes and businesses, others the loss of their jobs with the Tolko mill. For most the routine and familiar aspects of their lives had been disrupted and for many the fire resulted in an increased sense of vulnerability and an ongoing sense of uncertainty. As observed in the residents’ stories, 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.”

This latter feeling began 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. The disorientation continued in the mass exodus of the evacuation as they drove out of town, cars piled with what belongings they had rescued, overheating cars lining the road to their uncertain future. The sense 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. It was made even more unreal as they drove through dramatically and permanently altered landscapes. Landscapes that had been forested and familiar were now, on their return, transformed, blackened, and in many profound ways rendered completely unfamiliar. For those who returned to destroyed homes and businesses, the disorientation deepened in the face of the loss of the most basic components of their lives: their possessions, their neighbours and friends, the physical markers of their neighbourhood and of their community.

At the heart of this 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 irreversibly altered. In the next section, I describe the central social-psychological process of reorientation as a way of understanding the individual and collective process of negotiating the recovery from the disorientation associated with the McLure Fire disaster.

Reorientation

When residents of Barriere and Louis Creek found their place in the world dramatically changed by the McLure Fire, they described engaging in a complex process of individually and
collective negotiation and adjustment or reorientation. The motivation for reorientation was the disorientation residents' experienced in the wake of the fire and the need to concretely address the variety of changes that provoked that disorientation. This included working to recreate their lives in the context of significant changes to the orientating frameworks of individual and collective subjectivities through the referents available to them.

Although the term “disaster recovery” describes a complex, multi-faceted process involving a diverse array of sub-processes across multiple domains of living, as was seen in the analysis of media texts the discursive practice of recovery focuses attention primarily on the material and economic aspects of reconstructing the lives and communities of those affected by disasters. Reorientation is, therefore, not suggested as a term to replace recovery, but rather as a term to describe a core component of the social psychological process of recovery that has been obscured by the material and economic focus of the dominant discourse of recovery.

In Table 4, I present an overview of the reorientation process. The linear format of the table is not meant to imply linearity in the process, which is understood to be overlapping and interactional. Further, in keeping with a post-structural understanding of identity as relational, reorientation is posited to involve both the individual and the collective in a recursive and mutually informing process. In Figure 4, I present a diagram of the Reorientation process as I have constructed it. I propose Remembering and Forgetting as a general mechanism of reorientation. I then describe the overarching processes, Recreating and Redefining Self, Redefining Self in Community, Redefining an Ontological Relationship with the World, and finally, several significant examples of the manifestation of the reorientation process in the community.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Mechanisms</th>
<th>Remembering and Forgetting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Story telling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revisiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoiding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comparing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moving on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processes</td>
<td>Recreating Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Re-defining self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Re-asserting individuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Re-establishing routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-creating Belonging</td>
<td>Re-accumulating possessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Downsizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-greening the environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-defining Self in Community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homogeneity/diversity of losses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tolko Mill as a symbolic anchor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finding a community voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-defining an Ontological Relationship with the World</td>
<td>Seeing the opportunity in crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Manifestations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower North Thompson Community Forest Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower North Thompson Volunteer and Information Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shifting Status of the North Thompson Indian Band</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 13: General Mechanisms and Key Processes of Reorientation following the McLure Fire
Remembering and Forgetting

Residents, who had suffered losses as a result of the fire, whether material or symbolic, went through a paradoxical process of remembering and forgetting. In the macro sense of this process, residents remembered or were re/minded (put in mind again) of the fragility of the illusion of permanence, safety, and predictability of life. Although the fire initially sparked an awareness of the transience and impermanence of life in most if not all residents, with time most of those living in Barriere were working to consign that awareness once again to the background of consciousness.

This process of remembering and forgetting was particularly apparent with those who had lost their homes and possessions. Even at the second anniversary interviews, these participants spoke of the continued process of being reminded of their losses each time they looked out their window, or reached for an item. Everything was so changed and pervasively new that it was a constant reminder of what they had lost and of new losses discovered in the navigating of activities and relationships.

Story telling. Almost everyone I met in the initial stages of this study (February, 2004) seemed to need to tell their story of the fire, but for Barriere residents who had lost little in the way of material goods, this need gave way in the first year to the competing need to put the fire behind them. As early as the end of October 2003 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 01). Even though residents engaged in an ongoing process of remembering the fire through story telling and reflection, the majority of Barriere residents for whom the evacuation was the primary experience wanted to return to normal as quickly as possible. By the anniversary interviews, most of those with whom I spoke were actively engaged in the process of putting the fire out of mind.

Revisiting. Although in some ways the losses were abundantly apparent in the reports of eye witnesses and the media, personally seeing the devastation in Louis Creek was a crucial part of the initial process of acknowledging and integrating the losses. Many of them described their need to come again and again to spend time on the sites of what had been their homes “because it maybe made it easier to see that it was gone” (Jan 01). Residents of Louis Creek also spoke of a continual process of being reminded of their losses through the experiencing and re-experiencing the losses in the daily activities of reestablishing dwellings, routines, and normalcy.
They described how with each activity they engaged in they would remember something they had forgotten they had lost. Pam talked of making jam and going to put it in the root cellar only to remember that they no longer had a root cellar, or going to bake a birthday cake for her son and remembering that she had lost her cook books, and her cake tin. Jan spoke of being reminded of a treasured possession she had lost because it was featured in a photograph she had managed to save.

All of a sudden it will, you’ll be thinking, you know, of something in a box. Like that ornament that I’m holding in that picture. I’ve still got the ornament and I haven’t let it go yet. I came out here a whole bunch of times looking for a piece for that ornament. I couldn’t find it. I never did...I just kept it, just to look at it one more time. (Jan 01)

**Avoiding.** For many of these residents, the visual reminders of the fire were largely out of sight. The immediate environment and hillsides were treed, gardens and lawns were recovering from the drought and heat of the previous summer, and animals and birds that had fled the fire were gradually returning to the area. Residents spoke of being tired of hearing about the fires and wanting to move on, framing the continued need of others to talk of the fire as unhealthy and unnecessary.

Right now I want to forget it completely, push it back far enough that it’s not in the forefront. To not hear about it anymore. To just go on and not keep sliding back to that year. We’re all on the, should be on the recovery list. (Peaches 01)

Boxes of possessions that had remained packed since the evacuation were emblematic of the paradoxical nature of this process of remembering and forgetting as residents navigated the challenge of having these reminders around even as they were trying to avoid being reminded.

I can’t go back and unpack those boxes, it would be too painful. I can’t because it’ll take me right back to when I was putting them in the boxes and I don’t ever want to go there again. (Kay 01)

At a collective level, this process of avoiding was also manifest in the lack of attention or visibility of that which was most vividly a reminder of the fires. As was evidenced in the media accounts of recovery, despite or perhaps because Louis Creek had suffered the most damage, the community seemed ironically invisible at times to many of those living in Barriere. As the most apparent site of destruction, many residents seemed to want to forget Louis Creek, avoiding specific mention of the community in their conversations about the fire, or subsuming the experiences of those living in Louis Creek in discussions that failed to differentiate the
experiences of those who had lost homes from those who had not. As one Louis Creek resident put it, “I feel like the fire left us naked and invisible.”

Residents of both communities spoke of friends who actively avoided driving through the burned areas of the North Thompson Valley because they found it too upsetting. When asked about their experiences in the year following the fire, most of those from Barriere who were interviewed made scant references to the loss of homes in Louis Creek, focusing instead on the economic challenges facing their community. In some ways this tendency to focus on those experiences that were most directly salient to their own lives was unremarkable. On the other hand, however, given the proximity of the two communities and that fact that many in Barriere spoke explicitly of Louis Creek being a part of their community the absence of reflection or comments on the state of Louis Creek was notable. Even in the first interviews, approximately 6 months following the fire, surprisingly few references were made to the struggles of residents from Louis Creek, many of whom were still dislocated and most of whom were still actively engaged in rebuilding their lives from the ground up.

Comparing. Another strategy of forgetting, described as a distraction strategy, was gossip. The tendency to gossip was attributed to the need to distract from anxiety about their situation—“it’s better to worry about someone else’s situation than worry about your own.” Much of the gossip focused on who was accessing what aid, a process made easier by virtue of the visibility and lack of confidentiality afforded residents living in such small communities. The activity was described as equally present amongst groups of men and women but manifest differently. Men, particularly those who had lost their jobs as a result of the mill closure, were described as gathering at the coffee shop to talk about “finding a job,” or “running the community,” or “spreading rumours as to what has or hasn’t happened.” Women, on the other hand, were described as “having the time on their hands to reflect and worry” and were attributed with responsibility for the “finger pointing,” the angry calls to the newspaper and various local agencies, and the spreading of fear.

Moving on. Some residents acknowledged that there were different trajectories for those who “were still trying to catch up” (i.e., those who had lost homes) as opposed to those who were "moving on" (i.e., those whose homes were intact). Others spoke in disparaging terms of those, who in their eyes, were not moving on as quickly or completely as they should. As one
Barriere resident put it in the summer after the fire, “there should be a statute of limitations on how long people cling to the fire” and “blame” the fire for how they were doing.

By the second year even most of those who had lost their homes spoke of wanting to move on and not talk about the fire anymore. At a community gathering in Louis Creek on the second anniversary weekend of the fires, the community celebrated the rebuilding of a landmark antique store. Its resurrection in its new form and location (it was built on a slightly different part of the property) signified a milestone in this process of reorienting. During the event, residents shared stories and photographs of what had once been and was now lost but they also spoke of wanting to forget the fire, to not have it be so much in the center of it, and their desire to get on with life.

Recreating Identity

In the process of reorienting, residents were engaged in some very meaningful ways in recreating and redefining themselves – “We’re involved with the reinvention of ourselves and our world” (Sam 02). For some, this process of reinvention meant coming to know parts of themselves that had previously been less clear. This included a new understanding of the possibility of catastrophe in their lives: “You go through these kinds of things realizing who you are, what the world is, and what can happen to people” (Peaches 02).

Redefining Self: Some residents engaged in an active struggle to incorporate their need for assistance into their previous conception of themselves as “self-reliant,” “fiercely independent,” and “proud.”

It’s very humbling to have to accept money and things and donations and whatnot from people when we’ve always been very, very independent. We’ve taken care of ourselves since we both left home, you know, we have never had to ask for money or anything so that’s been hard. (Pam 01)

This struggle to hold onto their sense of independence and self-reliance translated for some to a more deferential and cautious relationship with authority that made it difficult to interact with the systems involved in the recovery process and at times prevented them from approaching aid organizations. Residents who received donated goods spoke of their gratitude and how receiving help had changed their outlook on themselves and others. For some this translated into a sense of wanting to find ways to reciprocate and for others into a shift in their outlook:
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 02)

It certainly opened my eyes to a side of society that I had never witnessed before. I feel now that I am a luckier person to have been able to experience that generosity, that side of man. (Shish 02)

For other residents their experience of themselves as self-reliant had not shifted but they had had to integrate a sense that this self-sufficiency was not necessarily an asset in a process that provided so much help for people who were “less responsible” and “lazy.” Some who had insurance and watched uninsured residents getting what they perceived as more help than they had, now described themselves as “the have nots,” and those who were uninsured as “the haves” or the “chosen ones.” As one resident described it, “there was resentment there, that I paid my insurance all my life and ‘Joe Schmoe’ never paid a cent and why are they getting a free trailer?”

Reasserting individuality. In dealing with multiple relief and recovery agencies (e.g., North Thompson Relief Fund, Canadian Red Cross, Emergency Social Service) people also felt the need to reassert their individuality. They described feeling diminished by the impersonalizing characteristic of the various bureaucratic systems with which they were dealing. They described a sense that in the face of the needs assessments conducted by various non-governmental agencies and relief funds, their individual identity was replaced by their classification as victims, further defined by categories of loss. Residents reasserted their individuality in the face of what they described as feeling “worse than a second class citizen,” experiencing a “sense of violation,” and “a loss of dignity.” In order to address this depersonalization they sometimes avoided accessing aid, or confronted aid providers with their sense of indignation. One of the few residents in Barriere to lose his home, for instance, spoke angrily about his experience of being seen not as a human but as a loss category, a “total burnout,” and having that loss totalized in ways that did not validate what had survived: “I’m not a total burnout and I’m not a total loss. I’ve still got a family” (Cliff 01).

Reestablishing routines. Regardless of their material losses, residents were uniform in their desire to reestablish routines as quickly as possible. People talked of their need to “get back to normal” as quickly as possible and what a struggle it was to have a “semblance” of normality. Those who lost their homes were particularly impacted by the loss of routines in almost every
aspect of their lives. They also spoke of how “everything is a challenge” and how “beaten down
tired” they were. In the face of so much disorientation even the most mundane (e.g., brushing
teeth, dressing, reaching for a casserole dish or a tool) now required focused attention. For these
residents there was no longer an automatic pilot option.

The time frame for reestablishing normal routines for those who had to rebuild their
homes was necessarily longer as there was so much more to put in place before routines could be
established. This resulted in these residents feeling out of step often with the larger community.
Some residents from Louis Creek described avoiding “going out into the world” in order to
avoid comments about them being “back to normal” when they felt “far from it.” This also
included avoiding joint (Barriere and Louis Creek) community meetings about the recovery
process because they believed that people in Barriere would judge them because they were still
focused on recovery – “You didn’t feel like saying anything ‘cause it, like you were crying and
whining kind of thing” (Pam 02).

The reestablishing of community routines at times conflicted with families who were still
rebuilding their homes and lives even two years after the fire. As Sam (03) described it, “It’s two
years after the fire and we are still in the initial processes of rebuilding our world. And who, who
is it that understands that? Who sees it? It’s invisible.” Many of those who lost their homes and
had children at home also described feeling out of step with the routines of the community, and
described a new lack of confidence in their parenting. Although most residents spoke of the
importance of the school reopening on time in the September following the fire (2003), a number
of those who lost their homes talked the following summer (August, 2004) of having had to
manage ongoing practical and emotional struggles to support their children’s ability to meet the
demands of school while they were living in the midst of a construction zone, and in the absence
of some of the basic domestic routines they had yet to reestablish.

Nancy (01) talked of enormous anxiety and difficulties in trying to reestablish her
children’s routines (e.g., school and after school activities, bedtimes, mealtimes) during an
extended period of living in a borrowed home while also rebuilding their home. Likewise, Pam
and Richard (02) spoke of their son’s forced growth in autonomy and independence because they
could not take him to sports and other extracurricular activities given the amount of time and
energy they needed in order to reestablish not only their home but Richard’s home-based
business that had also burned down.
The loss of the mill and the uncertainty of how to replace those jobs meant that for many ex-Tolko families familiar routines were also difficult to effectively reestablish. A number of them found work in other communities and regions and became absentee parents, leaving their partners, almost without exception women, to parent alone. Several residents described the emotional and practical difficulties of this arrangement:

It’s a horrible thing to watch people that you’ve grown up with and played ball with and curled with and had a good strong working relationship with, um, strong independent families, it tears you apart to watch what’s happening to their families. Their children are being left. It’s not right. (Brian 01)

Recreating Belonging

The threat to or destruction of homes underscored the interconnection between the questions “Who am I?” and “Where am I?” Residents of both communities expressed a deep pull to return to the place they called home and everyone spoke of a pressing sense of urgency to reestablish themselves as quickly as possible following the fire.

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 01)

Residents spoke of the urgency as being driven, in part, by pragmatic considerations regarding the upcoming winter – the availability of alternate accommodations and the time-limited presence of aid. For those whose homes were uninsured, the initial uncertainty regarding rebuilding was most acute because most did not have the finances to rebuild and reestablish themselves. Financial help from the North Thompson Relief Fund and volunteer labour from Mennonite Disaster Services and other Christian and secular aid organizations made the physical rebuilding of uninsured homes possible.

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, a house, according to many, 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 01). Many of those
interviewed the first year spoke of a continued sense of dislocation. They described feeling "not at home," in their new homes:

This house feels still like a hotel. You know, we’ve been in here since Christmas. It really felt like a hotel the first little while because you’d come into it, this is your house, great, except none of the furniture is yours. What’s in that china cabinet? It’s pretty much what was saved from the fire aside from a few pictures and a few photos. That was ours. Everything else is brand new. The walls are brand new. The house is brand new. You feel like you’re in a hotel. It took me probably three weeks before I started to think, oh that’s okay, if the newspaper’s on the floor, you know. (Thompson 01)

Re-Accumulating possessions. Not surprisingly, residents who had lost their homes also spoke emotionally of the loss of photographs and treasured items, those material objects that were imbued with and supported the telling of their autobiographies to themselves and others. However, residents also spoke of the loss of everyday objects, particular items of clothing and domestic and work-related tools in similar terms. In addition to their functional roles, these everyday items performed a symbolic role, as markers of familiarity and continuity in residents’ lives. As Pam described it, “we lost our lifestyle not just a few possessions” and “we went from rolls to the rails” overnight.

In their instrumental role, the loss of clothes, kitchen implements, work-related tools, furniture for example, caused enormous disruption in terms of routines and the ability of residents to function normally. They described feeling “bombarded by newness” and “overwhelmed by decisions.”

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 02)

Residents described the challenges inherent in having to constantly take stock of what they had and did not have as they tried to carry out even the most mundane of activities in the two years following the fire. Engaging in any activity meant having to determine whether or not they had what was needed to enter into and complete the activity, and if not, how or whether they would replace the missing item(s). With each step of the process of returning to normal, with each new season, new questions would arise as to what would, could, or should be replaced.
Richard lived and worked in a home-based business in Louis Creek. He talked of his ongoing uncertainty and lack of confidence in undertaking new contracts because he did not feel confident that he could successfully complete the job until he entered into and "discovered" what tools or materials he was missing. Sam described a similar lack of certainty and confidence engaging in domestic tasks. Even two years into the process, many of those who lost their homes described feeling fatigued and overwhelmed by the enormity of the myriad decisions they continually needed to make in the absence of long-term familiarity and the real-time process of re-accumulating and establishing a connection and history their possessions.

For those with insurance coverage the process of replacing their belongings involved writing an itemized list of all that had been lost. These residents described this process as “very emotional” both because it re/minded them of all that had been lost, and because of the practical challenges of trying to accomplish this memory task. Residents without insurance had limited funds for buying replacement items and had to rely a good deal on donated items. Their new status as recipients of help in the most intimate domain of their lives required a shift in their understanding of themselves, and often in the understanding of others.

You haven’t done anything wrong but your dignity is gone. And people handle you like you’ve got something wrong with you. You are so emotionally sensitive at the time...you’re a spark waiting to go. (Thompson 02)

Many people who self-identified as frugal and fiscally responsible found that having to spend thousands of dollars evoked a sense of guilt at the volume of things they accumulated over a relatively short period of time. Some spoke of the loss of their possessions as having “put material things into perspective” and provoking a desire to “scale down,” but at the same time without exception they pursued replacing their belongings as quickly as possible.

**Downsizing.** The counterpoint to this process of re-accumulation was the downsizing that occurred. For some residents this was a conscious choice arising from the experience of having lost so much and then having to question what would be replaced. For others, particularly some of the ex-Tolko workers, the downsizing was reluctantly considered in the face of their personal economic insecurity as a result of losing their jobs, and the larger context of the economic uncertainty of not knowing what if anything would replace the Tolko mill as a regional employer. Several of those so affected talked of the anger and sense of betrayal they felt at having to consider selling recreational vehicles (e.g., boats, snowmobiles). Such possessions
symbolized not only their economic status and, until the fire, their sense of economic security, but also spoke of their connection with the rural environment and the reasons that had drawn many of them to live in Barriere.

Regreening the Environment

For many of those interviewed, the environmental impact of the fire was unsettling and heartbreaking. Ranchers who had been up in the hills immediately after the fires searching for livestock spoke of the devastating impact of encountering shocking levels of destruction in the forests and rangeland they called home. They also spoke of the trauma of finding riverbeds filled with dead and injured animals and the loss of wildlife in general.

The damage to the landscape was most immediately apparent to those living in Louis Creek and on the north and northeastern outskirts of Barriere but the loss of the trees and the charred hills were distressing to many.

Nothing is ever going to be the same. In my lifetime I’m not going to see those trees on the hill again. It’s just the whole idea that it looked like that, now it looks like this, and we’re never going see it look like that again. It’s a huge impact. I mean my father-in-law is 87 years old and in his whole entire life he’s never experienced anything like this. (Willis 01)

There is an emptiness in all of us, an emptiness until the hills look like they did and the grass is green and the animals are all back. We’re going to have that hollow that we’re not going to be able to fill. (Ollie 01)

Throughout the communities there seemed to be a profound need to literally recover the scorched ground with green, as though residents needed an aesthetic reminder of the possibility of rebirth from death. The re-greening seemed to be another way in which residents materially and emotionally re-appropriated their environment in order to anchor their identities in this new normal.

An enormous amount of energy was put into re-greening the lawns and gardens of Louis Creek. In the spring following the fire, soil was bought with donated funds to cover the burned ground around the homes of Louis Creek. Donated plants, trees, and seeds were planted and by the second anniversary of the fire (August 2005), trees, and flowers had transformed Louis Creek from a landscape without colour or life to, in some cases, almost park-like conditions.
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 (01) 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.”

This putting into perspective was very noticeable in the spring and summer following the fire when residents of both communities commented on the green that emerged naturally in the midst of the blackened hills surrounding Louis Creek and throughout the North Thompson Valley. It was for many a sign of hope while at the same time a reminder of change.

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 01)

Thus, the changed environment also served as a reminder to the residents of the economic changes and the resulting changes to community identity and viability.

Redefining Self in Community

Although in some ways, the fires had, as one resident stated, “put us on the map,” the loss in particular of the mill meant that Barriere and Louis Creek were collectively faced with the task of reinventing themselves and renegotiating their relationship with each other. As a result of the different geography of losses, and the differences in the relative power between Barriere and Louis Creek, the process of redefining community was not the same in the two communities.

Homogeneity and diversity of losses. The relative homogeneity of losses in Louis Creek (i.e., the fact that most had lost their homes) seemed to provide some comfort to residents of that community – “this is where the fire was...it wasn’t just one or two, it helped to know that everybody else lost too. You weren’t alone” (Jan 01). Residents described intentionally connecting with each other more than they may have done previously and this bonding-through-shared-suffering seemed to support the re-creation of a positive community identity. In many
ways the fires seemed to forge an identity for Louis Creek in a way that that identity had not previously existed.

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-02)

Those living in Louis Creek spoke of searching out neighbours specifically because they “got it,” they “understood where I was coming from.” Even residents of Barriere noticed a difference in Louis Creek’s presence as a community. As Ken put it, “it seemed to be a reason for somebody trying to create an identity.”

In Barriere, on the other hand, the diversity and range of the experiences was not as conducive to the kind of bonding that seemed to take place in Louis Creek. Although there was a sense of a powerful, shared experience, this altruistic community seemed to give way more quickly in Barriere. When asked to characterize their community as it was prior to the fire, residents described it as having a fractured identity, being a loose conglomeration of separate identities—an old ranching community, a mill town, a bedroom community to Kamloops—that resulted in different issues and experiences following the fire.

I mean, for example, in our street we probably only had two guys who lost their jobs. Well, you know, why would we all band together?... So everyone has different issues and there’s no single reason for people to unite whereas in Louis Creek there was a reason to unite. (Kay 01)

_Tolko Mill as a symbolic anchor._ The loss of the Tolko mill played an important role in the reorientation process not only for mill workers, but also in the collective reorientation of the individual and shared identities of the two communities. Louis Creek was also the older of the two towns and as the site of the mill it was also an anchor in the stories of many long-time residents of both Barriere and Louis Creek. For some residents of Barriere, the loss of the mill and the homes that surrounded it were experienced as a personal loss.

It’s kind of tough for our family ‘cause a lot of our history got taken away... I mean my grandfather worked there and my father worked there and I worked there and so, you know, it’s since, since the 40s. So it’s just pretty much wiping out a way of life in an area. (Brian-01)
On the other hand, when asked, many of those living in Louis Creek had no sentimental memories of the mill, describing the loss of it as an opportunity to have something more aesthetically pleasing built on the site.

Barriere defined itself, at least partially, as a mill town because of its economic dependence on Tolko and many there seemed to equate Louis Creek with its most prominent feature. After the fires residents of the two communities initially reported feeling tied together by the common aspects of their fire experience. In the months that followed, however, and in particular after hope for rebuilding the mill was lost, the economic and symbolic ties that bound the communities together seemed to have diminished.

Many Barriere residents believed that the fires had benefited Louis Creek. They spoke of Louis Creek as having been an “eyesore” that now looked “100 percent better than it did...200 percent better” (Ned 01). The fire, from this perspective transformed Louis Creek into something more respectable and desirable than it had been.

Louis Creek was one of those areas basically, that, you know, that we won’t say it was, it was a slum area or anything like that, because it wasn’t a slum, but it was a cluttered area where there’s a lot of cars, a lot of older homes and we’ve rebuilt them all now. It’s been a, it was a funny deal that it burnt all the homes that probably needed to be replaced.

(Ken-01)

Residents of Louis Creek, who before the fire had been deemed to be economically marginal, now became “the haves,” whereas those who had formed the economic elite, primarily Barriere based Tolko workers, became “the have-nots,” or as another resident described it, uninsured homeowners in Louis Creek became “the chosen few.” This status generated distress, and contributed to the disorientation of ex-Tolko workers as they struggled to define a new role for themselves in the context of their families as breadwinners and as contributing members of the community.

There’s some dividedness in the community because what used to be the haves, like the mill workers, are the have-nots, they’ve lost their status. What do they do now? And who are they, you know? So as far as their role in the community or their status in the community, that’s where they’ve slipped.” (Mac 01)

One aspect of these social aspects of reorientation was an “othering” process in which some residents criticized those whose status they perceived as having unjustly improved as a result of the fire.
Why are we all paying insurance, you know? Hundreds of dollars or, whatever, and people felt almost like they were worse off because they paid insurance because it was such a battle with the insurance companies whereas the people who didn’t have insurance got, you know, “Oh, poor fellow, we’ll give you a house.” (Ann 01)

They couldn’t have insured it because it wasn’t worth insuring. Now they’re getting a new house, new appliances, and even new vehicles. I pay my insurance all my life and I’m okay with that. I hoped I’d never collect. But these people would rather buy beer and cigarettes and pot, go on fancy vacations and live in a shack, and now it’s "Poor me"...that’s what burnt us. (Ned 01)

A resident who worked with a volunteer organization providing material support to affected residents provided a different perspective:

I had to laugh at one person who said, “I’m getting so many people asking why do those people get brand new homes when they lived in a shack,” and she said she finally turned around and said, “Well, we can’t build new shacks.” (Ollie 01)

Despite some of the fracturing that occurred between and within the communities, residents of both Barriere and Louis Creek suggested that their sense of community. Organizers of Barriere’s Fall Fair attempted to have the annual fair in the September immediately following the fire, both as a visible sign that the community was returning to normal and to provide an opportunity for residents to gather. The circumstances were such that the Fair did not happen, but in that December the Santa Claus parade was one of the largest ever. As a symbolic reminder of the fires and the communities’ solidarity and spirit several residents organized to create red scarves that were distributed to everyone at the parade and worn as a symbol of their togetherness.

In the two years since the fires, residents in Louis Creek also organized annual community gatherings to mark the anniversary of the fire, something which had not occurred previously. For many of the residents of Louis Creek, the loss of the Tolko mill had little to do with their direct economic viability, as relatively few residents of that community worked there. So, perhaps ironically, although in some symbolic ways the loss of the Tolko mill had reduced Louis Creek’s visibility and presence for Barriere residents, this loss seemed to have solidified and empowered Louis Creek’s collective identity for residents in that community.

Finding a community voice. Very early on in the process, the homogeneity of the losses and the trajectory of recovery seemed to facilitate Louis Creek’s creation and development of a voice in the allocation of the recovery funds. At the suggestion of the Mennonite Disaster
Services and other disaster response organizations, the community formed a recovery committee that took on the job of negotiating with the North Thompson Relief Fund and the Thompson Nicola Regional District. Their goal was to ensure that residents’ needs were met and that information garnered through one resident’s experiences, for example with reestablishing property lines or getting power and telephone lines restored, was shared with others. The hope was that this would eliminate the need to start from square one with each new challenge.

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.

Redefining an Ontological Relationship with the World

Residents most commonly identified the discomfort of uncertainty as the most significant challenge they faced in the post-fire environment. This was true whether they had suffered
material losses or not. Many 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 01)

Still others, particularly ex-Tolko workers, expressed bitterness and disappointment that they had been treated callously by a company for which they had worked for many years and betrayed by a government they had believed would protect their interests and those of their community.

I had this expectation growing up in school, you know, through school that in time of disaster that you’d be taken care of—we live in a very civilized, very wealthy, opulent era and that we would be taken care of— it was very shocking to me not to be. (Brian 02)

Some reported a similar disappointment because of some of the greed they observed amongst community members. They expressed a sense of grief at their loss of faith in the essential goodness of people.

It was a disappointing time, some of them were so desperately greedy...it was heart breaking...you sort of lose your faith in your fellow man. (Peaches 01)

On the other hand, several of those who had interacted more closely with and received help from the Christian aid organizations involved in rebuilding homes reported a renewed sense of hope at their recognition of the kindness and spontaneous compassion of the many that had generously responded to their plight.

It has changed me knowing that there are people who are out there that don’t know you...you could be a convicted murderer, they don’t know, but they’ll come and help you. That’s a pretty moving thing. (Thompson 02)

For some the experience of the dislocation from home and the threat of the fire increased their awareness of their vulnerability: “We’re all very complacent. I think that last year has done a lot to make people realize that our lives aren’t as secure, and stable, and safe as we have led
ourselves to believe” (Peaches 01). For Marg, this was also tied to making connections between her experience and those of people in developing nations.

I keep thinking that mother nature wants us white folks to have an idea of what survivor terror is because it’s happening all over the world and we’re so able to distance ourselves from it here... You know, like what is happening for millions of people in the Sudan. But it hit me very deeply that other people could just tell you, you couldn’t go to your home and physically keep you from doing it. The oppression of that seemed overwhelming to me and again, I’m not sure why, but at a depth that I can hardly describe. (Marg 01)

For many the shift in orientation included a commitment to focusing more time and energy on family and friends.

You get that feeling that you are mortal, you know, mortality is not part of your lifestyle. That’s something we really felt after the fire. It really came home to us. You’ve got to stop and smell the roses, got to hug your kids, pat your dog. Cause they might not be here tomorrow. (Thompson 03)

Seeing the Opportunity in Crisis

During the two years of this process, a number of residents commented on new insights and perhaps more expansive understandings they had developed of the potential for the McLure Fire to spawn opportunities for growth and learning. A major emphasis was on the increased sense of connection with each other that the fire seemed to have promoted. One resident suggested the fire had prompted “new motion,” and “a willingness to fight for our own community identity.” Marg (01) believed the experience had “pulled this community together more than it has ever been,” and saw the disorientation as an opportunity to move out of “status quo concepts” and “stand up” for rural communities.

A fewer number of residents described the fire as a creative opportunity, the source for “creation and change” (Betty 01). Sam (03) talked of how the fire had galvanized her and forged a new sense of direction. She described the fire as “an opening” and “an influx of energy,” suggesting that if the energy could be harnessed and directed it could be transformative.

I do perceive that it is a real window of opportunity now for this community. And, you know, there are people out there that really are not able to deal with their problems or to move forward and they need help. And we need to strengthen communication lines and find a communal voice and, and, and, and that’s a huge opportunity. (Sam 03)
Manifesting Reorientation

The energy and transformed frames of reference described by Marg, Sam, and others in describing the shifts in their ontological relationship with the world were further evidenced in various practices of individuals and groups. It was particularly evident at the individual level in those who decided to reinvent themselves in the wake of losing their jobs. Necessity, as they say, is the mother of invention and a number of individuals created new businesses for themselves in order to stay in their community. At the collective level, there was also the emergence of a number of initiatives and some realignments of power within the communities.

Lower North Thompson Community Forest Society. In the midst of the process following the fires, the provincial government announced a change in the timber licensing regulations, a move that many believed was the final nail in the coffin of the Tolko mill owners’ decision not to reopen. In response to Tolko’s decision, a group of community members formed the idea of applying for a community forest license – a license that would provide for the transfer of timber licenses and decision-making powers to the local community with the expectation that it take a more active stewardship role in the management of the local forest.

The initiative involved a group of volunteers – foresters, business people with industry expertise, ex-Tolko workers, and concerned citizens – and resulted in the formation of the Lower North Thompson Community Forest Society (Forest Society). In order to be successful in applying for a community forest license, the society had to demonstrate the support of the community. The Forest Society engaged in a door-to-door campaign and developed outreach programs in the schools, which by their accounts generated a sense of empowerment that had until that time not been characteristic of the recovery process.

All of these things were coming at us from Victoria and from Kamloops as to what would be good for us but without us having any say in it other than our one TNRD voice which was too small. So you know the people had to get together here and that is powerful and the people have always had that potential but no one’s ever believed their vote made a difference...but if the people get together the governors have to listen. (Marg 01)

It has balls this group, you know, and I think its cause is just. It’s got do with taking control...I’m hoping that this group in the end will have a bit of clout and a bit of say in what goes around here and instead of it always being the same people. (Nan 01)

After much lobbying and many volunteer hours researching and developing a proposal, the society was successful in being awarded a relatively small license for 20,000 cubic meters of
timber (primarily beetle kill). The Forest Society then joined forces with the North Thompson Indian Band and another timber license was awarded jointly to the Indian Band and the Society providing another 300,000 cubic meters over 3 years. Several of those involved described feeling a greater sense of connection with the community as a result of their involvement with this initiative. Unlike so much of what had been instigated by those in positions of power (e.g., Provincial Government, North Thompson Relief Fund), the Forest Society license was an example of a locally generated solution drawing on local expertise in a collaborative manner.

**North Thompson Volunteer and Information Center.** Another local initiative that emerged from the fire was the North Thompson Volunteer and Information Center. Envisioned as a “toolbox” for the community by one of its originators, Sam, the idea was to support community capacity building through providing a central point for information, space for meetings, and organizational support to the various volunteer organizations in Barriere and Louis Creek. The Volunteer and Information Center was successful in securing an empty house in the midst of Barriere and funding from the North Thompson Relief Fund and the Canadian Red Cross for an initial set-up period. However, not everyone who had been involved in its set-up was happy with the unfolding direction of the Volunteer and Information Center. In Sam’s estimation, the initial impetus of the “toolbox” was not realized because the funding structure resulted in “a club” mentality that became “another version of a system that is about taking instead of giving.” Despite this, it was another example of the process of reorientation being collectively enacted in the worlds of Barriere and Louis Creek.

**Shifting Status of the North Thompson Indian Band.** For members of the North Thompson Indian Band, the fire resulted in a shift in status and identity within the region. Leadership, or the perceived lack of it, became an enormous issue in the wake of the fire as the two communities faced the disruptions that followed the fire. Even as government officials suggested that ex-Tolko workers needed to "move on" and, if necessary, move away to find work, the North Thompson Indian Band provided an alternative perspective that emphasized the strong connections they and members of the two target communities felt with the place they called home.

From the First Nations perspective, we are not leaving. We don’t have to leave. This is our place, this is our country. This is what we’re connected to. So you get this notion of identity and what it is to, what it means to be connected to a place. If you talk to somebody who’s rooted here and is not going anywhere at least you know you’re talking
about real issues in terms of how are we gonna sustain ourselves over time in this part of the world. As a First Nations group we see that, we’re not moving anywhere. (Mat 01)

According to many residents, the chief of the Band demonstrated a kind of leadership that had otherwise been absent in the process. He and other members of the Band initiated protests against the government’s changes to the forest licensing act and provided advice and support to those developing the community forest initiative. He described a change in attitudes towards the band and the North Thompson people:

The identity of the Chu Chua or the North Thompson Band people, I think, has been elevated in terms of the recognition of our part and our place. There’s a willingness to see that we’re a real part of the fabric of this, of this part of the world and that we’ve actually got a place that’s maybe more unique and significant than they thought before the fire...Because now they’re looking to us...I’m the one that’s saying that these resources belong to you guys...they belong to us but they also belong to you guys in this valley, do something about it and we’ll help you because we’re not going anywhere, we want you to stay here. (Mat 01)

Summary of the Reorientation Process

The experience of the McLure Fire deeply affected residents of Barriere and Louis Creek. They were profoundly dislocated from much that was comfortable, and routine. The process of reorientation was complex and involved many domains of community members lives. The basic orienting frameworks of their individual and collective identities, in all their fluidity and complexity, were irrevocably altered changed in some ways for all those interviewed. For some who suffered large-scale losses these changes were more dramatic than for others and the reorientation process was more complicated. Many affected residents engaged in a balancing process of remembering and forgetting as a way of managing the distress of disorientation. In some important ways, this process included an obscuring of the psychological and emotional effects of having being threatened by the fire and having experienced such losses. As a consequence, Louis Creek, the most outwardly affected of the two communities, was rendered less visible in the reorientation process.

Residents engaged in a process of recreating themselves, incorporating and adapting to the changes that arose from the fire. In part, this process involved negotiating changes in circumstances that impacted residents' sense of self-reliance. Reestablishing routines was an important part of the reorientation process, and this process played out in idiosyncratic ways.
Because the reorientation process more often reflected the needs of the majority, the individual and collective processes were often at odds for those who had suffered greater material losses. At times residents found themselves reasserting their individuality in the face of the generalizing practices associated with the provision of aid. Residents responded differently to the availability of material aid. Perceived changes in socio-economic status contributed to a “make hay while the sun shines” attitude in some, whereas for those whose homes were lost and who received a good deal of material and emotional support, there was a deep sense of gratitude and a desire to give back.

Concern with recreating a sense of home influenced much of the reorientation process and involved both the reconstructing of homes, and the re-greening of the immediate environment. The process of recreating belonging also involved a redefining of community and self-in-community influenced in good measure by the loss of the Tolko Mill and the uncertain economic future of the two communities. For some residents, the process of reorientation involved finding a more active and voice in the direction of their community, whether this meant the larger community (Barriere, Louis Creek) or their more immediate community (e.g., neighbourhood, work-related group).

For many residents, the reorientation process involved negotiating a new ontological relationship with the world that accommodated a sense of greater vulnerability, less economic security, and a greater awareness of the interconnectedness of humans. For a smaller number of residents, this process also included a sense of opportunity in crisis. This was evidenced in residents’ stories of developing a new consciousness of suffering, and the possibility of a more active engagement with this suffering. Opportunity was evident in a variety of emergent community projects that were developed to empower community members and create ways of memorializing the process in which they were all engaged.

The social-psychological process of reorientation was largely obscured by the public emphasis on the economic and material aspects of recovery. The different geographies of loss and the social practices influencing reorientation, for example the provision of aid and the presence or absence of local leadership provision of aid, greatly influenced the reorientation process. In many ways, the influx of aid contributed to a fracturing of the social fabric of the communities and reduced the likelihood of locals helping locals. For those who had lost their
homes, however, the aid was received as a godsend and the experience of being on the receiving end of such compassion and interacting with volunteers was often described as transformative.

Many residents spoke of feeling they had been excluded from most of the decisions affecting their individual and community recovery process. As a result, many residents believed that key decisions had been made in ways that did not reflect the best interests of the community or respect the values and concerns of the locals.
LOSING GROUND

Losing the ground of your footing,
adrift in the between spaces,
Dorothy’s words echo in your ears,
“There is no place like home.”

I watch you navigating,
this pearl-producing-oyster image,
of transformation and perturbation,
in the calling forth of disruption.

I walk with you this journey of becoming
sharing the restless and frenzied movement
of an insatiable need
to arrest the play of uncertainty.

Set adrift, the selfless-self is in motion
in the emergent fractures of a no-man’s land,
where all it has to return to
is the very thing being called into question.
In identifying the process of reorientation in disaster recovery, I noted the importance that place seemed to occupy in this process. In this chapter, therefore, I further examine the question of how recovery was discursively constructed by examining the role of place as a discursive construct and a key orienting framework of reorientation. I begin by discussing place as an orienting framework that involves a complex and varied understanding of place and identity. I then explore in more detail the relationship between place and identity and how this was evidenced in the reorientation process in Barriere and Louis Creek.

*Place as an Orienting Framework*

There is a large body of research on the role of place in identity (see Low & Altman, 1992) and the notion of place attachment, which Milligan (1998) defined in terms of the emotional bond that people form with a particular physical location because of the meaning invested in that site through repeated interactions. According to Rose (1995), the meanings imbued in place are varied, and they play a central role in the formation of identity. According to the findings of a variety of studies of the effects of forced dislocation on people, many people navigate transplanting and sudden changes in their home environments with great difficulty (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Fried, 1963). In the event of natural disasters, the sudden and sometimes devastating displacement can be the cause of profound feelings of grief and anxiety (Erikson, 1976a, 1976b).

The notion of place has largely moved beyond a simplistic understanding of place as a static, coherent, and bounded geographical location to be reconceptualized as a fluid, open system of intersecting social relations, and an emotional and psychic repository (Casey, 1997; Massey, 1995; Tuan 1975).

Places are...repositories and contexts within which interpersonal, community, and cultural relationships occur, and it is to those social relationships, not just to place qua place, to which people are attached (Low & Altman, 1992, p. 7).

Although in some important ways, in our post-structural, virtually connected world, the salience of geographic place to identity may have diminished (Giddens, 1991), humans still seem
to resonate to a profound archetypal longing to be grounded in and connected with a specific physical space. Despite the tendency to view individuals in terms of multiple, mobile selves transcending dissolving spatial and temporal boundaries, at the level of lived experience these boundaries continue to exist and people continue to define themselves in terms of collective identities based at least to some degree on geographical boundaries (Paasi, 2002, p. 144).

Similar to the notion of identity, the discursive, relational sense of place is connected to the physical sense of place, to the embodiment of place as it were in the spatial, geographical sense. Place offers an important orienting framework, anchoring identity through remembering and memory, offering a sense of who and what we are with reference to where we are (Casey, 1993). The emotional connection with place defines a sense of belonging and simultaneously the construction of the other, that is, those that are excluded from belonging. By giving places value and meaning, people transform unstructured spaces into defined and bounded places (Tuan, 1997). Agnew and Duncan (1989) suggested that a consideration of the intersections between place as location, locale, and lived sense was needed in order to fully consider the power of place in human lives. In the following section, I examine the role of the constructs place, home, and community, and their intersection with identity and transitions as reflected in the residents' stories.

**Reorientation and Place**

The importance of place as an orienting framework in the recovery/reorientation process was evident throughout the interview texts. The disruption caused by the fire exposed the taken for granted role of place and home in identity formation, in effect, by triggering a collective identity crisis (Buttimer, 1980). 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. To 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, as I have termed this process 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.

Place as Home

Place as home, was another significant orienting framework in the reorientation process. 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 & 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 dwelling (Mallett, 2004).

This construction of home, however, ignored much of the transactional nature of home as a site of belonging and shared cultural meanings (Guiliani & 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, there is a fusion of both the human and the natural order in which places can be understood as “centers 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, 1985, p. 201).

Home as shelter. Although for an alarming number of people, in particular women and children, home is a place of fear and violence (Eisenstat & 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 & 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. Displacement, even temporary displacement, involves uprooting and relocating and the subsequent adaptation to altered environments (Oliver-Smith, 2002). 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. Although the material emphasis in the discursive practice of recovery was associated with the provision of material resources to those who had lost homes, the symbolic aspects of their process were largely unaddressed.

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. The influence of this construction was heard in the comments of several of the residents in Barriere (and the surrounding environs) who were impatient with the apparent slowness of the recovery process in Louis Creek and who accused residents in Louis Creek of clinging to a “victim mentality” and refusing to move on.

*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 & Altman, 1992). In this regard, home is a very powerful site of identity in which the role of place and possessions intersect.
From this perspective, the home 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. They are imbued over time with psychic energy as symbols of our self-continuity and interconnectedness (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1982). 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 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.

Further, although the loss of special possessions (e.g., treasured artifacts, family photos) was acknowledged 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, which has tended to focus a great deal of attention on these special possession categories and less so on the mundane categories (Kleine & 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. These residents were framed both by themselves and others as overly materialistic for wanting to replace their possessions, overly sentimental in their attachment to what was lost, and ungrateful or indulgent because of their continued emotional struggle in the process.

*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). Disorientation and reorientation extended into every facet of the lives of those who lost both their homes and businesses.

Congruent with the gendered implications of the media text discourse analysis, 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. 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.

These kinds of gendered distinctions are well supported in the literature on disasters and gender (Enarson & Morrow, 1998). Drawing on several qualitative studies in two flood-hit locations in Scotland (Fordham, & Ketteridge, 1995), Fordham (1998) described many of these same gendered divisions in the responses of participants who were mostly women, and in the structured emergency response to the disaster. Likewise, Stehlik, Lawrence, and Gray (2000) concluded that drought was a gendered experience based on their study of the differences in men's and women's construction of a drought as a disaster. In a report produced for the International Labour Office on gender and natural disasters, Enarson (2000), in fact, identified global patterns of difference in the experiences of men and women in a broad range of natural disasters. The conclusions of this report attributed these differences to the greater risks and vulnerabilities for women associated with gender inequality.
Home as social relations. Home, in its broadest sense, also represents the affiliations and social construction of place that leads to a collective sense of attachment represented in the notion of community (Milligan, 1998). It is difficult to talk about the "self" without reifying some sense of the self, as separate from the individual. According to post-structural theories of identity (Gergen, 2001; Taylor, 1989), this separation of subjectivities belies the fact that self and other are continually and changeably interpellated through discourse, and socially produced through relations of power.

Identity cannot, therefore, belong to one person alone, and no one belongs to a single identity. We would go further, and argue that not only are there no 'natural' or 'original' identities, since every identity is the result of a continuing process, but that this process itself must be seen as one of permanent hybridization and nomadization. Identity is, in effect, the result of a multitude of interactions that take place inside a space whose outlines are not clearly defined (Mouffe, 1994, pp. 109-110).

Some common constructions of the recovery process were apparent amongst the majority of residents who, for instance, shared a sense of having survived the common experience of the evacuation. Many residents spoke of the dislocation resulting from the evacuation as distressing and those from Louis Creek described an ongoing experience of distress resulting from their extended displacement. Most residents also spoke of the strength of their sense of attachment to home in the wake of the fire, but these depictions also emphasized their sense of identification with their particular definition of community. As was seen in the present study, what community residents identified with, often reflected the varying geography of losses. For 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 neighbouring Barriere in ways that it had not previously been distinguished.

Conversely, Barriere residents seemed to withdraw from 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.

Rural communities because of their small size, relative homogeneity, and their geographic location tend to foster a strong sense of identification and belonging (Statistics Canada, 2005). Disruptions, such as those caused by the McLure fire, can cause distress but can also forge new or enhance existing attachments to place (Cox & Holmes, 2000). In his seminal ethnographic study of the Buffalo Creek disaster, Erikson (1976a, 1976b) 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.

Home and the hierarchy of losses. This sense of the significance of home to identity may also have accounted for the overwhelming generosity of those who heard of the disaster and donated money, clothes, and household goods. 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 & Thorns, 1998), and constructs a subjectivity of the homeowner as more responsible, a better citizen (DiPasquale & Glaeser, 1999). The loss of homes, therefore, holds powerful associations for many people and this was reflected throughout the findings.

In the context of neo-liberal discourse, the construction of home ownership as responsible and desirable is paradoxically in conflict with the construction of jobs as contingent and mobile, which may account for some of the less valued subjectivities afforded to the ex-Tolko workers (DiPasquale & Glaeser, 1999). Until the fire, ex-Tolko workers enjoyed a general status as responsible, contributing members of their communities. One community leader represented them as the “the top 10%” of the community. Most of them were home-owners,
many of them living in some of the most expensive homes in Barriere. As was evidenced in the media and interview texts, in the wake of the fire their status fell and they were as likely to be constructed as irresponsible, for not having a financial safety net other than their home, or unrealistic in their expectations and desires to stay put.

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. 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 community. Another aspect of a more extended meaning of home is community, another contested term. 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, 1976b; Kaniasty & 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 & Norris, 1993).

Although this deterioration of social cohesion was also true in Louis Creek and Barriere, the conflicts evident in these communities also appeared to be connected to the dominant
discursive construction of recovery and the tendency within this construction to ignore the social-psychological process I have termed reorientation. Furthermore, because this 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.

An additional discourse of community identified as occurring during the reorientation process in Barriere and Louis Creek was that of the regional community. 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 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). As Paasi (2002) suggested, in the practice of the dominant discourse, socio-spatial consciousness can be shaped and engaged in the reproduction of structures of domination and legitimization.

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. The enhanced community identity of Louis Creek often seemed to conflict with this construction of a regional identity and the comments about Louis Creek often reflected the differences in power between residents of Louis Creek and those who dominated the public discourse of recovery. Drawing on the discourse of regionalism, those in power denounced the emergence of local community identity as economically counterproductive and socially unnecessary. Their response to this emerging local community 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.

Media Discourse, Community and Regional Identity

In this study, the media discourse evidenced in the NTSJ encouraged an embracing of regional identity as a necessary and positive response to the economic disruption of the fire. The coverage explicitly and implicitly encouraged residents to move as quickly as possible to a return to normal in which normal stood in for "open for business." In so doing, the texts also framed the prioritizing of a regional identity as a positive response to a de facto economic imperative.

Harner (2001) 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. Although residents of both communities engaged in this process, the voices of those who resided in Barriere dominated the media texts, rendering the perspectives of those living in Louis Creek virtually invisible. In this way, the media texts supported a construction of recovery that was mirrored in the interviews with many Barriere residents—the expectations regarding the trajectory of the return to normal were based on the process in Barriere, where little direct damage was sustained but where the loss of the Tolko mill was keenly felt. 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, residents 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.

The strengthening of the Louis Creek community identity fits then, not only with the "retreat to a place of hibernation" (Cox & 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.

There were also, however, examples of what Harner (2001) described as emergent identities. He explained these as a reworking of the resistant identity that transcended insider/outside 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.

Summary of Place and Identity in the Reorientation Process

The literature on place and identity in the context of a post-structural understanding or construction of identity provides a great deal of support for the consideration of the social-psychological process of recovery as a process of identity reorientation. The notion of reorientation evokes the relevance of place to identity formation. To orient is to find ones bearings in space and place both in terms of physical location and the more symbolic and metaphoric meanings of place as the site of relationships and meaning making.

The importance of place as an orienting framework within reorientation was expressed in numerous ways by residents engaged in the process. The disorientation of having the physical environment so changed by the fire was evident as residents returned to their communities and began in a short space of time to focus on redeveloping or re-greening their immediate surroundings. They also spoke passionately about the incremental evidence of the return of wildlife to the burned out areas. Although in describing this process, I positioned this notion of place as a geographic location and natural environment separately from the discussion of place-as-home, the environment was as much an expression of home as other aspects of this complex construct.

Home as shelter, as a symbolic extension of self, as the site of work and social relations, played an enormous role in residents' reorientation process individually and collectively. Although the dominant discursive construction of recovery evidenced in the media texts seemed to frame the process primarily in economic and material terms, residents' depictions of their process following the fire indicated that although the economic aspects of the process were important, what was equally important were the symbolic meanings of home and the loss of home. Much of what residents described of their process focused on these symbolic and relational meanings of home. It was the disruption to their sense of belonging and continuity that
dominated their accounts of disorientation and reorientation despite their assertions that the economic impact of the fire had caused the most disruption.

Residents’ comments about the importance of the economic effects of the fire to their own process of recovery echoed the emphasis on the economic construction of recovery in the media texts. The economic effects were certainly tied to residents’ capacities to replace the material possessions they had lost. These things, in turn, had broad implications for their individual and collective identities. The lack of explicit reference to these implications, other than in material terms, however, indicated a discursive construction that reflected only a small portion of the ways in which residents were reorienting in their new and vastly changed environment.

In the residents’ accounts, there was evidence that community members were renegotiating their relationship with each other and the future paths of their respective communities. Residents spoke of these changes but it was primarily the residents of Louis Creek who seemed to be most conscious, or most in need of establishing a new collective identity in the wake of the McLure Fire. Although their economic place in the world had changed, relatively few of the residents of Barriere had to negotiate this change on a daily basis. Ex-Tolko workers did, and several of them had to make the decision to relocate, but most of those living in Barriere were not surrounded with the extensive changes in their orienting frameworks that many of the residents in Louis Creek encountered. The role of place, its material and symbolic meanings, became most apparent in the accounts of those who had lost the most and who were left to renegotiate and recreate their identities as a result.
INVOCATION

The creative offering
waves
in the ripples of our dis-integration,
and our becoming in answer to the questions’ call.

The dissected soul,
anchored
in the mediated language of management,
is buried in the well-tended fields of our encounters.

Still we listen,
surprised
by the soft echoes of the unsayable,
and the pounding of a too bright heart.

Momentarily blinded,
Khaos,
Refusing to sleep, reminds us
of the transcendental condition of our interlocution.  

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CHAPTER 8: ECHOS, TRANSGRESSIONS, SILENCES - RESIDENTS' DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF RECOVERY

The disorientation and reorientation processes evidenced in the analysis of residents’ interview accounts were shaped and influenced by the dominant discursive practices of recovery, or what I have termed the “discursive field” of recovery. By describing this as a field, I mean to imply both the complexity and interrelatedness of these discourses in the practice of recovery. The notion of field also highlights the artificiality in some ways of separating these discourses from each other as they overlap to such a great extent and are so mutually implicative. As Sunderland (2004) states, “Discourses are not ubiquitous, but that they are relatively unbounded means that the same discourse may be produced all over the place, in different linguistic guises” (p. 7).

In this chapter I build on the findings from the discourse analysis of the NTSJ’s coverage of the first 3 months of the recovery process in Barriere and Louis Creek. I examine the discursive field of recovery evidenced in residents’ accounts of the process as it unfolded over the 2-years of this study by exploring the following questions: (a) How did residents take up or resist the dominant discursive construction of recovery as it was evidenced in the media texts? (b) What subject positions were made available or constrained as a result of this construction? and (c) What evidence of transgressive constructions or discourses of recovery were evident in resident’s accounts and social practices?

As was foreshadowed in the NTSJ texts, residents drew on various strands of neo-liberal economic discourse to describe their experiences and to frame reorientation and the broader recovery process as primarily an individual and collective economic and material restructuring. As was evidenced in the description of the reorientation process, however, many residents spoke of a process that extended beyond the economic and material aspects of recovery. The discourses I discuss are: (a) masculinist discourses; (b) neo-liberal economic discourse; (c) leadership discourses; (d) aid discourse; and (e) psychological discourse. I examine these discourses as interpretive repertoires, and discuss the subject positions, practices, and the subjectivities afforded and constrained through these discourses in the context of reorientation and recovery more generally.
Masculinist Discourses

As was foreshadowed in the findings of the media analysis, gender and gendered discourses were readily apparent in the dominant constructions of recovery in the interview texts. Such discourses bring together “language use and gender representation” to construct the subjectivities afforded men and women differently (Sunderland, 2004, p. 21). 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 discourse I have identified as masculinist discourse.

The overall effect of masculinist discourse 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. Because of the considerable overlaps between (a) and (b), I discuss these discourses simultaneously.

*Women as Emotional Nurturers/ Men as Rational Providers*

The interview texts echoed the gender imbalances evidenced in the media texts in terms of how men and women constructed their experiences as different because of gender, and how different opportunities for social action were facilitated for men and women through these constructions. Although the gendered construction of recovery was largely implicit in the media texts, both male and female participants drew explicitly on discourses of gender differences to depict women as suffering more during the recovery process because they were more emotionally volatile and vulnerable. This vulnerability was attributed to unquestioned assumptions that women’s role was more about “nesting,” being “the mother of the home,” and “nurturing,” and because these aspects of their lives “had been threatened and disrupted.” Several of the male participants positioned women as having “more time on their hands to worry” because their primary roles were understood not to include work outside the home.
On the other hand, women were more likely to describe themselves as carrying the burden of the recovery process precisely for the same reason, because they were the ones who “held the family together” and had the primary responsibility for reestablishing the domestic and parenting routines, while also caretaking the emotional and material needs of their partners and children. Whereas male participants who drew on this construction positioned women as more vulnerable, many of the women who were interviewed constructed themselves as stronger, describing themselves as “being the rock,” and framing their greater willingness to accept or seek help as an aspect of moving forward, or “getting on with it.”

The same masculinist discourse was drawn on to describe the suffering of men, which was framed emotionally as evoking anger and frustration rather than distress, and as arising primarily because of the interruption in their role as providers. Both men and women pointed to those who had lost their jobs at the Tolko mill (the overwhelming majority of these were men), and constructed this loss as representing a major shift in men’s self-identity. Men were described as having a deep connection between work and their sense of self-worth, particularly in terms of their role as provider. As one resident stated, “All the men in Barriere after the fire felt useless. The men provide, they go out and they work and you take their work from them and you take who they are away from them” (Peaches 01).

Many of those interviewed also described the approach to concerns and issues as polarized along gender lines. Again this was attributed to stereotypical gender roles and concerns. Although few challenged the structuring of gender in this way, a number of the women interviewed believed that their lack of representation in key decision-making positions had resulted in a myopic focus on economics to the exclusion of social and relational concerns.

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. (Sam 03)

You know women do have, some women have better organizational skills and they look at other things that are further out there, like the kids, and the community, and the schools, where men are just like, business. And I noticed that it’s just all men and they do it from one community to another. (Nancy 01)

Although both Sam and Nancy offered a critique of the outcomes associated with the traditional imbalance in power relations, at the same time they re-inscribed the gender difference
discourse that supported these outcomes. Neither challenged the notion that men’s and women’s roles and concerns were different, and both used language that positioned only men as agentic and in control of recovery. In attributing the problem to men’s lack of consideration of women’s perspectives, for instance, Sam’s statement constructed women’s participation (or lack there of) as dependent on men’s decisions. For Nancy, women, or “some women” have “better organizational skills,” whereas men are all “business.” In this statement, Nancy did not position women as good at business, but rather positioned a subset of women as possessing some of the skills that may potentially be useful in business. Further, this was something she noticed, a relatively passive verb that again implied a sense of powerlessness to change the imbalance in power to which she has alluded.

The gender difference discourse was also drawn on by several local service providers who attributed a differential accessing of services to the gendered division in emotional responses to suffering. They spoke of noticing a lot of anger in men and a tendency to isolate and to access services only for the provision of material needs such as money for tools and transportation. Women on the other hand, they said, tended to be the “mainstay” of providing information to service agencies about the emotional and psychological challenges residents were facing, and were described as generally “more accepting of networking and reaching out for help.” These differences were rarely questioned but rather positioned as natural or innate.

Although at times these women drew on this discourse, several of them also drew on less explicitly gendered discourses to explain the apparent lack of attention during recovery to the psychological and emotional impact of the fire.

I think as a society as a whole we don’t embrace the whole idea of being able to grieve. It’s not okay. We don’t know how to do it, we’re scared about it so yeah, it’s supposed to happen in the private homes and nobody’s supposed to see that outside the home. (Betty 01)

Drawing on therapy discourse, Betty attributed the inattention to emotions to a broader social reluctance to grieve. Her statement implicitly re-inscribed the dominant discourse by obscuring the ways in which this reluctance to grieve was connected to masculine traits and the dominance of these tendencies in social practices. Betty and other service providers had previously described differences in men and women’s responses to the losses that indicated that women were more likely to grieve and more willing to acknowledge their distress in public as was demonstrated by their greater willingness to access services and support.
Women’s Place is in the Home — Men’s Place is at Work

In keeping with the findings of the media analysis, traditional conceptions of gender roles and a gendered imbalance of power seemed to preclude both a meaningful recognition of women’s contributions and the inclusion of alternative perspectives in the reorientation and broader recovery processes. The emergence of community-based organizations during the recovery period was mentioned in a number of the interview texts, but the roles of women in initiating and sustaining those organizations was rarely addressed. Women played significant and foundational roles in establishing many if not most of the community projects that arose during the recovery process and included: The Volunteer and Information Centre; the original idea for the community forest initiative; a Memorial Society developed to raise funds for and commission a memorial to the McLure Fire experience on the Tolko site; and two separate education initiatives – one focused on developing awareness of sustainable forestry practices and issues with high school students and another responding to an increase in drug use.

A number of women (e.g., Nancy, Sam, Thompson, Peaches) spoke critically and explicitly of this imbalance in representation in the decision-making process and leadership positions but again, in the construction of these responses there was a sense of powerlessness. Thompson (03) described a process in which, “They keep making decisions about what we’re doing with our lives and it’s the same people.” In these and earlier comments, Thompson had named those “same people” by name, all of them men, although she did not explicitly refer to their gender in any way. When I suggested that it sounded like an old boys network she responded by saying “It is a big given that it’s old boys,” and when asked why she believed this “kept happening over and over,” as she had stated, Thompson replied that it kept being reconstructed in this way “because they are the ones forming the committees.” Although gender was clearly an obvious aspect of who had power and who did not, in Thompson’s statements the access to power was personalized and embodied in individuals who happened to be men, rather than because they were men. There was also an assumed or resigned perspective on the perpetuation of this dynamic in as much as there was no challenge expressed to the fact that “they” formed the committees. This sense of powerlessness and resignation was evidenced in all of the interview texts in which residents spoke of their lack of empowerment within the decision-making processes.
For those with power, there was also an assumption of entitlement to this power that was implicitly gendered. In the texts of interviews with those in decision-making roles, being a businessman was equated with being capable of fulfilling a leadership role, a discursive practice mirrored in the material practices of recovery.

Neo-liberal Economic Discourse

Just as many of the discourses drawn on in the construction of recovery could be considered gendered, so too many of them were framed by an overarching economic discourse consistent with that evidenced in the media texts. For instance, although residents who had lost homes drew on a wide range of discourses to describe their recovery process, they typically focused more extensively on the material and economic aspects of their post-fire experience. Pam and Richard, who lost their home, their home-based business, and most of their possessions, described the worst impact of the fires as "economic," referring not only to their immediate financial context but also the loss of jobs resulting from the loss of the mill, and the more general adverse effect of the fire on the economy of Barriere, Louis Creek, and the North Thompson region. This sentiment was echoed throughout the interviews both with residents who had lost their homes and/or businesses and those who had not.

As was seen in the media texts, the economic framing included an emphasis on returning to normal through economic and material restructuring (e.g., rebuilding houses, replacing possessions, finding jobs). For the communities more generally, the recovery process was constructed as a return to a stable and healthy economy. Similarly the provision of aid focused on the material aspect of people's losses, providing support for them to replace material goods. Although service providers who participated in the interviews acknowledged the need for services to address the psychological/emotional aspects of the process, they framed these as largely outside their organizational recovery mandates. Those who had suffered few material losses, but who may nonetheless have suffered psychological or emotional distress were rarely acknowledged as legitimate as victims. These service providers acknowledged non-economic losses and drew on various psychological discourses (e.g., stress, depression) to describe them, but even so, in many cases the loss itself was constructed as a loss primarily because it interfered with the economic functioning and viability of their clients.
There were a number of paradoxical constructions within the economic framing of the recovery process. For example, the discursive practices of the return to normal discourse constructed re-accumulation as a key element of returning to normal functioning, and therefore a good thing. At the same time, some of those not engaged in this aspect of recovery positioned those who were rebuilding homes and re-accumulating possessions as winners in a lottery—they had been lucky enough to lose their homes and as a result get everything brand new. Residents who lost their homes spoke of their discomfort with their conspicuous consumption and described trying to minimize the visibility of this consumption. At the same time, however, these residents drew on the return to normal discourse to validate the urgency of their need to rebuild and replace, and to frame this not only as their need but in some ways reflecting the need of the broader community to have them back to normal. Again, the recovery discourse echoed in this way the larger neo-liberal economic discourse’s paradoxical positioning of the good citizen as someone who consistently consumes, keeping the economy going, but who is simultaneously chastised for irresponsible consumption in the face of mounting debt. There was a right way to be a good and responsible recovering citizen, one who “recovered, but not too much,” as one Louis Creek resident put it (Pluto, 01).

The paradoxical construction of the residents of Louis Creek as economically irresponsible and tragic victims was further developed in their construction as uninsured or insured homeowners. In accordance with neo-liberal discursive practice of translating all social relations as economic, victim discourse—which I do not discuss as a separate discourse but which was, nonetheless prevalent as a defining discourse within the neo-liberal economic construction of recovery—was also used to frame residents in economic terms. Although initially the term victim was used to describe all or most residents of the two communities, the term quickly narrowed to define legitimate victims, where legitimacy was determined in terms of economic and material losses. The legitimacy of a resident’s victimhood—their status as deserving or not—was framed in terms of how much they had lost, what they had lost, and the degree of responsibility they were constructed as sharing in those losses. For instance, as was seen in the description of the reorientation process, those who had lost homes were positioned differently than those who had lost jobs, and differentiations were also made regarding deservedness based on whether home owners had been insured or not.
Those who lost homes were positioned as tragic victims of this horrendous enemy, the uncontrollable Mother Nature and the monster fire. Simultaneously, because the community of Louis Creek was constructed as the poor neighbour or suburb to Barriere, the wrong side of the tracks, residents there were positioned as the deserving poor —to help them with the relief funds was to “raise them up” as one Barriere resident described it. On the other hand, uninsured homeowners in Louis Creek were positioned as creators of their misfortune through their lack of prudence in having failed to buy home insurance. These bad citizens were then seen by some to have been unjustly rewarded for their lack of prudence (e.g., the provision of aid to replace homes and possessions) instead of punished.

Ex-Tolko workers were also held accountable for their losses in some ways. They, who had previously been positioned positively as the top income earners in the community, were now blamed for their lack of financial foresight. These individuals were constructed as having had all the resources and disproportionately favorable incomes prior to the fire, but also as having wasted this on superfluous items (i.e., toys) instead of being responsible citizens and planning and saving as insurance against the unpredictable future. The expectations regarding their accountability after the fire were quite different from those placed on uninsured homeowners. In accordance with the neo-liberal discourse’s framing of workers as responsible for planning for insecurity, the ex-Tolko workers should have anticipated job loss as part of their economic future. In the global context of a neo-liberalism, change is inevitable. Unlike those residents who lost their homes, these victims were expected to repair their losses through their own ingenuity, either by becoming entrepreneurs, or leaving their communities to find jobs elsewhere in the province or the country. By contrast, homeowners, although judged irresponsible because of their lack of insurance, were not expected to move and were seen as more legitimate in terms of accessing relief funding.

At the same time, ex-Tolko workers resisted their construction as less legitimate victims by framing themselves as the newly fallen “have nots,” the new poor, contrasting the downward reversal of their fortunes with the seemingly upward reversal of uninsured homeowners in Louis Creek. By pointing to their economic reversal these residents implicitly highlighted the paradoxical position of the individual worker in the neo-liberal economic discourse. One of the prevailing messages of this discourse is that those who work hard and keep the economy in motion through consumption (good citizens) are rewarded. These same workers, however, are
also told to be prudent and responsible by banking against contingencies like disasters by buying insurance. The distribution of the relief funds seemed to completely contradict this construction, rewarding bad citizens (i.e., uninsured homeowners) for their lack of anticipation and punishing good citizens (i.e., high income earners) for the same lack of foresight.

This contradiction highlighted the neo-liberal discourse’s embrace of entrepreneurship and rejection of unions and unionized workers. As unionized employees, the ex-Tolko workers were framed as having had unrealistic expectations about job security and wages, and thus, their so-called fall from grace was constructed as their responsibility as a result of their outdated and unrealistic unionized expectations. They were positioned as authors of their own misfortune due to their union-based “ostrich with their head in the sand” attitudes. Fire or no fire, the changes in their status as workers should have been anticipated as the inevitable outcome of a progressive global economic restructuring. These residents expressed a "taken as fact" adoption of the tenets of neo-liberal discourse. In the absence of a critical analysis of the assumptions and ideologies guiding the process, they made each other targets of their objections and anger while apparently unquestioningly accepting the need for diversification and economic regionalism in response to the Tolko closure.

Aid Discourse

Recovery was also framed to a great degree as a process driven by the provision of aid, a particular sub-discourse of the economic discourse. As with any of the previously discussed discourses there was no one ubiquitous aid discourse but rather some themes within what could be identified as an overarching discourse of aid within recovery.

Within the residents’ accounts, the provision of material and emotional support was described as “help,” “disaster aid,” and “services.” In these discursive constructions, help was offered in the form of providing services, goods, and money in order to effectively address the problems of victims. Residents and service providers alike described the process as one of “assessment” and “allocation,” the determining of “unmet needs,” and “the most effective means” of addressing those needs. In this process, those providing help were framed as experts, with privileged knowledge and perspectives, whereas those receiving help were constructed as victims or clients, defined primarily by the extent of their material losses and their
vulnerabilities. For some residents, this construction of aid felt pathologizing or, as Thompson (02) described it, “people treated you like you’ve got something wrong with you.”

Organizations offering help often did so in the absence of integrating local community resources into the decision-making process, or when they did, they very carefully decided who would work well within the existing structure and who would not disrupt the committee meeting processes with perspectives that may not have fit the dominant paradigm. In effect, this discourse demanded that those most affected adapt to the organizational mandate, rather than the organizational mandate responding to them or to the locally defined needs.

Metaphors and similes: Aid discourse. A variety of nature and gardening metaphors were drawn on to describe the economic process that constructed the fire as something positive, promoting “new growth,” and suggesting that relief funding should be used for “sewing seeds.” R (01- this initial was the pseudonym provided by the resident) described the community using this Pruning the Lilac Bush simile:

Lilac bushes thrive when they are given a severe pruning. You need to cut the lilac bush right to the ground; you can’t prune it too hard. If you give a lilac bush a good, hard pruning—as the fires have done to this area—it grows back with new shoots, new green, new growth. In the same way, the devastation caused by the fires is causing new growth, a positive impact on the community and the area.

In drawing on this metaphor, R invoked a nature discourse that constructed the fires as natural and the disruption and job loss resulting from the mill’s destruction as necessary, something that a good gardener would want to have happen in order to promote growth. In some way, this metaphor also made allusions to the ex-Tolko workers and the union mentality as dead wood—that which is cut from the lilac bush to ensure its continued growth. Through comparing the community to the lilac bush, R (01) also implicitly evoked the resilience discourse seen throughout many of the media texts. This discourse, which I discussed under the rubric of Sequestering of Suffering, framed residents as hardy and suggested that they should see the positive in the process, rather than dwell on their losses and/or distress. This framing, along with the suggestion that “new growth” would result from these losses was consistent with neo-liberal discursive construction of recovery.
Several of the most striking metaphors and similes used in discussing the provision of aid were identified in the multiple interview texts of Sam. In speaking of the aid provided, and the way in which it was distributed, Sam drew on the metaphor of a cookie jar:

We in this community over the last year, we have had a cookie jar given to us. However, we have not had the ability to protect our cookie jar and to actually use that cookie jar but there have been many, many others who have said, “Oh jeese, Sam, you know, you don’t really need all those cookies, I’ll just take them. Thank you very much.” Thank you. But not even thank you. (Sam 03)

Cookies serve metaphorically as reminders or markers of childhood and of the care giving of a mother. The idea of a cookie evokes the notion of aid as spiritual and corporeal nourishment, offering pleasure and evoking a kind of magical quality reminiscent of childhood. When you bake a batch of cookies you do not know how many cookies will come from the dough; when you have a cookie jar you do not know how many cookies are inside or how quickly they will be eaten. They are hidden from view and their distribution implies another layer of gift giving. Cookies are also doled out by parents as a treat for when you have been good. So too with the aid, Sam implied that there was a sense that those in charge had adopted a parental role, doling out aid to those who were deserving, and perhaps taking a few cookies for themselves, because cookies were to be shared. The metaphor pointed to the sense of power and paternalism of those in charge of the aid, and the concomitant powerlessness and dependency of those who needed the aid.

Further, thinking of aid as a cookie jar invokes the image of cookies being doled out one at a time. As with the cookies, there was reciprocal individualism in doling out of the aid wherein everyone was treated in some ways as distinct and separate, but where the aid was not really individualized to satisfy the unique needs of those individuals. There is in some ways less accountability with cookies because it is difficult to discern when or if someone has taken a cookie. In contrast to a pie where a missing slice is obvious, you only know too many cookies have been taken when the jar is empty. Finally, there was also an evocation of gender in the metaphor. Cookies are associated with mothers and grandmothers. Aid was constructed as a form of circulation of goods that was in some significant ways outside the market, as something given freely with no sense of reciprocation, and with the love or spirit of giving traditionally associated with the good mother. The implication that aid was like a gift doled out by mothers positioned aid as something unique within the market logic of neo-liberalism in which nothing is
for free. On the other hand, because the distribution of aid was determined by men and not mothers, the use of the metaphor was also ironic. There was a critique of the lack of altruism inherent in the process as contrasted with mom’s loving, fair, and nurturing distribution of cookies.

Leadership Discourse

Although the issue of leadership was touched on in the media accounts, it did not assume the importance it did with the residents in the interviews. This may be accounted for, in part, because of the timing of the interview, the fact that residents’ accounts of recovery incorporated 2 years of experience rather than only the first 3 months, as was the case with the media data.

Residents drew on various discourses of leadership when describing their experiences, often in the context of critiquing their perceived lack of individual and collective power in directing and managing the economic aspects of the recovery process. Leadership was most typically constructed through the overlapping discourses of “heroic leadership” and “bureaucratic leadership” in which gender was not specifically assigned but in some important ways assumed. The examples offered of leaders were all male, and leadership was described in terms of traditionally masculine characteristics and behaviors (e.g., assertiveness, independence, decisiveness, autonomous decision making). Bureaucratic leadership was described as having arisen from, and therefore being the responsibility of governments.

In the construction of the leader as hero, there was a sense that if only someone had stepped into this position of leadership the process and the projected outcomes of recovery would have been better. This absent leader was constructed as an amorphous male who would have taken the reins of power, united the community or sub-communities (differently defined depending on the social location of the speaker), and stood up for the rights of the community. He was constructed as a visionary with privileged access to information, knowledge, and power, and as someone who would make decisions that were unbiased, and just. He was someone core to the success of the community. This discursive construction was grounded in masculine values that framed the desirable leader as reasoned, expert, powerful, autonomous, and in a hierarchical relationship with those being led. He was identified as someone who would “step up to the plate,” and meet the ongoing challenges, predominantly associated with economics and governance, of recovering from the fire.
Those who had some authority and power in the recovery process were positioned both by themselves and others as leaders, or at least decision-makers, either because of their role as elected representatives or because they were business leaders. Residents not occupying these power positions typically framed those in power as unresponsive to the residents and operating independently of their interests. For the few individuals occupying elected positions, there was an interpretation of what it meant to be elected that did not necessarily reflect the rhetoric of democratic liberalism.

In describing leadership in the community, Ken (01) emphasized the importance of being elected and further, the need for incorporation, critiquing the notion that leadership could or should emerge from the community:

I think that [the lack of incorporation] gives you a fragmented leadership, so you are spending a little too much effort on who’s the leader rather than looking after the ship that you’re on...You know, leaders trying to emerge rather than already be there and elected. You know, you can’t beat having people being elected to a position because they are doing what the community wants.”

Within his statement was an assumption that being elected results in leadership that reflects the desires of the community, a statement that contrasted the criticisms of lack of representation expressed by community members. At the same time, Ken (02) suggested that there was fragmented leadership because of the lack of incorporation, despite the fact that the formal leadership or decision-making group in the recovery process was by all accounts cohesive. He also suggested that time was being wasted on deciding leadership despite the fact that no formal challenges to his leadership had been evidenced in the interview or media texts, or in the actions of community members. Finally, Ken drew on what might be construed as a military metaphor implying that he is the captain of a ship. The concept was linked to an understanding of leadership in which leadership was and should be unquestioned, hierarchical, and in which decisions were made by an authoritative male who had the best interests of his crew—community members—and his ship—the community—in mind.

Those in power also drew on this heroic and masculinist construction of leadership to depict themselves in possession of privileged knowledge and expertise. Authority claims within this construction of leadership relied on a construction of leaders as in possession of a more objective and hence more egalitarian perspective. The paradoxical rationale employed was that this objectivity arose either because of their history of residency in the communities and their
tenure as businessmen, or because of their lack of embeddedness in the community (many of these men were from outside Barriere and Louis Creek) and their position as businessmen and/or politicians. By contrast, others in the communities were framed as belonging to “special interest groups” or constrained by a “union mentality” and unable, therefore, to hold the best interests of the community in the forefront. R (01), who held a paid decision-making position created through the North Thompson Relief Fund, invoked the heroic leadership discourse to define leadership. Referring to the mythic lead character of the movie “Braveheart,” he described the qualities of bravery, courage, action, and “an old soul” as key to leadership, and in so doing suggesting by implication that these were the qualities that had resulted in his occupying this position.

The disempowerment described earlier in the description of masculinist discourse was particularly evident in residents’ comments about leadership and those in power during the recovery process. Despite the fact that many residents commented on their lack of access to power and decision-making positions, they did so drawing on an expert discourse that positioned them as lacking the expertise to take on such leadership. The abilities to “pull things together” or “to have the whole picture” were cited as necessary skills for leadership and these qualities were positioned as belonging to others. Many residents wishfully hoped that someone would “take on the leadership role” constructing it as a duty and a responsibility from which they were excluded themselves by virtue of their lack of expertise.

Throughout the texts, leadership was framed as the responsibility of elected officials (e.g., Regional District representative, Chamber of Commerce president) and the bureaucrats who served them. In this way, leadership was strongly equated with distant others – “they” who through implication were constructed as government officials that the residents expected would take unspecified future actions. Leadership was most often equated with business skills, particularly acumen in economic endeavors. Those put forth as potential leaders or those who accepted leadership positions (e.g., head of the recovery committee) gained their legitimacy in good measure from their position as established “business leaders” in the community. This bureaucratic leadership discourse positioned business leaders as having a social responsibility to step into leadership positions even as it positioned other community members as lacking the ability to do so. This once again implicitly positioned men rather than women as leaders, despite the fact that there were a number of successful businesswomen in the communities. It also
constructed economic rather than social issues as the driving force behind the need for leadership.

For a relatively small number of those interviewed, all women, a more relational leadership discourse was employed. In this alternate discourse, albeit infrequently voiced, leadership was constructed in terms of the ability to build coalitions and consensus. It was seen as something that did not depend on incorporation or the government but was framed rather as an emergent quality or potential of people coming together, taking responsibility and taking back power from governments and corporations. In this counter-discourse, the down-streaming of responsibility to elected officials that is promoted in neo-liberal (and liberal) discourses was critiqued:

We’ve always ‘offed’ our community responsibility with a mind that well we pay our taxes so we pay these guys to look after us. Well, when they don’t look after you then, you know, you can bitch and complain all you want but you know you can’t really expect them to pick up where you just wanted to get rid of your own responsibility.

Metaphors and similes: Leadership discourse. A number of leadership metaphors and similes were identified in the texts. I have included two of the most striking in these findings. Marg (01) offered the simile of Leadership as an Awakening.

So you can’t wake people up until they’re ready to wake up, until the consciousness maybe all around them has grown to a point where then they can’t even avoid it anymore but, it seems to be a trickle down process of raising consciousness that I really just feel these days, you know, everybody has to look to raising their own consciousness. You can barely, you can try to get things going in a community but if people don’t pick up on it, you know, you can’t beat yourself up about it because you can’t wake people up till they’re ready. You can try to get things going in a community but if people don’t pick up on it, you know, you can’t beat yourself up about it because you can’t wake people up till they’re ready. (Marg, 01)

In this statement, Marg (01) constructed the absence of involvement in decision-making as the result of community members’ shared lack of social responsibility and willingness to get involved, which in a later statement she attributes to a lack of consciousness or awareness. Marg also offers a metaphoric construction of leadership in which leadership involves consciousness raising, or “waking” others up. Although in earlier statements she used the pronoun “we” to construct a solidarity with other residents, in this statement she shifted to the impersonal “you.” The leader was someone, not her, not anyone specific. The use of “you” diffused the action and the ownership of leadership; although she went on to position herself as someone who had tried
to raise consciousness. She constructed a model of leadership that was from the ground up and collective in which leaders emerged as a result of “raising their own consciousness.” She positioned leaders as capable of encouraging this process but ultimately reliant on individuals to raise their own consciousness. Marg implied that people were reluctant to awaken, avoiding the responsibility that goes with being awake such that they had to “be ready” to awaken.

The simile Marg (01) offered was also metaphorically suggestive of the disorientation process. A number of residents spoke of the McLure Fire as prompting changes (again primarily in the economic sphere) that would ultimately have occurred anyway as a result of globalization. The fire had in effect, awoken people before they were ready to be awake, opening them to the disorientation that comes from confronting the uncertainty, instability, chaos of late modernity before one is ready. There was a resigned quality, however, to Marg’s depiction of this awakening process as reliant on readiness, as though leadership in this regard was futile. This depiction echoes in many ways the resignation of other residents who constructed the desired leader as a hero, implying through the metaphoric constellation that leadership emerged, heroes arrived they were not made. In both depictions, leadership was something residents had to passively await but which they were not actively involved in generating themselves.

By contrast, Ken (01) provided a different simile to describe leadership. Driving the Bus was offered by Ken to describe his role as a leader and the different perspective this afforded him on the timing and speed of the organized response (i.e., distribution of relief funds):

It’s like, if you’re standing there waiting for the bus and he’s 5 minutes late, it seems like an hour. But if you’re driving the bus and something’s really been throwing you late, so you’re driving to beat hell. You’re looking at your watch and saying oh, I’m only 5 minutes late. [Chuckle] But to the person waiting it’s an hour. To you it’s only 5 minutes.

Ken used this simile to describe his role as a leader in the community and as a response to the criticisms of leadership that had been expressed in the media and residents comments. In comparing the recovery process to a bus journey, Ken suggested that that there was a degree of impatience in the community that resulted from residents not having the full context about the recovery process. In comparing himself to the bus driver, however, Ken also demonstrated a taken-for-granted stance toward his role as the leader—he had been hired, or in this case elected, to do a job that involved steering those who had less information and who were appropriately reliant on his ability to drive and steer the process because of his role. There was no suggestion of providing more information and creating a more inclusive and informed population. This was
consistent with the hierarchical and paternalistic qualities of the bureaucratic discourse of leadership identified in the texts. The authority of the driver/leaders of the recovery process was not to be questioned. It was to be assumed that they had access to privileged information and that they were “driving to beat hell.”

Service Providers Discourse

The discursive construction of recovery identified in the interviews with individuals working within various aid and service providing organizations painted a slightly different picture. A mix of local resident service providers and relief-agency workers working temporarily in Barriere as part of the recovery process drew on a number of related discourses (e.g., psychological, service, expert, medical) in their depiction of recovery. Their construction revealed a high degree of ambiguity about the meaning of recovery and conflict in their experience as service providers.

Their framing of the recovery process drew on psychological discourse as a process of “healing,” “moving on,” “adjusting to change,” and “mourning.” A number of service providers described the term recovery as an oxymoron that failed to capture the non-linearity and duration of the process. Another described recovery as a “balancing act” between “moving forward” and “complete fear” with an ultimate destination of “balance.” Several drew a distinction between recovery and rebuilding, describing recovery as the phase immediately following the fire – “virtually near the beginning to probably 6, maybe 8 months” following, and distinguishing rebuilding as the point at which their clients “start[ed] thinking of doing things outside the home, getting into more community work, getting back into volunteering.”

Several service providers used language to describe their approach to and practice of their recovery related work that revealed contradictions between intent and practice. They drew on empowerment and resilience discourses to describe their intentions, using phrases such as “building on strengths,” “working from a client-centered perspective,” “focus on resilience,” and “capacity building.” They offered critiques of what they described as “outside agencies” and their practice of working or expecting these service providers to work from a more hierarchical approach they described as “top down,” and as an “attitude of we need to come in and rescue the people of Barriere.” At the same time, they drew on psychological, expert, and service discourses to describe their own work, discourses that reinforced a similar kind of hierarchical
relationship with community members. Some employed psychological discourse to describe their “clients” in terms of specific psychological problems and disorders (e.g., addictions, poor self-esteem) while at the same time employing language that constructed themselves as experts guiding community members’ processes – “we’re starting to let the community blossom or build” (Oprah, 01)

These same service providers also acknowledged that the recovery process was largely organizationally driven and described being as constrained by these organizations in terms of what they could and could not do for their clients. They often denied the knowledge and expertise of locals (their knowing of their community, of themselves, of the economic, social, psychological characteristics, strengths and vulnerabilities) through a lack of meaningful consultation. The hierarchical valuing of expertise also distinguished between response organizations and those who worked for them. Those working with established relief organizations had greater status, authority, legitimacy, than those who worked for pre-existing locally based organizations (e.g., local counselors, various churches). As the economic discourse had encouraged a rush back to normal, this discourse encouraged a rush into helping that may have precluded a more considered response that would have incorporated locals in the decision and planning of services, and focused on local capacity building, empowerment, and social or community level interventions.

Psychological Discourse

Residents and service providers drew on psychological discourse to describe the embodied effects of the recovery and reorientation process. Many of those who had lost homes described the process as stressful and themselves as “stressed right out.” They described signs of this stress in terms of “not sleeping,” “not able to make decisions,” “feeling exhausted,” “losing weight” and “going through bottles of Tums.” Several described the process as “not healthy” and spoke of “borderline depression” and “anxiety.” Although several residents cried during the interviews, and described “breaking down” or shedding tears during the process, the emotional language was limited. Emotions were most often described using vague terms such as “hard,” “tough,” “difficult,” and “upsetting.” This construction of the recovery process as one of stress and coping is consistent with psychological discourse (Norris et al., 2002a, 2002b). In this construction, the experience of loss or grieving of losses is less prevalent. Within this
construction, emotions associated with stress tend to emphasize anger, irritability, nervousness, moodiness, and feelings of being out of control; emotions associated with grief and loss tend to be described in more generic terms as moodiness, or in clinical terms as “depression.” This construction was evident in most of the interview texts of residents and service providers.

The construction of distress as stress was congruent with the sense of urgency that pervaded the recovery process, this need to “get back to normalcy as quickly as possible.” In keeping with the engineered grief framework Kugleman (1992) proposed for understanding stress discourse, residents and service providers alike, invoked time, time management, and a sense of being outside of normal time or being “in limbo” as crucial aspects of their experiences of recovery. Pam described her disorientation as being analogous to “being like an alcoholic, one day at a time.” In this way, the experience of being thrown out of normal was implicitly framed as individual failing, or a disease, the consequence of which was being out of step with the expectations within modernity that we are able to navigate present and future simultaneously.

Jan (01) was one of the few residents to refer to emotions associated with loss by describing the reorientation process as akin to grieving, comparing her feelings to “that feeling of loss, just like somebody dying.” She also talked about her “depressed symptoms.” She quickly followed this, however, drawing on the explanation her daughter had provided, which was that her blood sugar as a diabetic was “jumping around like crazy.” Brian (01) also spoke of his sadness at the loss of those individuals and families that had moved away in search of work. Several resident service providers also framed the experiences of their clients in terms of grief and grieving and healing. Within this framing there was generally much less urgency and an acknowledgement that the healing process would take time.

In describing men’s responses during the recovery process, service providers conflated stress discourse and masculinist constructions of the emotional differences between men and women to construct men’s “anger” and “increased drinking” as coping strategies. The stress discourse was also drawn on by decision-makers to explain their reluctance to include residents in decision-making processes. They spoke of not wanting to add stress to residents who were described as “already overwhelmed.”
Subject Positions

The range of subject positions afforded residents within this discursive context was similarly constricted as those found in the media texts. Residents often took up a victim stance or adopted passive positions in relationship to those who exercised power in the process. Although decrying their lack of participation in decision-making, residents most often positioned themselves as unable to take on leadership roles, or positioned politicians and elite business men, those in power already, as having the greater social and moral responsibility to be leaders. The emphasis on the economic and material aspects of the recovery process afforded limited subject positions in which residents were constructed primarily as economic beings (e.g., producers and consumers). The aid discourse positioned community members inconsistently in much the same way that residents were paradoxically positioned in the media texts as both resilient and dependent. Agency-driven needs assessments determined residents' needs, shaping the type and timing of help received or the process required in order to access help. In this way, residents were simultaneously constructed in contradictory subject positions as victims needing help, guidance, and the expertise of others, while also being positioned as resilient, capable, and responsible for their own recovery.

Residents often resisted these passive and limited subject positions. They took up the "rural resident as resilient discourse" describing themselves as independent, and stoic, and adopting more traditional rural subject positions as resourceful survivors who would manage regardless of the availability of outside help. Community-based initiatives such as the Community Forest Society were a manifestation of this discourse of resilience. In this discourse, residents framed themselves as experts because of their local experience and commitment to their community, and as capable of determining their future and that of their community. Some women resisted their construction as caregivers, and the "background others" by stepping into the public sphere and transgressing this masculinist framing of them. These attempts were often met with a backlash in which these women were positioned as having inserted themselves in issues and areas in which they did not belong. In this latter construction, women and residents more generally were positioned as lacking expertise, lacking an understanding of the big picture that was largely construed as economic and therefore out of women's purview.

Men, positioned as breadwinners, and those "with jobs" were constructed more often as doers, actively and legitimately engaged in the public sphere. As such, men also had limited
subject positions available to them given the unemployment and underemployment associated with the mill closure. If they were seen to be actively attempting to find or create work for themselves, they were positioned as responsible, resourceful, but also beleaguered, and somewhat heroic – doing what they had to do to keep home and hearth together, even if that meant becoming an absentee parent or uprooting the family. If they were seen not to be actively engaged in this way or taking too long to recover they were positioned as malingerers and poor citizens. Men were more likely to be positioned as heroes particularly in connection to their roles in the fire fighting efforts. That said, even in these roles they were offered limited subject positions. Outside fire fighters were positioned as the experts whereas locals were more likely to be positioned as well intentioned but lacking expertise. Men were also more likely to be positioned as community leaders particularly if they were seen to be successful businessmen or those with expertise because of their involvement in government or quasi-governmental roles such as belonging to the Chamber of Commerce.

As rural communities, Barriere and Louis Creek were collectively positioned as needing the guidance of outside others, most often more urban others. Ranchers and those working in the forestry and lumber industries were positioned as workers rather than leaders or experts, and constructed as strong but not necessarily visionary men (gender was assumed). On the other hand, ex-Tolko workers, because of their union connections, were positioned as men with unrealistic expectations, less worthy work-ethics, and generally as having been undeservingly privileged by virtue of their union status.

Summary of the Discourse of Disaster Recovery

In analyzing resident’s descriptions of their process of reorientation, a web of interrelated and at times conflicted discourses was evidenced. The patterns of this inter-discursivity were in many significant ways similar to those evidenced in the analysis of the media discourse. The primary difference was that in residents’ accounts there was evidence of transgressive constructions and practices of recovery alongside the dominant constructions and practices. In this section, I describe some of these overlapping and conflicting patterns, paying particular attention to masculinist, neo-liberal economic, and expert discourses (including psychological discourse), and some of the ways in which residents’ drew on and resisted these discourses in their attempts to understand and enact recovery.
The discursive practice of disaster recovery as it was evidenced in the media and interview accounts encouraged behaviors that could be classified as supporting a progression toward a future that consigned the disaster as quickly as possible to the past. This was framed in a variety of ways, such as “moving forward,” “getting back to normal,” “healing,” and “recovering.” This sense of “normal” was implicitly and explicitly construed as the reestablishing of recognizable routines (e.g., reopening of businesses and schools, staging of annual community events) and economic stability. The new normal was constructed, in effect, in ways that did not challenge the status quo in terms of the prevailing tendency to frame life in economic terms. Likewise, this construction did not afford residents many opportunities to challenge the status quo in terms of the distribution of economic and bureaucratic power.

Men, particularly elite businessmen, continued to hold power and manage the movement and direction of progress even as women continued as the background others, invisibly supporting this process through care giving and attention to the social fabric of the communities. At the same time, this new normal also included an unquestioned assumption of ongoing change, uncertainty, and a required willingness for individuals to be more adaptive, flexible, and inventive in their approach to employment and therefore economic sustainability (individually and collectively). Within this overarching emphasis on the economic and material aspects of reorientation and recovery more generally, psychological distress and suffering were sequestered and constructed as an undesirable impediment to progress.

Although the construction of recovery as a healing process was in some ways implied in the media accounts, this understanding of recovery was more explicitly evident in residents’ accounts. At times they drew on psychological discourse, primarily the stress discourse to describe their experiences. When alluding to the emotional impact of the disaster and the recovery process, residents tended to use mostly vague descriptors of their adverse emotions and to practice a similar kind of sequestration of their emotions as was evidenced in the media texts. At the same time, when drawing on psychological discourse, both service providers and residents drew on constructions of their subjectivities that were more holistic, including material, psychological, and spiritual aspects of their being.

Despite their use of a broader array of discourses than was evidenced in the media texts, there was a marked similarity in how residents in some ways minimized their personal losses and stressed the importance of the collective, economic losses. The distress associated with residents’
losses was evident in their descriptions of the meaning of those losses in their lives and the emotional tenor of the interviews. At the same time, they were much more likely to explicitly frame the economic and employment losses associated with the demise of the Tolko mill as the most salient and devastating consequences of the fire.

Recovery was rarely referred to explicitly as recovery but more often referred to in terms of movement forward to a future that both included new possibilities and this new normal that resembled as much as possible the normal of the pre-fire period. The emphasis on psychological functionalism meant that distress was consigned to behind closed doors, either at home or in the offices of counselors where it was to be "dealt" with so that the adverse emotions did not impede progress toward the new normal. Those who were taking longer than the implicitly agreed upon acceptable length of time for recovery were rendered invisible or positioned as vulnerable or bad citizens. In this way, the practice of recovery progressed at the pace largely determined by those who were outside the direct experience of the fire and by what was seen to be the economic rather than emotional or social imperatives of the process.

The subjectivities made most available through the dominant construction of recovery mirrored those afforded more generally in the neo-liberal discourse of late-capitalism. These included viewing the world as a place of continual change, particularly in terms of work and economics more generally and oneself as needing to be flexible and entrepreneurial. At the same time, the emphasis on progress and normalcy afforded a view of the world as controllable, in effect a counter argument to the experience of the modern world and Mother Nature as unpredictable and frightening. A reliance on experts was encouraged and constructed as a necessary aspect of modernity. The influx of aid and money in response to the fire encouraged a subjective perspective of the world as connected, caring, and generally good but at the same time encouraged a symbolic (i.e., money) rather than an immediate and interpersonal expression of this goodness. Community members framed themselves and each other as humble, thankful, and deserving victims or survivors of tragic circumstances, or as avaricious, overly entitled, and undeserving.

The following poem represents some of my reflections on the findings and the implications of those findings. I began writing it during the summer of my last trip into the field, August 2005. I left it unfinished and then resurrected it as I began reflecting on the findings during the writing of my discussion chapter.
WHEREVER IT WILL

I sit here,
planted
with coffee cup and pen,
listening to the fire’s final poetry,
breathing deeply
the fragrance of spring’s return,
the nexus of an ending.

The charred ground,
like this text,
is writ with possibility.
Pictures, china,
words on the page,
all the gathered remnants sorted,
and like ashes, swept away.

Stories caught
by my listening
as they tumble forth,
chattering over rocks,
slipping quickly by,
carving ever-deepening channels
of desires and expectations.

My feet,
are dangling in uncertainty.
The icy pain before numbness
signals an invitation
to plunge below the surface,
to pause between breaths,
and let the current take me,

Wherever it will.
CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study, I examined the process of disaster recovery in the context of two rural BC communities affected by a natural disaster, a forest fire. Drawing on the solicited accounts of residents and news media accounts, I addressed the question of how residents understood their experience and how the process of disaster recovery was discursively constructed and practiced in the context of the post-McLure Fire environments in Louis Creek and Barriere. I conceptualized the process as one of disorientation and reorientation that involved the negotiation of individual and collective subjectivities in response to the structural, material, symbolic, and social changes associated with this disaster. Further, I identified a dominant construction of disasters and disaster recovery that emphasized the material and economic consequences of disasters, while simultaneously obscuring and minimizing the emotional, psychological consequences and their implications for individual and collective identity formation in the wake of disasters.

In this chapter, I discuss my findings and their implications for practice and research as they relate to our social response to the psychosocial consequences of disasters. I begin by situating the notion of reorientation within the post-modern and post-structural construction of identity. I then discuss disorientation as an experience of discontinuity and de-routinization. I then discuss the disorientation-reorientation process in the context of the dominant discursive field of recovery as it was identified in the context of the McLure Fire. I contrast this with an examination of the disorientation-reorientation process in the context of the significant shifts in Western thinking encompassed in complexity theories and the concomitant intersection of complexity science and consciousness studies.

Reorientation

Within psychology, the recovery process from disasters is framed primarily as a stress and coping process and there is a good deal of support for this approach in the literature (Norris et al., 2002a, 2002b). This construction was also reflected in the interview texts as residents of Barriere and Louis Creek drew on the stress discourse to describe their distress and the physical and psychological effects of that distress. In contrast, within emergency management, the recovery process is framed primarily in terms of economic and material reconstruction and
rebuilding. The emphasis here is on returning individuals and communities to what is termed *normal* functioning as quickly as possible, although there is some recognition for the emotional and psychological issues for survivors. Again, my findings reflect this emphasis, with the economic discourse dominating residents' depiction of the process in both media and interview texts. Residents who lost homes and/or businesses fore-grounded the importance not only of their rebuilding but also framed the broader economic impact on their communities and the region as the primary challenge and source of their distress. They tended to rebuild as quickly as possible, moreover, those in control of the relief funding focused on facilitating this rebuilding and initiating the economic recovery as quickly as possible in the wake of the demise of the Tolko mill.

The findings also suggest, however, that the discursive practices of recovery tended to obscure and minimize the disorientation associated with the losses incurred as a result of the fire. Further, the dominant construction depicted a process that, although it was often described in coping terms, involved not only a broader range of emotional responses, but also a more extensive process involving the negotiation of identities.

My choice to use the term reorientation to describe this process draws directly from Taylor (1989), who used the term orientation to describe the way in which humans find their bearings in moral space. To orient means to find one's bearings, to become familiar with a situation, or to put oneself in the right position or relation (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002). We orient, Taylor suggested, in a moral space of questions, the answers to which are the discriminations we make about what is good or bad, right or wrong, worth doing or not, of value or not, and to what degree.

Taylor used the spatial metaphor of orientation because it implied the physical analogy to the ways in which we orient spatially as embodied beings. In response to living in physical space, we are called to develop a sense of up, down, right, and left—the physical space in which we live our embodied existence calls us to orient spatially. Similarly, he suggested that the meaning we make of the answers to the question, “Who am I?” is in answer to the call of fundamental and inescapable questions posed in the moral space of living as relational, embodied beings:

To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame of horizon within which I can
try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done. (Taylor, 1989, p. 26).

I have proposed reorientation as a way of describing the social-psychological process that was underway in Barriere and Louis Creek following the McLure Fire. I have described this as a process of identity formation and negotiation in response to the disorientation that arose in association with the myriad changes in their social and material environments. I further posit that the reorientation process evidenced in the interview texts is a specific and perhaps more dramatic version of a process that is occurring continuously within the context of later modernity. From a post-structural perspective, identity is understood to be relational, contingent, and continually underway in an ongoing culturally and historically mediated process of becoming through our social interactions as situated, embodied, symbolic beings (Shotter, 1997), or as Gergen (2001) succinctly put it, “identity is a relational achievement” (p. 177). We are continually refining and adapting our sense of who we are through our social interactions and our reflective processing of those interactions.

In framing the process as reorientation, I have also chosen a word that consciously reconnects the idea of the self as discursively produced within a material framework, an acknowledgement, in other words, that the self is embodied. The term orientation literally reminds us of the material body in material space, something more congruous with Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) notion of embodied subjectivity, or body-subjects. This acknowledges both the constitutive role of discourse and the material fact of the body and its interaction with/in the material world in shaping our understanding of the self. The material world of residents had radically changed. The hillsides surrounding the town were devastated, the Tolko Mill destroyed and along with it much of Louis Creek. 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.

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17 Although Merleau-Ponty (1962) attempted to collapse the dualism inherent in Western constructions of self (mind and body as opposed to mind-body) that were based in foundational assumptions of individuals as autonomous subjects, his notion of embodiment is still useful in this post-structural framework because it provides a way of reconnecting the post-modern notion of the discursive self with the lived experience of our materiality.
In proposing the term, reorientation, I do not wish to imply that that is the only process occurring within the larger rubric of recovery. The term highlights the fact that within the term recovery there are a variety of processes occurring and that the term in its common usage obscures the multiplicity of processes giving greater emphasis to those that are material and economic. These include the physical rebuilding process, the reestablishment of civil and political authority within affected communities, the restructuring and reestablishing of the economic activities. What is lost in this view of the process of recovery are the so called “softer” aspects of recovery, the social-psychological processes in which affected individuals and communities are engaged following a disaster. Reorientation describes a key aspect of the social-psychological domain of recovery that is ignored and obscured by the dominant discourse of recovery. In this sense, therefore, it is not proposed as a substitute for recovery but rather as a core component of recovery.

Gadamer (1994) proposed that a person’s intuitive knowing acts as a field, a background knowledge that is largely implicit and operates below the level of cognitive awareness. This field can be understood as a culturally constructed means of interpreting and making sense of our lives and our selves, a networked orienting framework consisting of a multifaceted, temporally specific, and continually evolving web of connections with people, objects, and places. These connective webs are a source and a reflection of the stories of “I” in place, in time—in effect the material and symbolical markers of the sense of self as it is maintained through our living as embodied beings in a material world (Latour, 1996). In Barriere and Louis Creek, for example, the Tolko Mill stood as a material symbol of employment and economic prosperity. For those directly employed by Tolko, the mill was a foundation for social relationships, for a sense of community, and a certain socio-economic status. For many of those living in Louis Creek, the mill existed in the background as an anchor of their community.

The corporal world, shaped through and within discursive practices (i.e., language and social practices) provides a material marker for a variety of orienting frameworks involving unique and commonly shared literal and symbolic extensions of our subjectivities or identities including: our possessions (Belk, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Klein & Baker, 2004); where we call home (Buttimer, 1980; Cuba & Hummon, 1993); our surroundings (Guiliani & Feldman, 1993; Low & Altman, 1992); our affiliations (Hogg & Abrams, 2003; Turner & Reynolds, 2003), and our immediate and extended communities (Bakker & Bakker-
Rabdau, 1973; Belk, 1988). These orienting frameworks (i.e., the attachments to and evaluations of the material and social world) provides 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. As was evidenced in the reorientation process after the McLure Fire, one of the most significant of these orienting frameworks is place.

**Disorientation**

According to the Oxford dictionary, disorientation is defined as “losing one’s bearings” — in navigational and metaphoric terms, a turning from the east. Giddens (1991) used the term disorientation to describe the experience of ontological insecurity and uncertainty that he posited was a characteristic condition of high modernity. He and others (Kugleman, 1992; Laing, 1965; Taylor, 1989) suggested that the dissolution of temporal and spatial boundaries, the flooding of the present with the future, the activities in which we are engaged, and the technology that supports these activities all encourage an experience of needing to be everywhere and nowhere simultaneously. Stress, as Kugleman (1992) contended, masks the ongoing micro experiences of grief that arise as a result of the multitude of losses incurred by living in this fashion and stands as a metaphor for the wounding inherent in this revolving door state of perpetual movement.

The disorientation that followed the McLure Fire was a heightened example of this loss of belonging and connection characteristic of every day life in late modernity. In the context of the extensive and pervasive losses associated with the fire, what had been background became, in some critical ways, the foreground. As Strauss (1993) described the effect of emotionally intense experiences, “rather than losing ones self in the experience, one now loses self because of the experience” (p. 124).

The collective nature of the experience of the fire meant that this disorientation affected residents in these communities simultaneously and coextensively and that the identity

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18 This notion of disorientation as a turning from the east derives primarily from the importance of the east to navigation. The east also implies Asia in the Western world. According to Jung, the manifest psyche of the East was a symbolic parallel to the unconscious psyche in the West. Drawing on this symbolic understanding of the east, disorientation also implies a losing of one’s bearing associated with a turning away from some aspects of self that are less a part of conscious awareness.
reorientation process that ensued occurred at the level of the individual and the collective or community. In the process, the ground of being for those directly (and in some ways indirectly) affected was both literally and metaphorically shaken. In this way, the McLure Fire acted as a discursive insertion point, a time and place in which routine social practices are momentarily disrupted. It is only when the smooth functioning of one’s background knowledge is interrupted or breaks down that one becomes aware of its functioning. 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.

In the case of Barriere and Louis Creek, the immediate and ongoing uncertainty, or the “not knowing” as several residents identified it, was the initial and perhaps most profound expression of this opening. In the sudden loss of the familiar and routine, residents 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 resulting in a sense of disorientation. The reorientation process that ensued illuminated the practice of the re-assertion of the dominant discourses associated with neo-liberalism and more generally characteristic of late modernity (e.g., masculinist discourses, expert discourse, psychological discourse) in such an opening. The findings also illustrated the ways in which non-routinized or transgressive discursive practices emerge in response to the dislocation of the routinized practice of self.

In the following section, I discuss the discursive field of recovery and reorientation from a complex systems perspective in order to explore how the dominant discursive field of recovery directed the process of reorientation as evidenced in Barriere and Louis Creek, and to consider additional possible directions given other discursive constructions.

Discursive Field of Recovery

I have suggested the notion of there being a discursive field of recovery/reorientation. In attempting to describe this field, I pointed to the ways in which this field was dominated by, or characterized by discourses associated with neo-liberalism (e.g., expert discourse, neo-liberal economic discourse) and with modernity more generally (e.g., psychological discourse,
masculinist discourses). In so doing, I also identified leadership or dynamic relations of power, gender, place, and the provision of aid or help as important aspects of this discursive field, shaped by and shaping the practices of recovery.

The threads that tied the dominant discursive framing of recovery together included a continued reification of characteristics and practices that tend to privilege men and/or value characteristics and behaviors traditionally associated with men. Research has shown that this lack of attention to the gendered patterns in the disaster recovery process (e.g., differences in vulnerabilities, effects, “coping” styles, leadership, and decision-making) can contribute to an exacerbation of women’s social vulnerability, role strain due to care giving, and increased levels of distress (Anderson & Manuel, 1994; Enarson & Morrow, 1998). The male-dominated disaster response and recovery environment evidenced in Barriere and Louis Creek is common if not ubiquitous in emergency planning and disaster management (Fordham & Ketteridge, 1998). As was seen in the present study, this tends to result in an action-oriented approach to disaster management that may preclude pro-active outreach strategies to identify and address the needs of the most vulnerable amongst those affected, including women and children. It also tends to focus attention on problems and issues that can be easily addressed through action and to obscure the other aspects of the recovery process. These other aspects can include emotional and cognitive processing of the profound symbolic losses and changes associated with such things as the loss of homes, community, and environment. Although such losses have been identified as important aspects of recovery (Gerrity & Steinglass, 1994), they continue to be largely ignored in the organized response to disasters and there is a continued need for research on the social and cultural factors that facilitate or impede long-term recovery in the face of such losses (Litz & Gibson, 2006).

Another significant and intersecting thread in the findings was the extension of the market metaphor and neo-liberal economic discourse more generally to social arenas and issues in the recovery process. The restructuring of capitalism in neo-liberal economic discourse emphasizes an informational and global economy and a redefined role for the nation state (Castells, 2000). This restructuring frames as desirable and natural an increased social and economic mobility with a concomitant increase in social disconnection, and a greater reliance on experts whose expertise is more and more narrowly defined (Castells, 2000; Fairclough, 1999; Putnam, 2000).
The discursive construction of recovery offered in the media texts and largely mirrored in residents’ interview accounts was of a process that was largely economic. This construction often precluded a meaningful response to the distress and suffering of those most adversely affected by the fire, framing residents primarily in utilitarian and individualist terms. Within this construction, the valued self is the functional self, productive, independent, and instrumental in determining the course and direction of their lives (Crossley, 1999). As was seen in the findings of the present study, within this neo-liberal framing, suffering and mental health issues more generally are positioned as something to be contained, privatized, and managed, the result of individual failures and not a social concern (Coburn, 2004). The marginalization of those who were out of step with the dominant framing of recovery, those who continued to struggle, may have limited the availability and access to appropriate support for both men and women.

Although service providers working with the Canadian Red Cross and other recovery organizations continued to be involved in the community over an extended period of time following the McLure Fire, service providers who were interviewed agreed that the range and duration of disaster-related psycho-social services were limited, particularly in terms of psychological and emotional support. Given the stigma that is already associated with accessing mental health services in general, this may have undermined residents’ willingness to access services where they existed (Corrigan, 2004; Ottati, Bodenhausen, & Newman, 2005).

Drawing on a Foucauldian term, the discursive field of recovery as identified in this study created a disciplinary matrix that constructed notions of the good and bad citizen or subject and the normal and preferred way of recovering (Foucault, 1991). The predominant subject positions offered by this discursive construction were paradoxically disempowering. They suggested agency and action, yet constructed residents as inadequately equipped to take action without the outside support and guidance of experts. This may have limited rather than enhanced community capacity, and constrained the ability of individuals and collectives to define, access, and developed resources that would support their self-defined (individual and collective) trajectories of recovery/reorientation (Coburn, 2004).

Further, and in keeping with the neo-liberal emphasis on individualism (e.g., entrepreneurship) and the dissolution of collectives (e.g., unions) (see Bourdieu, 1998), the economic construction of recovery contributed to a fracturing of the combined social fabric of the two communities. Research has shown that the disruption of a disaster can tear the fabric or
shared attributes of affected communities (Bolton, 1999; Erickson, 1976a, 1995; Kaniasty & Norris, 1995). The individualistic framework associated with the discourses of neo-liberalism encouraged a concomitant individualized framing of the reorientation process that may have lessened the likelihood of mutual help. Levine and Thompson (2004) suggested that it is the degree of shared identity that determines the likelihood of an individual reaching out to others to help. The practice of focusing attention on the individual and framing the "problem" of the disaster as primarily economic, certain outcomes became more likely including the privatizing and individualizing of distress or suffering and the framing of this suffering as a problem to be solved with the help of experts and through economic and material means.

As suggested by Kugleman (1992), however, the individualization and sequestration of suffering is not peculiar to disasters but is, rather, symptomatic of a more pervasive cultural relationship to suffering. This framing of suffering arose within an implicit and, less often explicit discourse of psychology, that is, a modern discourse of suffering.

Psychology and Suffering

The structural effects of psychology’s construction of disasters as causing wounding or trauma cues a medical discourse, the symbolic function of which has been to turn pain and suffering into technical problems needing technical solutions (Illich, 1990). In pre-modern times, on the other hand, pain was, “an experience of the soul” (Illich, 1990, p. 149). The medicalization of pain (physical and psychic) has encouraged a more distant and passive relationship with suffering that obscures what he described as the referential aspect of pain:

Pain is the sign for something not answered; it refers to something open, something that goes on the next moment to demand, What is wrong?…When I suffer pain, I am aware that a question is being raised…The medicalization of pain...has rendered either incomprehensible or shocking the idea that skill in the art of suffering might be the most effective and universally acceptable way of dealing with pain. (Illich, 1990, p. 142-145)

The stress and coping framework when applied to the distress/suffering of disasters not only masks the grief associated with both the material and symbolic losses and applies an individualistic frame, it also positions that grief as a problem to be solved rather than a question to be answered. Furthermore, through the stress discourse, the distress of disasters is individualized and removed from the social context; an understanding of this distress as a sign of a system in motion is precluded. Grieving, at least in dominant Western constructions is also
individualistic but unlike the stress discourse it anticipates a temporary and necessary loss of functioning, albeit one that is increasingly mandated to fit economic schedules. A time-limited loss of functionality is anticipated and legitimized with grief. Grief also invites mourning and reflection, a process of sitting in the pause of grief, being with grief, engaging in “the action of feeling or expressing sorrow” (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002). Understanding recovery as reorientation also implies movement, to find your bearings requires movement and the ability to stand still, to notice, and listen. It implies creativity and a more conscious process of forging new connections.

As Hacking (1995) suggested, traumatic stress and stress more generally have become the dominant construction of suffering that may more accurately be described as grief, or, in the case of traumatic stress, horror and grief combined. If traumatic stress is an expression of an “infinite passion…to flee the flesh” as Kugleman (1992, p. 27) proposed, then it is also the impassionate expression of the grief associated with that fleeing of the flesh, with the mundane and profound experiences of loss we encounter in attempting to be in all places but the here and now. Constructing the distress of disasters as stress, traumatic or otherwise, implicitly points to the ways in which these experiences hamper our normalized attempts to lift ourselves out of time and place. Whereas grief highlights mortality, stress highlights the contradictory experiences that result from being freed from place and time as mobile workers and doers, while simultaneously being frozen in time and place by the immediate and visceral experience of our embodiment.

In the framing of these experiences of loss as stress, the individual and collective response to change and impermanence is problematized and turned into something to manage, something to fix. The discursive double entendre of the word fix is not accidental. “Fixing” is defined as the “the process of rendering (a negative, etc.) permanent” (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002). It is also the verb of “to fix,” or “to fasten,” “to become firmly attached or implanted” “to secure from change” and “to secure against displacement” (Simpson, 2005). Grief is held with/in the body. It is a deeply embodied experience that involves a re/membering – a re-embODYing of the person who is lost through reflection. The pause is more fluid. Mourning is a process of transforming grief, not managing it.
An Alternative Construction

At this point, the story of recovery/reorientation bifurcates. I intentionally borrow this term from the physical sciences, complexity and quantum sciences to be specific, much as I have borrowed the term from navigational sciences to describe the social-psychological process of recovery. My intent is to reframe and recontextualize the story of recovery and reorientation in order to discuss the way in which the discursive construction or field of recovery shaped the reorientation process as it was constructed in Barriere and Louis Creek, and to suggest or examine some other possibilities hinted at in the findings.

Complexity and quantum theories are one of modern science’s latest attempts to make sense of and explain order, disorder, and the emergence of novelty in living systems (Capra, 1996; Nicolis & Prigogine, 1989). The discursive construction offered by/within these theories, offers an alternative perspective on materiality, energy, and the functioning of complex systems. Quantum theories have constructed a universe of probabilities in which small shifts can incur enormous and unpredictable changes (i.e., the butterfly effect) and where far from equilibrium systems can display patterns of behavior that are less predictable and more “chaotic” (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). In such states, systems can exhibit emergent behavior, or from a mathematical perspective, bifurcate, that is a suddenly branch off into new, unanticipated directions or states:

At the bifurcation point the system can “choose”—the term is used metaphorically—from among several possible paths, or states. Which path it will take will depend on the system’s history and on various external conditions and can never be predicted. There is an irreducible random element at each bifurcation point (Capra, 1996, p. 183).

Complexity (and quantum) theories shift away from the characteristic dualistic thinking of Newtonian, or mechanical metaphors that assume linear causality and characterized by either-or thinking. From the latter perspective, systems are either ordered or disordered. From the view of complexity and quantum theories, however, order and disorder exist on a continuum and chaos and disorder can no longer be viewed simply as dysfunctional, but, rather, as the creative potential of a system. At the bifurcation point, new structures of greater complexity and order can emerge spontaneously. Further, where and how we pay attention matters to what we see, as there is a constitutive effect of noticing. The conceptual shift entailed in this move is significant in the consideration of disasters and disaster recovery/reorientation as it sets the ground for a different meta-framework through which to examine the reorientation process.
Social scientists have applied some of these same constructs, particularly the concepts of complexity and emergence to social systems positing that during times of system instability new, non-routinized relationships, activities, and organizations can emerge (Elliott & Kiel, 1997; Stacey, 1996). In an extensive review of the sociological literature on disasters, Drabek and McEntyre (2003) concluded that there would be value in adopting an approach to disasters that meaningfully incorporated and valued emergence. This, they argued, might support more flexible, inclusive, and decentralized emergency management practices that were more likely to value resident survivors as resources and contribute to a more collaborative and innovative responses during recovery.

The construction of disasters as adverse events, problems to be fixed and moved beyond harkens to a Newtonian and mechanical view of the world that ignores this fundamental shift in Western thinking. Instead, examining the recovery/reorientation process from the perspective of complexity, the direction or path of reorientation as it unfolded in Barriere and Louis Creek can be seen as one of many possible directions at a creative moment in a systems history. The patterns of discourse and discursive practice I identified suggest that particular discursive constructions or historical patterns were at work shaping the meanings and practices associated with recovery/reorientation.

Discourses, like the living systems they transcribe, exist in complex, mobile, and dynamic interconnected webs out of which new constructions and practices emerge. Although the discursive practices associated with disaster recovery tend to be based largely in an uncritical acceptance of the framing that the language of “recovery” suggests — that this is a process of healing from a wound as quickly as possible—this is not the only option available.

The fire was like an influx of energy into a complex system, overwhelming its adaptive capacity. The loss of bearings, the dis-orientation prompted a process of reorienting through doing (i.e., reestablishing, replanting). The dominant discursive framing of recovery, which includes the privileging of an economic and material frame of reference, the construction of suffering as stress, demands—thinking of Foucault’s disciplinary matrix—a movement quickly past the pause of disruption and disorder. Although the dominant discourse of recovery implied movement, in practice the activity of recovery was a holding in place. The dominant construction supports a construction of place that “fixes” in place, re-inscribing the status quo and ignoring the fluidity of the practice of suffering. Geographical differences in the reorientation process
reflected to a large degree the fire’s dividing line but the discursive patterns largely ignored these boundaries.

Viewing disasters from a complex systems perspective, emergence is a likely outcome and where and what we pay attention to becomes a critical element in the construction of that which emerges. The concept of coherence implies a level of interrelatedness between humans and the world (also implied by a critical discursive framework) that calls for a greater consideration of the fabric of recovery/reorientation.

In the findings, there were many expressions of the creativity of disorder or chaos—a word which is derived from the ancient Greek’s name for the Goddess who birthed the universe. The emergence of several new collectives or organizations in the wake of the McLure Fire is in keeping with other research on the emergent nature of organizational networks in disasters (Tierney & Trainor, 2004). These organizations emerged from and in response to the social processes of recovery as creative responses to disorientation and to the lack of congruence between some of the collective subjectivities and the constrained options available through the dominant structuring of the recovery process.

The outpouring of compassion could be considered another example of emergence. Several authors have suggested that compassion and healing may be emergent properties of social systems (McTaggart, 2002; Mehl-Madrona, 2005). In the context of the McLure Fire, compassion was evidenced in both more intimately relational ways in which people directly worked alongside residents to support them in their recovery process, and more pervasively in less direct ways through the translation of compassion into economic and material goods. The discursive practice of framing compassion/help in material and economic terms has implications for the degree to which these expressions of interrelatedness support practices of connection and relationship building within affected communities.

The shifts in ontological relationships with the world and living evidenced in some of the interview texts are other potential examples of emergence. The degree of reflection on the process of the disaster and the recovery/reorienation process that followed varied from resident to resident. The dominant discursive practices supported a rush to return to normal functioning, a rush in effect past the pause of the disaster that did little to encourage this reflection. Further, the individualistic emphasis throughout the dominant construction did little to support individual or collective reflection or to support a translation of such emergent thinking into social action.
Implications for Research and Practice

The implications of shifting to view disaster recovery not simply as a process of coping or healing, but also as a creative and discursively produced process of reorientation has a number of implications for practice and research. The discourse of emergency management has been gradually shifting to incorporate resiliency frameworks, the aim of which is to empower and build capacity in individuals and communities in the wake of disasters. Whereas the dominant discursive practice of recovery as evidenced in Barriere and Louis Creek did include this framing, at least rhetorically, the effect of many of the practices was exactly the opposite. The dominance of the economic framing precluded much meaningful engagement with the suffering and generated a sense of urgency that encouraged individuals and their communities to rush past the discomfort of the pause to a shore called normal.

One of the implications of examining the discursive construction of recovery and considering the process from a complex systems perspective is a consideration of practices that explore the pause of disasters, the disorientation and distress, as invitations for reflection and curiosity. Such considerations would more meaningfully take into consideration the notions of emergence, coherence and non-locality as they are evidenced in social systems. One of the most interesting emergent discourses in the West currently is the discourse that is arising from the conversations between Tibetan (Mahayana) Buddhism, a philosophical tradition of Buddhism, and complexity and cognitive sciences. These conversations are happening in a number of areas including medicine (see the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society, University of Massachusetts School of Medicine) and are resulting in a growing body of research on mindfulness-based strategies for supporting health and well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002). The concept of mindfulness arises as a practice within Buddhist traditions and reflects a different discursive construction of suffering. From this perspective, suffering is not a problem but an aspect of our embodied existence and the mind’s construction of the experience of pain (psychological and/or physical).

Mindful practices are being integrated into mainstream psychological interventions with a variety of problems such as depression and anxiety where they are constructed as experiential, preventative practices that can be effectively taught to groups of individuals (Segal et al., 2002).
Although positioned within psychology as an intervention strategy, mindfulness is more accurately described as a lived practice of engaging in moment-to-moment awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 1994). In this way, mindfulness engages with the pauses between actions, including the action of the thinking mind. Integrating mindfulness into the context of the planned social response to the disorientation of disasters might provide alternatives to standard counseling interventions that tend to continue to treat the individual in isolation from the community and to focus on the prevention of pathology. Research is needed on the potential role of mindfulness practices within disaster response and how or whether these may open up the space for and attention to emergence in disasters.

Another implication of working from a complexity orientation to disasters is that this approach might encourage a more meaningful acknowledgement of the interconnectivity and interrelatedness of the affects and responses within social systems. For some time now in the disaster research literature there has been a call for a shift in focus from traditional top-down, hierarchical intervention models to more client-centered, bottom-up models that incorporate local expertise and adopt a community-as-client approach (Cox & Espinoza, 2005; Hobfoll, deVries, & Cameron, 1995; King, 2005; Norris et al., 2002a). This shift reflects both an awareness of the need for a contextual approach to addressing the complex array of individual and collective stressors that arise as a result of the disruption and loss caused by disasters and a need to engage affected communities as active participants rather than passive recipients of services (King, 2005).

A disconnect continues between the theory and application of these principles in emergency management. As Morrow (1999) pointed out in her study of community vulnerability in disasters, “while it is widely accepted, if rarely practiced that sustainable development programs require involvement and leadership at the local level, this important concept is inadequately applied in the disaster context” (p. 11). Those with the most intimate knowledge of a community’s strengths, vulnerabilities, and cultural norms are those who live in it. The strength of community-based organizations and of residents themselves is their proximity to the situation; they are familiar with each other, with the environment, the local cultures and subgroups in their community, and they are likely to have the most intimate knowledge of their needs and resources.
Effective psychosocial support would, therefore, benefit from a more integrated approach grounded in local knowledge, expertise, and the capacities of those directly affected in ways that facilitate collective and individual processing. As was seen in the case of the two communities in the present study, the idiosyncratic nature of the recovery process and the commonalities and differences across sub-groups need to be acknowledged. Furthermore, because disasters can result in an intense but very short-lived influx of resources and the focused attention and intervention of governments and nongovernmental agencies, there are some opportunities not just for reparation but also capacity building. In this way, at a collective level, disasters can be viewed as catalysts for change and capacity building. This may be of particular importance in rural areas where health and other social resources are often already marginal and where the disaster-related influx might support more sustainable options.

In rural communities, the affected community is always the first and primary response organ, and the strengthening of a community's capacity to meet and even grow from a disaster will be largely dependent on the patterns of vulnerabilities and strengths. Precisely because of the lack of resources and the challenges of living in sparsely populated areas, rural people tend to be creative and resourceful. Moreover, their communities often have strong networks of volunteers and an attitude of mutuality that results from a more immediate experience of their dependence upon each other. Some of the factors that can be seen as potential vulnerabilities in rural areas affected by disasters (e.g., marginal incomes, lack of resources, the absence of formalized government structures) can also be seen as potential strengths from a community capacity building approach to emergency management.

Landau and Saul (2004) have suggested a community resilience program that encourages community members to develop their own working definitions of resiliency and to identify and act on overarching goals that support community involvement and capacity building. Cox and Espinoza (2005) have also proposed a theoretical model for working from a more creative and community-capacity building approach with communities engaged in large-scale, traumatic transitions. Examples of the implementation of such social resiliency approaches are very limited, however, and research is needed in order to develop realistic strategies for their implementation, and to examine their effectiveness in the post disaster context (Watson, Ritchie, Demer, Bartone, & Pfefferbaum, 2006).
Conclusion

The present study has underscored the need for more critical and creative responses to disasters and how we conceptualize and respond to them. Koehler (1996, as cited in Drabek & McEntire, 2003) suggested that applying complexity theory to the study of disasters and the emergent behavior following disasters might open new, more flexible and responsive emergency management practices. The findings in the present study support this call but also suggest that approaching the disorientation and distress associated with disasters may benefit from a deeper shift in perspectives, one that involves the consideration of a different relationship with disorientation. Shotter (2003) described the possibilities inherent in such a shift away from a dualistic (Cartesian), mechanical (Newtonian) problem-solving orientation to distress and disorder:

In other words, when faced with a disorienting circumstance, a circumstance in which we do not know how ‘to go on’, instead of turning away from it and burying ourselves deep in thought in an attempt to mentally and imaginatively construct a way to explain it in ways already familiar to us, we should, so to speak, stay in dialogue with it. We should look it over as we look over a painting or a sculpture in an art gallery We should respond to it from up close, from a distance, from this angle and that, until we can begin to gain a shaped and vectored sense of the space of possibilities it opens up to us in the responses it ‘calls’ from us. And we should do this in collaboration with the others involved with us in the practice in questions (p. 462-463).

As seen in the findings of this study, the disaster recovery process involves individuals in a deeply personal and yet also profoundly collective process of navigating and reconstructing identities. This reorientation process is shaped and influenced by the discursive practices of recovery in ways that emphasize the economic and material aspects of recovery while at the same time obscuring and minimizing the emotional, psychological, and many of the social aspects of recovery. The rush to return to normal as quickly as possible makes intuitive sense. There is the pragmatic urgency of rebuilding structures and infrastructures in order for people to have shelter and safety and to restore the basic functioning of society. There is also 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 is also attributable in good measure to the ideological assumptions of an economic agenda that reifies productivity above all else.
The dominance of the economic agenda positions suffering or anything that interferes with productivity as a problem to be solved through technology, bureaucracy, and the maintenance of the status quo. This discursive construction of recovery individualizes and privatizes the psychological and emotional distress associated with disasters, resulting in a sequestering of suffering and a social denial of the depth and duration of the reorientation process. Within this dominant construction, gendered and other structural and social inequities persist and are reinforced. Further, the creative potential of the disorientation associated with disasters is largely ignored, or at times actively denied.

Were we to engage with the disorientation or disasters in the fashion suggested by Shotter (2003) or by the mindfulness orientation of Buddhist philosophy and practices, the reorientation process would potentially be one of individual and collective exploration, a sitting in the experience rather than moving through it as quickly as possible. From this perspective, disasters might offer not only devastation and destruction, but also the potential to practice, to become familiar with, and to exercise the muscles required to meet the disorientation and change so characteristic of late modernity. By entering into conversation with disorientation, rather than resisting and managing it, the social-psychological process following a disaster could be reconstructed as a process of discovery rather than recovery — the responses called forth from the breathing space between the question and the answer and our willingness to sit in these pauses of not knowing.
THIS QUILT

A pattern has emerged
In the sewing together of pieces,
New and old lying side by side,
Tied together by measured stitches,
Squares aligned and juxtaposed,
Telling new stories.

Picture the fire,
Symbol of endings and beginnings,
Transformations and ruptures,
As you lie underneath
Listening to fear's voice
Tell the story of our vulnerability.

See the orange
Of the smoke shrouded sun,
The black of devastation,
And natures green reclamation,
Each square a bringing forth
Of the story of our perilous lives.

This quilt
May be folded away in your closet,
Or perhaps its diamond-squared stories,
Lovingly crafted as a question,
Will invite your curiosity
And our knowing together.
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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INITIAL CONTACT

The University of British Columbia
Faculty of Education
Counseling Psychology Program
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

[Date]
Dear [participant]:

We are inviting you to participate in 2 related research projects entitled, "Systemic and community-level processes in the recovery from the effects of firestorms (2003) in two rural BC communities: A focus group study" and a more comprehensive study "Rising from the Ashes: A grounded theory of the community level recovery following the wildfires of 2003.” Both studies are funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Over the next 12 to 36 months we will be conducting individual and group interviews with community members in Barriere, Louis Creek and Kelowna with individuals who have been involved in their community's recovery process since the Firestorms, 2003. The purpose of these two concurrent projects is to gain a better understanding of the recovery process within fire-affected communities, and the ways in which various systems and community level factors are influencing the health and recovery processes in these communities.

During the past decade our understanding of the psychological and emotional impact of natural disasters on individuals has grown, but our understanding of how disasters affect communities, and the processes and experiences involved in recovery has not kept pace, particularly as it pertains to the Canadian context. Natural disasters, such as the forest fires that so heavily impacted your community last summer, are collective-traumatic events. They are also potentially recurring events. In order for governments, disaster response and recovery organizations and communities themselves to respond more effectively and relevantly to these events it is important to have a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the response and recovery process at the community level. Your participation in this project will contribute to our collective ability to respond to communities impacted by natural disasters in the future.

You are being invited to participate in individual interviews and/or focus groups to discuss your understanding of the recovery process in your community, with a particular focus on your experience of the ways in which leadership, organizational responses, government responses and other social and structural forces are impacting your process and that of the larger community.
Title of Project: Rising from the ashes: A grounded theory of the community-level recovery following the wildfires of 2003.

To Whom It May Concern:

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the recovery process at the systems or community level within communities affected by the firestorms, 2003, and the ways in which these factors are influencing the health and recovery process within these communities. This study is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

For the purposes of this study, we are recruiting individuals who are residents in one of three identified communities (Barriere, Louis Creek, Kelowna), who self-identify as being involved in some way in the recovery process within their community or region and are willing to discuss their experiences and/or impressions of the process in their community since the fires. Any time someone talks about a challenging situation, such as the one faced by your community, there is some risk of stirring up unwanted emotions. We are also ready to offer support and/or referrals to local supports should you wish to access such support.

As a volunteer you will be asked to participate in at least one 1 to 2 hour interview regarding your understanding of the recovery process in your community, with a particular focus on your experience of the ways in which leadership, organizational responses, government responses and other social and structural forces are impacting your experience and that of the larger community. If possible, you may be interviewed an additional 2 times over the course of the next 3 years. Should you choose to, you may also be invited to participate in a 1.5 to 3 hour focus group interview in your community. Therefore your time involvement may be as little as 2 hours or as much as 10 hours.
APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Table 5. Demographic profile of research participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Duration of Residency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University/</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>College</td>
<td>years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married, Common Law</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total = 43</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 43 individuals participated in at least one semi-structured interview over the course of 2 years, from November 2003 to November 2005. Of these, 9 were non-residents who were involved in the recovery process in Barriere and Louis Creek. 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. 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 - $60 thousand (N = 17).

Detailed demographic information was collected for all the study participants. Given the small size of both Barriere and Louis Creek however, and the difficulty of maintaining confidentiality in that context, I made the decision not to include this demographic information in greater detail or to connect it with individual participants through their pseudonyms.
APPENDIX D: INITIAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

The interview is intended to be open-ended and responsive so that the answers given by the interviewee are meant to continually inform and shape the evolving conversation. The following questions are meant to encourage the respondent to tell their story and are only suggested as a way of entering into the subject of interest, namely the systems-level and community-level factors and processes impacting the disaster recovery process in their community and their impressions of what influence these factors have had on themselves and their community.

Introduction:

The purpose of this interview is to better understand how individuals and the community are experiencing the process of recovering and rebuilding from the forest fires last summer. We are interested in your impressions of your own process and that of your family, but also of the community as a whole and any systems-level factors that have been playing a role in this process.

As we proceed with this interview, I may ask you to respond to a more specific question, or to elaborate on issues that arise in what I am hearing. This will help me in understanding your experiences.

If at any point in this interview, I ask about something that you don't wish to discuss, I want you to let me know that and feel free to not discuss that. If at any point during our conversation you feel you would like to stop, or that you want a break, I want you to let me know that as well, and we’ll stop and re-assess whether we want to continue. This is as much your interview as mine, we’re co-investigators in this way and it is important for me that you feel comfortable guiding and shaping our conversation about your experiences.

Possible Prompts:

1. Can you describe for me what has been happening for you and for your community since the fires?
2. Can you describe any issues, or factors that have influenced this process for you thus far?
3. Can you describe any issues or factors that have influenced the community process thus far?
4. How has this process evolved over time? Can you describe any patterns that you have seen emerging in this process?
5. How would you describe your health since the fires?

6. Have any of the factors that you have described to me already, influenced your health? And if so, in what ways?

7. How do you anticipate the process unfolding over the next few months, and couple of years?

8. Can you describe your sense of what might be the most significant factors that will influence this process in the upcoming months, years?

9. What is your sense of the emotional/psychological impact of these events on the community thus far?

10. Is there anything else that you think would be important for me to know in order to understand the recovery process in your community?
APPENDIX E: ATLAS.TI SOFTWARE

I used Atlas.ti version 5 (Muhr, 2005) to help manage the data in the present study. This software was designed to support a systematic analysis of qualitative data including text, graphics, audio, and video data.

All interview transcripts in the present study were saved in Microsoft Word and then imported into the Atlas.ti program. I did the initial coding (i.e., open coding) of all the interviews using Atlas.ti and coding with a mix of in vivo codes (i.e., verbatim words and phrases from transcripts), and descriptive codes (i.e., short descriptors I generated). I then reviewed the transcripts and codes and began to make code families, or categories, using Atlas.ti (Figure 8). At this stage I used the program to generate code lists which, with further analysis I collapsed into categories and themes. I continued to use the program with some of the key interviews, those that were generating the most relevant quotes, and also returned to manual coding using pen and paper and Microsoft Word to develop the key aspects of the disorientation and reorientation processes. Throughout the coding process I used Atlas.ti’s memo generating process to develop theoretical memos.

P: Um, I don’t know, I don’t know. I think it’s, it’s, um, scared the community in that they realize wow, you know, things do not just go on as always. Anything could happen. Over night your life could change which is, uh, kind of a sad thing of course but, uh, maybe it’s a wake up call for everyone. But those that lives hadn’t been changed, they’re still quite comfortable. So I don’t know. I don’t know. Um, I don’t really know how I would put it. I don’t know.

INT: What about for yourself?

P: I haven’t figured that out yet either. I know it’s changed our lives and we’ll see how, uh, I’m hoping to have a much simpler life than we had before because we had too much. Obviously I had too much of everything so I have to start again from scratch. Um, my husband’s still into the well we, I’ll just work harder and get back to where we were kind of thing. I’d like
## APPENDIX F: CONTENT MATRIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPICS &amp; SUBTOPICS</th>
<th>3. IDENTIFIED NEEDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. EFFECTS OF FIRES</td>
<td>3.1 Rebuilding homes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Environmental impact</td>
<td>3.2 Rebuilding businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Economic impact – general to fires</td>
<td>3.3 Creating jobs/stimulating economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Loss of jobs/employment</td>
<td>3.4 Stay strong/stick together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Business losses</td>
<td>3.5 Grieve/memorialize loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Increased social cohesions/community</td>
<td>3.6 Reestablish routines/return to normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Brings out the best in people</td>
<td>3.7 Environmental assessment/management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Increased social conflict/fracturing of community</td>
<td>3.8 Reflect/learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 The worst comes out in people</td>
<td>3.9 Get creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9 Loss of homes – symbolic focus</td>
<td>3.10 Future prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.10 Loss of homes - structural focus</td>
<td>3.11 Allocation of funding for recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.11 Adverse psychological-emotional impact (trauma, grief, loss)</td>
<td>3.12 Other (specify)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.12 Positive psychological impact (inspired, awakened)</td>
<td>3.13 Need for patience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.13 Routines disrupted</td>
<td>3.14 Need to celebrate heroes/give recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.14 Physical impact (questioning “god”)/finding “god”</td>
<td>3.15 Making connections to global issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.15 Ongoing effects on health</td>
<td>3.16 Information/cont assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.16 Ongoing threat/fires still underway</td>
<td>3.17 School associated (books, supplies etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.17 Dislocation</td>
<td>3.18 Rebuild the mill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.18 Other</td>
<td>3.19 Need to put out fires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.19 Other</td>
<td>3.20 Need for personal safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.20 Firefighting</td>
<td>3.21 Need for health services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. PUBLIC RESPONSE TO EFFECTS</td>
<td>4. IDENTIFIED ISSUES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Psych/emotional support (private-local to local including community based groups)</td>
<td>4.1 Government response inadequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Psych/emotional support (private-non local to local)</td>
<td>4.2 Tolko closing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Psych/emotional support (local government – TNRD)</td>
<td>4.3 Tolko – corporate citizen (+ or -)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Psych/emotional support (nonlocal government– BC Feds)</td>
<td>4.4 Fire management (including related forest mgmt issues)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Psych/emotional support (NGO’s – Red Cross, Salvation Army, Christian groups)</td>
<td>4.5 Help (material goods/donations) overwhelming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Funding (private – local)</td>
<td>4.6 Help (material goods/donations) inadequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Funding (private – non local)</td>
<td>4.7 Help (material goods/donations) misdirected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Funding (government – TNRD)</td>
<td>4.8 Conflict in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9 Funding (government – Provincial)</td>
<td>4.9 Too much whining/complaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10 Funding (government – Federal)</td>
<td>4.10 Local voice not validated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11 Funding (NGO’s)</td>
<td>4.11 Local leadership absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.12 Practical/material support (private – local to local)</td>
<td>4.12 Global complications (BSE, Softwood tariffs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.13 Practical/material support (private – nonlocal)</td>
<td>4.13 Ongoing threat (forests still dry etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.14 Practical/material support (local gov’t.- TNRD)</td>
<td>4.14 Global implications of fires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.15 Practical/material support (nonlocal gov’t.- BC/Fed)</td>
<td>4.15 Need to remember the blessings/pass them on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.16 Practical/material support (NGO’s)</td>
<td>4.16 Community supporting community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.17 Spiritual support (local to local)</td>
<td>4.17 Omitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.18 Spiritual support (non-local)</td>
<td>4.18 Mother nature (makes a point, as context for awareness) [as threat-see 4:13]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.19 Other</td>
<td>4.19 Other - specify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.20 Firefighting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.21 Emergency Management in general</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.22 Infrastructure repairs (phone, hydro)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.23 Providing information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.24 Re location (during crisis)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.25 Re location (moving because of job loss, ongoing threat)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX G: IDENTITY MATRIX

| Occupation                  | 1 North Thompson Valley | 3 Barriere | 5 Louis Creek | 7 Other area (McLure, Vavenby, Exlou) | 9 Clearwater | 11 Kamloops B.C. | 13 Canada | 15 other |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|--------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------|
| A Resident                  |                         |           |              |                                     |             |                 |           |         |
| B Rancher                   |                         |           |              |                                     |             |                 |           |         |
| C Tolko employee            |                         |           |              |                                     |             |                 |           |         |
| D Tolko Mill Representative |                         |           |              |                                     |             |                 |           |         |
| E Small Business            |                         |           |              |                                     |             |                 |           |         |
| F Forestry (more generally including ministry, forest service) |                         |           |              |                                     |             |                 |           |         |
| G Chamber of Commerce       |                         |           |              |                                     |             |                 |           |         |
| H Public school representative |                        |           |              |                                     |             |                 |           |         |
| I Healthcare worker         |                         |           |              |                                     |             |                 |           |         |
| J Artist                    |                         |           |              |                                     |             |                 |           |         |
| K Regional Government       |                         |           |              |                                     |             |                 |           |         |
| L Provincial Government     |                         |           |              |                                     |             |                 |           |         |
| M Federal Government        |                         |           |              |                                     |             |                 |           |         |
| N Not specific              |                         |           |              |                                     |             |                 |           |         |
| O Infrastructure organizations (Hydro, BC Tel) |                         |           |              |                                     |             |                 |           |         |
| P NGO’s/SPCA/Churches       |                         |           |              |                                     |             |                 |           |         |
| Q Union                     |                         |           |              |                                     |             |                 |           |         |
APPENDIX H: NORTH THOMPSON STAR JOURNAL REFERENCES


APPENDIX I: EMERGENCY PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1: Facilitate and mentor the development of representative local leadership structures in unincorporated communities.

Recommendation #2: Facilitate the establishment of local recovery committees that can represent the interests of affected individuals/families and serve as intermediaries with relief and funding agencies.

Recommendation #3: Acknowledge and work to meaningfully include the various subcultures and groups in the decision making process.

Recommendation #4: Not all help is equal – consider the nature of the helping relationship and creating opportunities for reciprocity in structuring recovery programs.

Recommendation #5: Support communities in identifying local vulnerabilities and resources.

Recommendation #6: Integrate, consult with, and resource existing services rather than creating new services that are unsustainable in the long-term recovery process.

Recommendation #7: Provide clear information throughout the process in ways that acknowledge the constraints and unique challenges of rural environments.

Recommendation #8: Immediately establish ‘one-stop shopping’ options in affected communities such that individuals can go to one place for information and resources.

Recommendation #9: Put the word out about specific needs—people may want to help but not know what or how to do so.

Recommendation #10: Include women and children as active participants in and resources to the recovery process.
APPENDIX J: EXAMPLE OF REFLEXIVE MEMOS
IDENTITY MEMO

August 12, 2004

The issue of identity, subjectivity is present in almost all the conversations and interviews with residents at some point. It is present in the embodied sense of my encounters with individuals and the groups of individuals as geographically situated subjectivities centered on the land to which they are emotionally, psychologically, economically, and socially attached.

There is an acute sense of importance of belonging and rootedness, that sense that this is ‘me,’ and who I am extends beyond my body to the others that share the social space I inhabit, and to a terrain, to a place in the world defined by borders and boundaries of culture and geography. This is, perhaps at the very heart of who we are in our selves and in our bodies, a mirror geographical expression of our sense of ourselves as bounded and separate from other such that in the midst of such a crisis, with economic and social rootedness at stake, with the experience of continuity at stake, and the rootedness of an unquestioned commonality at stake, that identity becomes a central issue. Our unconscious ‘selfing’ made conscious because of the breach in continuity and the uncertainty that ensues.

The beehive burner is the only thing left standing on the Tolko site, marking a contested site that defined both communities in different ways and may perhaps define new identities and relationships depending on what emerges from their collective negotiation of the future of this property. What an interesting metaphoric artifact of the fires, this symbol of a collective birthing place, of shared industry and meaning in the midst of this charred land devoid of trees and grass, surrounded by blackened hillsides and toothpick, charred trees and the red of the still standing but singed and dying pine, with the sun beating down and smell of smoke in the valley from this year’s fires.

August 23, 2005

At various points in a single interview, residents have provided differing descriptions of their community identity. They might use Barriere to mean both Barriere and Louis Creek, and at other times to mean only Barriere. They described themselves as residents of the Lower North Thompson, and then later in the same interview would decry official attempts (i.e., statements by elected officials) to encourage them to define their identity in more regional and less specifically
local terms. Residents seem to be engaged in an interactive, dynamic social process involving a vigorous negotiation of individual and collective identities. They seem to be finding their way in what several have described as their “new normal,” in the changed landscape of their lives.

This theme of shifting identities continues to press forth in my iterative analysis of the interviews. I have struggled to find a term to describe what seems to be occurring, trying on “reconstruction,” “recreation,” and “redefining” but none of those terms seems to fully capture the sense I have of the deep connection between place and identity in this process. In reading Charles Taylor’s (1989) communitarian concept of identity and his use of the terms “orientation” and ‘webs of interlocution’ I am wondering whether this is perhaps a more accurate way of understanding the process as a relational construction of identity. In the notion of orientation I may have found a way of describing the process that I have been mapping through this analysis.
APPENDIX K: BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services and Administration
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Certificate of Approval

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<th>DEPARTMENT</th>
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<tr>
<td>The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the Committee and the experimental procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.</td>
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Approval of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board by one of the following:

Dr. James Frankish, Chair,
Dr. Cay Holbrook, Associate Chair,
Dr. Susan Rowley, Associate Chair

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures