

Flood of emotions: emotional work and long-term disaster recovery

Rebecca Whittle^{a,*,1}, Marion Walker^a, Will Medd^a, Maggie Mort^b

^aLancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YQ, United Kingdom

^bDepartment of Sociology, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YT, United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses concepts of emotion work and emotional labour to explore people's experiences of the long-term disaster recovery process. It draws on data taken from two qualitative research projects which looked at adults' and children's recovery from the floods of June 2007 in Hull, UK. The paper argues that the emotional work of recovery cannot be separated from the physical and practical work of recovering the built environment. It shows that a focus on emotion work can lead to a more nuanced understanding of what recovery actually means and who is involved, leading to the identification of hidden vulnerabilities and a better understanding of the longer timescales involved in the process.

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1. Introduction

Contrarily, and without apparent irony, the preferred story in a natural disaster is a good news one: miraculous rescues and escapes, acts of heroism and bravery, selfless rescue workers from Rotherham, sniffer dogs from Barking, saintly surgeons from Surbiton. As the hope of more wide-eyed victims being plucked from the grave diminishes, as the disaster medics wrap up their kit and go, so too do the 24-hour rolling-news teams. This is very expensive stuff, and nobody has the budget or the audience for the grim, dull depression of resurrection (Gill, 2010: 45).

The novelist AA Gill's bleak portrayal of life after the Haitian earthquake of January 2010, in which up to 230,000 people died and more than 1 million were made homeless, highlights a central problem in our attempts to understand and deal with disasters. While the event itself, and the emergency response and rescue phase that occupies the days immediately following the crisis, are the subject of both popular and political attention, the longer-term recovery process, and the emotions this entails, tends to be ignored by the wider media and the policy debates that follow. This paper explores recovery in the context of a very different kind of

disaster – the Hull floods of 2007 in the UK. Here, again, statistics provide an indication of the breadth and depth of the impacts: The floods affected over 8600 households, one man died and 91 of the city's 99 schools were affected (Coulthard et al., 2007). Numbers can also be used to track the recovery process: how many people are back in their homes? How many schools and businesses have re-opened? To what extent are public services up and running? In the case of Hull, an independent review published five months after the flood reported that 2681 households were displaced from their homes with over 600 households living in caravans (Coulthard et al., 2007). In July 2008, a little over a year from the original event, 1476 people were shown to be still out of their homes, with 293 people still in caravans (Hull City Council, email communication, June 26, 2008). However, such statistics can disguise the complexity of who is affected and the processes by which such effects come into being (Walker et al., in press; Walker et al., 2010). While recovery is often measured in terms of the kinds of physical and economic milestones described here, we argue that there is an important emotional component to disaster recovery that goes unnoticed.

More specifically, while there is a growing body of work that highlights the place of emotions in disaster recovery (see for example Convery et al., 2008; Mort et al., 2004; Tapsell and Tunstall, 2008) our specific concern in this paper is to understand the role of *managing* emotions in flood recovery. To this end we follow Hochschild's distinction between 'emotional labour' and 'emotional work' to understand how individuals 'inhibit' or 'render'

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: r.whittle@lancaster.ac.uk (R. Whittle).

¹ Formerly Sims.

emotions 'appropriate' to a situation (Hochschild, 1979, 1983). However, our use of this distinction is complicated in three key ways because of the disruption caused by flood. First, during flood recovery the boundaries between the very places in which this distinction is applied in its original sense, namely 'work' and 'home', become blurred. Not only do 'homes' become the workplace of builders, insurers, inspectors etc., 'work' can also become a place where strong emotions about the disruption of home need to be 'managed'. In this sense we apply the concepts in relation to the role that an individual is in, rather than the boundary of place *per se*. For the most part we focus on the emotional work, though one case study illustrates the blurring of emotional work and emotional labour in a school setting. Secondly, and as an effect of the disruptions of place, as accounts of householders affected by flood reveal, the boundaries of what is 'appropriate' emotional expression are disrupted and subject to negotiation; in turn a source of further emotional strain. Finally, who is involved in emotional work and labour is also disrupted by the floods, namely the role that different family members as well as workers play.

Our paper draws upon examples from two qualitative research projects on flood recovery. The paper begins by detailing current understandings of disaster recovery before exploring ways in which a focus on emotion work and labour can enhance our knowledge in this area. This is followed by a methodology section which describes the two research projects on which this paper is based. The paper then moves on to discuss examples of the emotional work (and, in one case, labour) of flood recovery before finishing with a reflection on how paying attention to the process of managing emotions can enhance our understanding of long-term disaster recovery.

2. Disaster recovery

We started this paper with the claim that long-term disaster recovery tends to be neglected by the media and policy makers in comparison with the preparedness and emergency response phases of hazard management.¹ This was particularly apparent in the case of the UK floods of 2007 which prompted a wealth of policy documents – from the Flood and Water Management Act (HM Government, 2010), which initiates a more coordinated approach to flood risk management, through to consultations on the National Flood Emergency Framework (Defra, 2008b) and Property-Level Flood Resistance and Resilience Measures (Defra, 2008a). Long-term recovery is seldom discussed in these documents. In contrast, the Pitt Review (The Cabinet Office, 2008), the UK Government's review of the 2007 floods, devotes an entire chapter to recovery. It also includes a model of what it considers this process to be like (Fig. 1).

However, this model is flawed on a number of levels. Firstly, 'normality' is represented as a flat line, which ignores the ways in which every family goes through good times and bad times; times of celebration and times of crisis when more support may be needed (Baldassar, 2007). Secondly, and crucially, because the rapidly rising upwards curve implies that recovery involves a smooth and rapid progression towards a defined end point where things are presumed to have returned to 'normal' or, better still, to have 'regenerated' to an improved state. Such a model thus leaves no place for the kinds of

¹ There is, to a certain extent, a legal basis to this distinction because the Statutory requirements placed on responders by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 [i.e. what they 'must' do] are focused on emergency preparedness (HM Government, 2005). In contrast, Emergency Response and Recovery (HM Government (2009)) contains only non-statutory 'guidance'. However, research has shown that the ways in which these statutory and non-statutory requirements should be interpreted is, in terms of guiding practice, surprisingly ill defined (Deeming and Easthope, 2010).

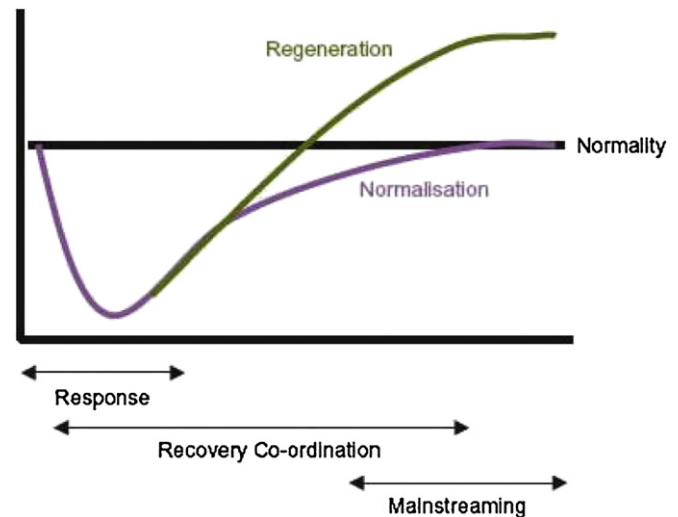


Fig. 1. Recovering from an emergency (from p. 398 of the Pitt Review).

pre-existing vulnerabilities that may act to 'produce' the disaster (Bull-Kamanga et al., 2003; Erikson, 1976, 1994; Pelling, 2003). It also contradicts the disaster studies literature which shows that, far from being a quick, smooth process, recovery is often a protracted, disjointed and frustrating experience with its own 'highs' and 'lows' (Mileti, 1999; Whittle et al., 2010; Wisner et al., 2004). Finally, the model ignores critiques which challenge the idea of recovery as involving a return to 'normal' and which argue instead that recovery must be understood as both relative and contingent:

The terminology associated with disaster recovery is biased towards optimism. The key words – 'recovery', 're-establish', 'reconstruction', 'restoration' and 'rehabilitation' – are all prefixed with 're', indicating a return to the pre-existing situation. A more realistic view challenges the assumption that such recovery will actually be achieved. Instead, the more pessimistic argument suggests there will be uncertainty, unforeseen events and even the reproduction of vulnerability. A rather depressing implication ... is that in some cases the most vulnerable households and individuals do not recover (Wisner et al., 2004: 357).

Paradoxically, the model's optimistic view of recovery is also challenged by the more pragmatic approach that exists in government doctrine on UK civil protection. This acknowledges that recovery:

"...usually takes years rather than months to complete as it seeks to address the enduring human, physical, environmental, and economic consequences of emergencies" (HM Government, 2007: 3).

It is here, in the acknowledgement of the human, the physical, the environmental and the economic impacts, that the Government comes closest to addressing the complex and enduring consequences of long-term disaster recovery. We say 'closest' because the list neglects to mention the emotional experience of disaster recovery. In this paper, we show that an acknowledgement of the emotions and, in particular, emotion work, is essential in order to appreciate the ways in which recovery is experienced by those affected. To set the scene for this task, the following section links the literature on emotions and emotion work with research on disaster recovery.

3. Emotion work and disasters

An extensive literature has developed around the mental health effects of disasters (Brooks and McKinlay, 1992; Freedy and Hobfoll,

1995; Penick et al., 1976). For example, psychologists have researched people's responses to violent disasters such as terrorist attacks with a focus on conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (Burkle, 1996, North and Pfefferbaum, 2002). In recent years, researchers have also focused on the mental health impacts of natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Abramson et al., 2008; Galea et al., 2007; Schoenbaum et al., 2009; Weisler et al., 2006) and the 2004 tsunami (van Griensven et al., 2006; Wickrama and Kaspar, 2007). Such studies are helpful in highlighting the very real emotional consequences of disasters which may otherwise remain hidden from researchers and practitioners. However, there is a danger that studies that focus solely on mental health issues may miss the complexity of people's emotional responses to disasters and the ways in which such responses are interwoven with the environmental, social and economic changes which take place during disaster recovery.

For example an extensive analysis of the literature on disasters conducted by Norris et al. (2001) revealed that a number of chronic problems were experienced by those affected by disasters, including financial stress, troubled family and interpersonal relationships, concerns about the wider community and obligations to provide support to others. Such issues undoubtedly have a strong emotional component but may not necessarily be identified as such within the mental health literature.

For the purposes of this paper, we have found it more helpful to explore the small but growing literature which argues for a broader understanding of the place of emotions within long-term disaster recovery (Convery et al., 2008; Mort et al., 2005; Tapsell and Tunstall, 2008). These studies are not just focussed on adults – there is also a growing body of research which explores children and young people's emotional recovery from disasters (see for example Carroll et al., 2006; Convery et al., 2010; Hill and O'Brien, 1999).

Erikson's (1976, 1994) work on a wide range of disasters shows that the individual trauma experienced by residents only forms part of the story. He argues that, in order to understand the real impacts of the disaster it is also necessary to have a wider appreciation of the 'collective trauma' suffered by the community. The notion of collective trauma refers to the ways in which a disaster may constitute "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of commonality" (Erikson, 1976: 154).

A similar approach is taken by Convery et al. (2005) who focus on the emotional geographies of the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreak in Cumbria (Convery et al., 2005). Using the concept of 'lifescapes' to encompass the complexity of the spatial, emotional and ethical relations between people, animals and place, they conclude that: "the events of 2001 transcended the loss of the material (traumatic though this undoubtedly was) and became also the loss of the conceptual (the loss of the meanings associated with this lifescape)" (Convery et al., 2005: 107). Such examples show that it is possible to see how the emotions can be employed as a useful analytical lens through which to better understand the wider impacts of the disaster recovery experience.

In this paper, however, we concentrate more specifically on the process of managing emotions as part of the process of disaster recovery. We utilise the concepts of emotion work and emotional labour, as developed by Hochschild (1979, 1983) to relate to the ways in which "the individual ... works on inducing or inhibiting feelings so as to render them 'appropriate' to a situation" (p. 551). Such work arises in relation to 'feeling rules' or 'conventions of feeling' which tell us what kinds of feeling are deemed appropriate to any particular situation. However, these feelings do not necessarily arise automatically: for example, we may not feel happy at a wedding if the person we love is marrying someone else. Work is

therefore required in order to respond appropriately, and here Hochschild distinguishes between 'surface acting' – where our feelings remain unchanged but we work to put on the outward appearance of the expected emotion (such as smiling when we feel like crying) – or 'deep acting' – where we work on our inner feelings to change them in accordance with what we are supposed to feel. Emotion work can therefore be internal or external, and involve either evocation (trying to induce a desired feeling) or suppression (trying to quash a feeling that we consider to be undesirable).

Hochschild's ideas have been developed in a number of contexts with emotional labour being employed to describe activities that take place in a work arena, while emotional work is more commonly used to describe unpaid activities outside the workplace (Seymour, 2005, 2007, 2010). However, because a key effect of flooding is to disrupt the boundaries between work and home, in this paper we use these concepts according to the primary role (rather than the place) that a person is in at that particular time. Some examples of the application of these concepts will help illustrate how they can be beneficial to an analysis of disaster recovery.

Within work settings, emotional labour has been extensively discussed in relation to jobs in the service sector (typical examples here include teaching, nursing, the hospitality industry, social work, etc.) with a particular focus of attention being the question of whether emotional labour has a positive or detrimental effect on employees (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Kirk, 2010; Philipp, 2010). Research shows that emotional labour can have positive outcomes, such as increased task effectiveness, self-expression and enthusiasm, as well as negative consequences such as emotive dissonance and self-alienation, depending on the circumstances and the individuals concerned (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). Other negative consequences of emotional labour include burnout for the employee (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002) and unrealistic expectations of good service on behalf of the customer (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). Such conclusions have clear relevance to attempts to understand the emotional experiences of disaster recovery workers who find themselves on the 'frontline' of managing the recovery (for examples of studies looking at emotional aspects of frontline work see Convery et al., 2007).

However, if we are to gain a full picture of the complexities of disaster recovery then, in addition to looking at the experiences of workers, we must also include the emotion work that is carried out by residents in their homes and communities. Indeed, as this paper shows, some of the most difficult experiences were had by those for whom pressures at work were exacerbated by pressures at home (see also Whittle and Medd, 2011). Here, again, the idea of emotion work can be helpful in enabling us to understand what goes on within the family and how a disaster can impact on the activities and relationships contained within it. For example, researchers interested in family life have used the concept of emotion work to illustrate the effort that goes into 'doing family' through tasks such as cooking meals, creating a 'homely' space, scheduling particular times when the whole family can be together and providing emotional support in times of crisis (Baldassar, 2007; DeVault, 1999; Seymour, 2010). Such activities highlight what DeVault (1999) describes as the 'braided' nature of emotion work, whereby physical tasks like cooking or tidying go hand in hand with loving, nurturing and being 'emotionally present' for someone. They can also illustrate the kinds of gender divisions that may be present within the home, with some authors arguing that emotion work has traditionally been viewed as more of a feminine activity which, as such, goes unpaid and unrecognised in comparison to the more visible work which men tend to conduct in public places (DeVault, 1999). Studies have also used emotion work to

highlight the kinds of role conflicts that women may experience when their caring role within the home is coupled with the pressures of increased responsibility in the workplace (Fothergill, 1999).

These insights have much to offer the disaster studies literature. As Fothergill highlighted in her study of women's roles during recovery from the Grand Forks flood of 1997, disasters can draw attention to the kinds of work that often goes unseen by creating a crisis which disrupts the social and temporal ordering of everyday life. As well as revealing existing forms of emotion work, her study shows how new forms of work were also created by the disaster.

Finally, it is important to think about the roles which children and young people might play in disaster recovery. As DeVault (1999) remarks, the extent to which children participate in emotion work is not commonly discussed in the literature. However, those studies which do exist reveal the extent to which children can provide important support to each other and the adults in their households (Baldassar, 2007; Leitch, 2008; Seymour, 2005). The concept of emotion work could thus provide a useful tool with which to explore the varied roles that children and young people may play during disaster recovery.

4. Methodology

The results presented in this paper are drawn from two 'sister' projects which used in-depth qualitative methods to investigate recovery from the floods of June 2007 in Hull. The first project launched in October 2007 and was a two-year study which focused on adults. It used methods adapted from a longitudinal diary-based study into recovery from the FMD disaster which severely affected Cumbria in 2001 (Mort et al., 2004).

Upon recruitment, the 44 participants gave an initial semi-structured interview which enabled them to tell their story of the floods so far. At this point they were introduced to the weekly diary booklets that we encouraged them to keep throughout the 18-month duration of the fieldwork. The diaries started with a few simple 'warm up' questions where we asked participants to rate their quality of life, relationships with family and friends, and health using a simple scale ranging from 'very poor' to 'very good'. There was also a section where they could enter details of what they had done on particular days during the week. The main purpose of these sections was to familiarise participants with writing in readiness for the main, 'free-text' part of the diary, where they were encouraged to write whatever they liked about their lives that week.

During the diary-keeping period we also held group discussions at quarterly intervals where the diarists were able to meet and share experiences of the challenges they were facing during recovery. However, in the early stages of this initial project, the diarists talked a lot about how concerned they were about the effects of flood recovery on their children and grandchildren. We realised that these impacts were not being captured by our existing study and, as a result, we were successful in launching a one-year 'sister' project to explore how children and young people were experiencing the flood recovery process.

In total 46 flood-affected children took part in this project, which started in March 2009. Some of the children were flooded at school but not at home and others were flooded both at school and at home. We worked in two schools that were badly affected by the floods; both schools were evacuated on the day and then closed for strip out and refurbishment. We used storyboards (where participants drew pictures or used creative writing to tell their stories), followed-up by short one-to-one interviews and group discussions with the school children. We also conducted telephone interviews with four flood-affected young people, accessed through the youth team in Hull. Finally, we worked with 18 adults, involving

interviews with key service providers and frontline workers, together with stakeholder engagement through a project steering group.

Data analysis for both projects followed the principles of grounded theory (e.g. Glaser, 1992; Strauss and Corbin, 1994). This began with a series of 'data clinics' where the entire research team would read samples of the data individually, and then meet to discuss and compare their themes. When repeated over a period of months, this resulted in the development of core analytical themes through a process of comparing, examining, contrasting, conceptualizing and categorizing the data. These themes were also discussed with the project steering group and the participants before being translated into codes that were then applied to the transcripts using Atlas Ti[®] qualitative data software. Although these themes were slightly different for the adults' and children's projects, there were major areas of overlap between the two, with the issues discussed in this paper – namely the emotional and health impacts of flood and the work of flood recovery – being core areas of analysis for both projects.

5. Results and discussion

In this section, we illustrate four key themes around emotion work and emotional labour by using examples from the research projects. The first is that much of the work of disaster recovery is hidden, un-noticed both in research and policy evaluations of the process. The second is that, once attention is paid to such hidden work, it becomes less obvious who is affected by a disaster. The third is that the emotional work of recovery can generate new vulnerabilities. And finally, once attention is paid to emotional work, then it becomes clear that disaster recovery operates over much longer timescales than research and policy normal envisage.

5.1. Much of the work of disaster recovery is hidden

Looking at emotional work allows us to examine behind the scenes and capture the kinds of effort that are routinely performed in flooded households yet which are much less visible to observers than the labour that goes into the 'bricks and mortar' recovery of the physical environment. Indeed, our research shows that such physical recovery would be impossible without the application of the serious emotional work that accompanies it.

At the time of the floods, Abby² lived with her partner and 19-year-old son. After the floods happened, the couple lived in a caravan on the drive so that they could oversee the repairs, while her son lived in the upstairs of the flood-damaged house because he wanted more privacy. Abby had problems with her insurance and builders and, as well as reflecting the endless practical tasks needed to get her house "sorted" (typical examples being repeated phone calls to the insurance company, completing forms and paperwork, cleaning up after the builders and shopping for new things), her diary entries reflect how emotionally and physically draining she found this process to be:

It is now April [2008³] and we have only finished the kitchen area. We are so tired all the time, we argue every week, we never seem to have time for doing things for yourself, things we enjoy, no proper relax time. And we've also lost interest in everything. I don't think we will stay together, I think this has just put a big wedge between us. I think the only way forward is to sort house then sell it and try to start again, putting it behind us. I know this is such a weak thing

² Pseudonyms are used throughout.

³ The floods happened in June 2007.

for us to do and we are both strong and love doing our house up. In the past every week we would be doing home improvements, but not like this, it's just too much. We said we wouldn't let the flood get the better of us but we have (Abby, diary extract, adults' project).

Her admission that she feels the flood has 'got the better of her' reflects her experience of the recovery process as being like a constant battle; one in which she is continually fighting to overcome her sense of anger and frustration in a bid to stay calm and get things done (an example of the 'suppression' component of emotion work described by Hochschild, 1979). The emotion work involved in doing so is considerable and it is an effort that is conducted, in large part, as a result of her desire not to upset those around her:

Feel a bit stressed today. Could cry or shout but I'm not going to. I must control this and I can. I tell [partner] how I feel and I go out for the day on my own, just looking round shops. But I know if at home I'm going to spoil things and everyone seems happy (Abby, diary extract, adults' project).

On one level, it could be argued that Abby's use of emotion work is no different to the kind which research shows goes on everyday as part of 'normal' family life as we work to suppress unpleasant emotions in order to avoid causing distress to others (Baldassar, 2007). However, as we read more of her story we can see how the pressures of recovery – and, in particular, the disruption to her finances and home environment – are resulting in additional stress for Abby, meaning that more emotion work is necessary to deal with this.

In addition to this escalation of 'everyday' emotion work, Abby and her partner must also contend with new forms of emotion work which are necessary in order to negotiate with the different companies and agencies that they must contact in order to recover their home. Here, Abby recounts a particularly stressful episode with her insurance company where she feels upset and ashamed after losing control:

"[My partner] had come home and told me [what the insurance company had said] and that set me off, and he rang them up and I was still more or less screaming on the other end of the phone and embarrassing myself, which I don't know why but I suppose some things make you go that far and it's not until you are back to being level headed a bit that you think, 'God, what an idiot must I look like?'" (Abby, interview, adults' project).

This example illustrates that 'successful' emotion work is not only about maintaining control of the emotions because, while Abby berates herself for her loss of control, her outburst has a galvanising effect on her insurance company which creates an important change in her family's experience of the recovery process: "Since then they have absolutely bent over backwards to help us, they've sent us some money".

For Abby, however, the key stressor results from the fact that the recovery process, and the frustrations that it generates within her, makes it harder for her to carry out the kinds of everyday emotional work that she feels is necessary in order to fulfil the role of being a good partner and mother.

"I feel like we haven't had time to like love each other and that's what I'm finding hard to cope with because we just haven't got the time to maybe show each other the affection we would have before because we are too busy... You just feel guilty... that you are not looking after your family... Not cooking... nice meals... we've all eaten crap for like six months... Every week I keep saying, "Right, as a family we'll start having our dinners together, we'll start having fresh vegetables". And we do it for a day... But like again, we are sorting things out and we are

going out shopping for bits of wood... and then it's the end of the day and you think, 'I just don't want to cook'... and then you feel lazy and beat yourself up about it" (Abby, interview, adults' project).

The emotion work of 'doing family' is therefore exacerbated by the emotion work that Abby must perform as an integral part of managing the recovery process particularly because, as recounted earlier, the disruptions to the boundaries of home and work make it harder for her to identify what counts as 'appropriate' emotional expression in a particular context. Thus, whilst screaming at her insurers may have been an effective emotional response in that it finally made them take action, it also made Abby feel uncomfortable about what she perceived as her loss of control. Crucially, we can see how emotion work is fundamental to both the practical task of managing insurers and builders as well as to holding family together. However, the cost to Abby is considerable, in terms of the emotional exhaustion she experiences.

5.2. *It is not immediately obvious who is affected by a disaster*

As explained previously, many attempts to ascertain the impacts of disasters such as flooding do not extend much further than the identification of those homes and businesses suffering damage. However, this approach does not account for the complex ways in which people can be affected by disasters. By contrast, a focus on emotion work allows us to look both within and beyond the thresholds of those affected and, in doing so, establish a more nuanced picture of the recovery process in action. As we saw from Abby's example, much of the work of flood recovery is hidden, meaning that it is not immediately obvious who is affected.

By looking at the emotion work which goes on within affected households we can better identify those whose experiences may be otherwise overlooked. For example, children and young people may be missing from accounts of flood recovery due to the assumption that, since children are not home owners and do not tend to manage builders or insurance claims, they are peripheral to the recovery process. Yet an emotion work perspective reveals that this is not the case at all as children and young people both affect and are affected by the processes of recovery within their homes, schools and communities (Walker et al., 2010). Here we focus on their involvement in the emotional work that goes on within the home, using the example of Sally.

Sally, an 11-year-old⁴ who took part in the children and young people's project, lived with her family in a caravan during the repairs. Her storyboard is reproduced in Fig. 2.

Like Abby, there is a lot of stress in Sally's storyboard as she writes: "I felt empty inside" after seeing her home stripped out by the builders. She also found her (school) Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) incredibly "stressful" – writing "aaaaah!" next to them and reflecting her comments in her interview where she acknowledges: "It was stressful because I was scared because I thought I was going to get a real low score". Thankfully, Sally's fears were not realised and she got what she described as "a real high score". However, it is important not to underestimate the distress that these feelings of worry caused her at the time as she tried to prepare for her exams in the restricted space of the caravan.

Also like Abby, there is a lot of emotional work that goes on in Sally's storyboard – some of which reflects the support that Sally received from her Mum: "Mum would calm me down telling me not to worry and just try to do the best I could". However,

⁴ Sally was 9 at the time of the floods.

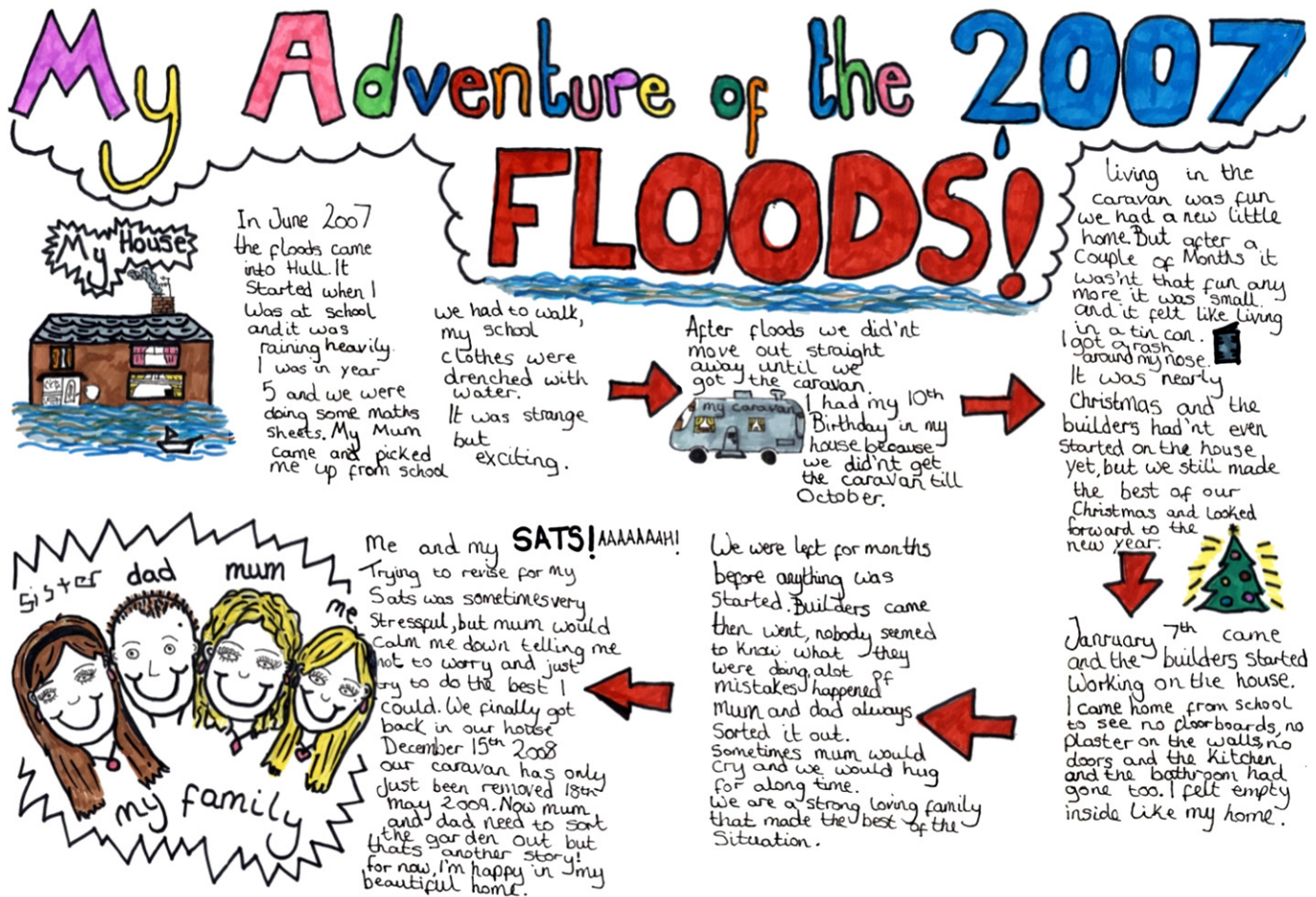


Fig. 2. Sally's storyboard, children and young people's project.

interestingly, we also see the emotional support that Sally herself provides for her Mum and the rest of her family: "Sometimes Mum would cry and we would hug for a long time. We are a strong, loving family that made the best of the situation".

This sense of emotional work being shared amongst the family and bringing everyone together is also reflected in the way that Christmas was approached as, once again, everyone works to "make the best of things" despite being stuck in the caravan. Such accounts thus lend support to research which argues that children and young people do play an important role in performing emotional work within the family (Baldassar, 2007; Seymour, 2005). They also illustrate how an emotion work perspective can provide us with a more nuanced picture of the involvement of different members of the family during disaster recovery, contradicting accounts which position children and young people on the periphery and showing that they have a more central role to play in the process.

However, Sally's experience of such emotional work also appears more positive than Abby's. For example, the title Sally chooses for her storyboard – 'my adventure' – has more positive connotations. She also explains that the flood was "exciting" and the caravan "fun" – though only initially.

Yet children and young people are not the only ones whose recovery role is hidden. A focus on emotion work also reveals that the impacts on the teaching staff supporting them also went largely

un-noticed, as the example of Marilyn, who was the headteacher of Marshside Primary School,⁵ shows. Marilyn was one of the frontline workers interviewed as part of the children and young people's project. Her case supports Convery et al.'s (2007) argument about the frontline emerging in unexpected places during disaster recovery as she commented: "I don't think anybody's really thought of the headteachers. You just get on with it don't you? That's what we do."

In addition to her regular responsibilities as headteacher, Marilyn was involved in 'flood work' for what she described as "two traumatic years" because the school was left badly damaged after the disaster. In addition to overseeing the renovation of the buildings and arranging for the replacement of all the damaged furniture and classroom resources, Marilyn had to organise for the children to be taught on alternative premises, including organising transport for this. Her experience was made even more difficult by the fact that she was also flooded at home.

"Being needed in both places" was very hard for Marilyn and she said she felt "really torn". However, in the end the school came first because of her emotional commitment to her pupils and her regard for the staff and what they had achieved over the years since she

⁵ School name has been changed. Marshside is a larger than average urban primary school with 329 pupils aged 3–11 years in what the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) describes as "an area of considerable deprivation".

had come to the school at a troubled point in its history.⁶ During her interview, Marilyn described how the school had become “her baby”; a very apt metaphor considering the emotional labour that she came to conduct in its service. She explained that getting the school back together again, which she and her staff achieved by foregoing their holidays, required her to put her own personal distress at the loss of her home to one side in order to focus on getting things done at school:

I had to get a friend to see to my loss adjuster. And that really was my dilemma just about the whole of the time because there were these demands and my personal side I'm afraid, I let that go because this was just too important ... you know, you are dealing with children here, they have to be the priority don't they?... I had problems with stress... At one point I did crack... I was trying to work with three different schools, three different buildings; I was chasing about by car to all these different places and dealing with the builders and people here. And all of a sudden I said to myself, 'I can't do this, I can't do this'. And I rang the [Local] Authority and said, "I'm going". And I walked out. And I got as far as the car park and [the 2 office staff] came running after me and sort of hugged me and calmed me down and everything and I got back on an even keel and I came in. But that was my snapping point, I was overwhelmed completely" (Marilyn, interview, children and young people's project).

In addition to the emotional labour of having to stay strong for the staff and pupils whilst suppressing her concerns about what was going on in her own home, Marilyn also experienced emotional conflict over her decision about how to manage the year 6 children who were approaching their SATs. With the pupils temporarily displaced to another school so that Marshside could be repaired, Marilyn was unable to run the usual round of ‘booster’ classes:

So what we had to do was to focus on getting them [the pupils] their Level Four's and those children who could have got [Level] Five we weren't able to give them that extra push. So that's the worse for me... I feel that year group were let down. And they went into secondary not at the level that they could and should have been... Secondary will do their best and those children will... be fine but we felt guilty about that" (Marilyn, interview, children and young people's project).

Recovery was also not so easy for Marilyn herself. During interview, she described how the emotional exhaustion she experienced contributed to her retiring earlier than she had planned.

When I was 60 I had absolutely no intention of retiring at all. I still felt I was on top of the job and was enthusiastic and motivated. And then I suppose when it all stopped you know... we were back and everything was on an even keel again. I woke up and I thought 'I don't really want to go and do it again'... I just felt I didn't have that resilience that is definitely required in schools in challenging circumstances... I had been ill almost the whole year, and I thought 'I need to do something different really'... I'm not sad about it, I think I've made the right decision ... But I do think the floods made that decision for me" (Marilyn, interview, children and young people's project).

Like Abby, Marilyn's story shows how the emotional labour that is required during disaster recovery compounds the emotional work and labour which is required as a routine part of everyday life within the home and working roles. The end result is that Marilyn – like Abby – now feels that she lacks the energy to perform the more

routine forms of emotional labour that are required as part of her job. Numerous studies have looked at how the degree of emotional labour involved in teaching can lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout (Kirk, 2010; Philipp, 2010) but here we see how particular vulnerabilities can be generated when such routine emotional labour is coupled with the additional demands of disaster recovery.

5.3. *The emotion work of recovery can generate new vulnerabilities*

The examples we have discussed already provide an insight into how emotional work can generate new, and often hidden, vulnerabilities, as we saw in the example of Marilyn's early retirement. However, the case of Sam, a 19-year-old who took part in the children and young people's project, exemplifies the relationship between emotion work and hidden vulnerabilities more clearly.

Sam lived with his parents whose house was affected by ‘secondary’ flooding – a phenomenon where water entered under the floorboards and caused hidden damage to the property which only became apparent at a later date (for more on this see Walker et al., in press). Sam's parents spent a year ‘arguing’ with the insurance company to get them to acknowledge that the damage to their house had been caused by the flood, which made things difficult at home. When asked ‘was it difficult being at home when your mum and dad were arguing?’ he said ‘well what do you think ... I just used to go up to my room’. This reaction is in itself a form of emotion work: like Abby, who took herself off to town to avoid upsetting the rest of the family when she felt bad, Sam removed himself from the scene as a way of coping.

The difficulties Sam was facing were exacerbated because ‘money was tight’ at home. His two older brothers were unemployed, Sam was at college and his dad had recently had a pay cut at the point when the family needed more cash to cope with the flood damage to their home. Consequently, Sam used emotional labour to try to help the situation. He decided the only thing he could do to ease the tension at home was to leave college and earn some money and he took this decision without talking it through with anyone at home or at college. He took up an apprenticeship but ‘that didn't work out’, so then he worked in sales – itself a job associated with a high level of emotional labour, especially as he was employed on a 100 per cent commission basis. Consequently, he found himself walking around knocking on doors of the houses that had been flooded asking people to donate to the Red Cross Charity with very little success.

Sam did not explain his reasons for leaving college to his family or tutors and, as a result, there was no obvious connection between his decision and the pressures of the flood recovery process. However, using the concept of emotional work, we can see how the two were intimately related as Sam was trying to earn money so that he could ease the tensions at home. His concern about the stress upon his parents was shared by many of the children and young people taking part in our study – we found that a number of the participants spent a great deal of time and energy worrying about their parents. However, as we saw in the case of Sam, these worries were rarely vocalised and, as a result, the emotion work that was being conducted by these children and young people went unrecognised. By focusing on emotion work we can thus gain a better indication of the ways in which the flood recovery process created new vulnerabilities.

5.4. *Disaster recovery operates over timescales that are longer than expected*

In addition to revealing new and hidden vulnerabilities, understanding emotional work also provides us with a clearer indication of the length of the timescales involved in recovering from a disaster such as flooding. Crucially, such a perspective shows

⁶ Marilyn had been brought in ten years earlier by the local authority to lead the school which she described as being ‘in crisis’ due to ‘poor management’.

how the work of getting lives and homes ‘back on track’ continues long after a person returns home, as the example of Bruce, who took part in the adults’ project, illustrates.

Bruce, a married man in his 30s with two young children, was flooded twice – once on June 15 and once on June 25. The fact that two floods occurred in quick succession was a major cause of concern for Bruce and, although he was successful in getting his home repaired and moving his family back in relatively quickly, other aspects of recovery took a lot longer as he continued to experience feelings of alienation from his home and major anxiety whenever heavy rain was forecast (for more about the impact of disaster on the home see for example [Edelstein, 1986](#); [Sims et al., 2009](#)). The sequence from his diary, which is recorded in [Box 1](#),

Box 1. Extract from Bruce’s diary, adults’ project

12th January 2008

Switched on the TV this morning (06:00hrs – up early due to baby) and the news media coverage was showing flooded roads, which only brings back your memories and worst fears of what happened... I try all day to dispel the thoughts from my mind, but I think that I’ve become too concerned with the whole issue.

17th January 2008

The day starts with rain and ends with rain – no real breaks. When it rains I feel helpless, it’s the unknowing of what is happening but also the knowing of what could happen – if this makes any sense.

21st January 2008

Heavy rainfall over night has just added to already saturated gardens, end up having to bail out bucket loads, upon bucket loads of water from the rear garden. This started from 04:30 hrs.

06:45 hrs – rang work to say that I was on flood watch. My concern is the rear garden and the fact that the rainfall is so heavy that the area could flood once more. 07:30 hrs – put the new sofa’s up on bricks in the lounge. Looking at the road at the front of the house where it flooded previously – but the waters are draining away – so far so good.

13:00 hrs – my father and wife call by at lunch with a hot sandwich, not stopped moving water all morning, my first break.

Physically and mentally drained – bad joke and the wrong terminology but hey you must still have a sense of humour, if it wasn’t for that, you would crack up. The garden has heavy clay under it, so the water table was high from the continuous rains over the past week.

Finally finish removing buckets of water and call it a night at 19.00 hrs.

22nd January 2008

Back to work. I don’t think that anyone has any understanding of how I felt and why I did what I had to do yesterday.

When you are a father and husband, you have to defend your property and belongings for the sake of your offspring and spouse. I had to defend my property to the best of my ability, as I couldn’t think about or endure a further six months away from home.

I still say ‘home’, loosely, as I still don’t feel that the home we have ended up with is ours, still feel detached from it, as though it’s not ours. This is a feeling that I’ve had from the beginning.

shows how he uses emotional work to try to keep a hold on his anxiety, whilst also keeping his home safe.

This powerful extract is interesting for a number of reasons: firstly, we can see the huge amount of emotional and physical effort that Bruce puts into managing his fear. Aside from the bailing out of water and the moving of furniture he ‘tries all day’ to dispel his fears from his mind and keeps his true feelings hidden from his family and colleagues as he attempts to display the emotional strength that he sees as central to his role of father and husband. However, more importantly, we can also see how a focus on emotion allows us to understand that the recovery process operates over longer timescales than is commonly assumed by reports that are only interested in how many people are back in their homes. Bruce is back in his home but, for him, the recovery is far from over because, as this extract also shows, he is still struggling to feel ‘at home’ in his repaired house. In this way we can see how the emotion work of flood recovery is not just about suppression – just as Sally’s family tries to summon up more positive emotions during recovery in an attempt to keep the family’s morale up, so Bruce is also required to engage in the ‘deep acting’ needed to overcome his feelings of alienation from his repaired home. Through such emotion work he tries to recreate a new sense of normality and a new sense of home for him and his family.

6. Conclusion

The five examples discussed here each illustrated different aspects of the ways in which emotional work and labour play an important role in longer-term flood recovery. In a context where the boundaries between work and home have become blurred and the notion of what is ‘appropriate’ emotional expression less clear, it appears that in fact the intensity of emotional work and labour are increased as the struggle to define what is appropriate in itself becomes a focus of emotional work. Indeed, we have focused on these examples as a starting point to illustrate the importance of emotional work and labour – other examples would have illustrated the struggles of emotional labour experienced by a range of frontline workers faced with considerable role conflict ([Whittle and Medd, 2011](#)). Here we highlight six key conclusions we draw from these examples. While the examples we have used in this paper relate to flooding in a UK context, these conclusions could also prove useful in understanding recovery from other kinds of disasters where the home is affected. Equally, although the specific experiences of the participants were related to the ways in which recovery is managed according to the institutional rules and practices within the UK, it is likely that the general stresses they experienced – in terms of having to manage their emotions during the longer-term recovery process – would be common to disasters experienced elsewhere in the world. For example, previous research by [Erikson \(1976, 1994\)](#) illustrates the emotional and practical difficulties faced by residents in their long-term recovery from a range of disasters including flash flooding, nuclear accidents and water supply contamination. Equally, early reports from the media and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) indicates that the conclusions we draw here may well have relevance for people’s long-term recovery following more recent disasters such as the 2009 bushfires in Victoria, Australia ([Miletic, 2010](#); [State Government Victoria Department of Human Services, 2011](#)), the earthquakes in Christchurch, New Zealand ([Gillies, 2011](#); [James, 2011](#)) and the Japanese earthquake and tsunami of 2011 ([BBC News, 2011](#)).

Firstly, we can see how concepts of emotion work and emotional labour can lead to a better understanding of what is involved in the experience of long-term disaster recovery. They therefore allow us to re-evaluate what ‘recovery’ actually means. Here, we have

shown that recovery is more than just a 'bricks and mortar' exercise to be measured through statistics of displacement and return or economic damage. In contrast, our data shows that residents are struggling, not only to restore the physical fabric of their homes but also to recreate the very meanings associated with 'home' itself and the everyday lives that are bound up with that space. Recovery is thus an inherently emotional process and, by paying attention to its emotional dimensions, we can attain a more nuanced understanding of what recovery entails.

Secondly, analysing the challenges of managing emotion during recovery also leads to an improved understanding of who is affected by a disaster. In this paper, we have demonstrated that the ways in which 'recovery' intersects with the everyday responsibilities of work and family life results in a much broader range of activities – and, crucially, a much wider range of people – becoming embroiled in 'flood work' than those considered by official reports into recovery. Here we think particularly of the children and young people, like Sally and Sam, whose role in the recovery of their households was missing from 'official' accounts of recovery. The impacts of recovery do not, therefore, stop at the thresholds of the households concerned (Sims et al., 2009). Rather, understanding emotional work and labour allows us to understand that recovery is played out through the relationships that exist within families, communities and workplaces. Such conclusions support research which suggests that disasters have important collective, as well as individual, dimensions (Erikson, 1976, 1994).

Thirdly, our data support DeVault's (1999) comments about the 'braided' nature of emotion work by illustrating that the emotional aspects of recovery cannot be separated from the more physical tasks involved. Here we think of Bruce, for whom the physical effort involved in bucketing out the floodwater and raising his possessions out of harm's way was born from the emotion work of needing to conquer his fears of a repeat incident and needing his family to be and feel safe and 'at home' in their house. We also think of Sam, whose decision to leave college was based on his concerns for his family.

Fourthly, we can see how the new understandings of recovery that we gain from using an emotion work perspective are not just of academic interest. They are also of practical and political relevance because they highlight problems in the management of disaster recovery and shed light on the kinds of support arrangements that might be helpful for residents. For example, much of Abby's stress and subsequent emotion work stemmed from the way in which her insurers persisted in disputing her claim. Sam, too, felt that his home life would "definitely" have been easier if it had been more obvious that his house had been flooded, thus avoiding the need for his parents to argue with their insurer over whether or not the repairs would be covered. By seeing people's emotional recovery as intimately related to the management of the recovery process, our research indicates that finding ways to alleviate the kinds of 'secondary stressors' which require a high degree of emotion work during recovery (such as dealing with 'cowboy' builders or evasive loss adjusters) may be more effective than approaches which treat the 'mental health impacts' of disaster as a separate issue.

A fifth, and related point, is that exploring emotional work and labour can provide us with the tools to investigate new kinds of vulnerability that the recovery process may induce because it brings to light the kinds of 'hidden' and unexpected impacts that are missing from more conventional analyses. Here, again, Sam and Marilyn are prime examples as the major life decisions that they made (for Sam, leaving college and, for Marilyn, leaving work) appeared initially unrelated to the floods. It was only through an examination of the new kinds of emotion work involved in recovery that fuller explanations for their decisions were uncovered. Such conclusions make an emotion work perspective particularly

important for those involved in identifying – and potentially supporting – those affected.

Finally, in contrast to those analyses which view recovery as ending when people move back into their homes, focusing on the challenges of emotional work and labour introduces an extra dimension to analyses of recovery which demonstrate that recovery has no clear end point. The main physical work of rebuilding may be completed but, for the residents involved, the recovery process is far from over as they engage in the emotional and practical work needed to reclaim their homes and lives. Here, again, we think of Marilyn, whose longer-term recovery involved the process of re-evaluating – and ultimately ending – her role in the workplace. This is also an important conclusion for policy makers and practitioners as it indicates the need for support arrangements to be sensitive to both the longer timescales and the unexpected impacts involved in disaster recovery. For researchers it also highlights the need to pay attention to the longer-term process to more fully understand disaster recovery.

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