Exploring Community Resilience towards Rebuilding Community Identity After the Portapique Mass Shooting in Canada

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Abstract: *This research aims to explore the significance of citizen participation in rebuilding a sense of community identity and facilitating the communal healing process in the aftermath of the public shooting in Portapique, Nova Scotia. We approached this research using autoethnography and completed a thematic analysis of the first author's journal entries written in the ten months following the public shooting. We generated two higher-order themes- posttraumatic stress responses and factors of resilience. These two themes provided the framework on which to organise the data. The findings indicate the significance citizen participation and event organisation have on a community's ability to exhibit resilience and the detrimental effects that can occur when support is not community-led. Through the lens of participation in community organising (the Portapique Community Build-Up project), participation was the crucial link to building a sense of community identity.*

Keywords: Healing, public shooting, autoethnography, posttraumatic stress, event organisation.

1. Introduction

Portapique, a rural beachside community with 100 full-time residents, is situated in Nova Scotia (Canada). On April 18th, 2020, Portapique resident Gabriel Wortman killed thirteen neighbours and burned several homes before killing a total of 23 people across Nova Scotia (McMillan, 2021). Wortman was killed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) on April 19th, 2020, ending the deadliest mass killing in modern Canadian history. The following narrative is taken from my journal, written in April 2021:

One year ago, on a Saturday evening, my three children and I were getting ready for bed. It was just the four of us. My husband, a rotational worker, was away, and due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we weren't sure when he could come home. Saturday, April 18th was a quiet night. My youngest son, aged nine and my daughter, aged twelve, was already tucked in, and my 15-year-old son had just taken our dogs out for their nightly run. It was 10:30pm when my son ran back into the house with the dogs behind him. "You need to come outside. There's a fire." He spoke quickly, and I ran outside with him. The fire across the road and through the trees was massive. Approaching the road, we realised there was more than one, the closest of which appeared to be at the location of my friend's house. It was 10:37pm when I called 911, only to be told they had numerous calls and were aware of the fire, but we saw no trucks and heard no sirens. We did hear loud popping noises, which we thought at the time must have been things exploding in a house fire. Worried about our friends, and not seeing or hearing any emergency vehicles, I woke up my daughter and told her that my son and I were going to go help. We jumped in the car and drove to the entrance of Portapique Beach Road, only to find the entrance

barricaded by police, one of whom yelled at us to get out of there. I was confused, I told him the people there were friends of ours, and we were going to help them. The officer yelled at us to leave again just as another car coming towards us pulled up alongside the officers. The driver of the car was covered in blood. Still not understanding the situation, I tried to explain to the officer that I wasn't a curious bystander, that I knew the people there and wanted to go help, but this was met by more panicked yelling. My son and I turned around, and I called my friend for the first time that night. It was 10:47pm, and there was no answer, I left a voicemail. My son called his friend for the first time that night, she lived down Portapique Beach Road with her parents. She didn't pick up. These were the first of many unanswered calls we made.

It wasn't until about 11pm that we learned through social media that firefighters couldn't attend due to an active shooter in the area and that several people had been shot. We were supposed to remain inside our homes with the doors locked. We didn't learn this from the RCMP officers we had just spoken to while parked alongside what I know now was a gunshot victim, we learned this through social media and my brother frantically called me after listening to a friend's police scanner. My son and I turned off all our lights, we locked our doors and closed our curtains. The back door off our kitchen hasn't latched properly in years, I tied it shut with an apron string. I could see my neighbour's house lights on, I wanted to call to check on them, but I didn't have their phone number and I was torn for a long time over whether I should risk running over there to warn them. If I wasn't alone with my kids, I would have, but leaving them alone in the house wasn't an option. I settled for watching my neighbour's house out the windows.

By 11:30pm there were RCMP vehicles with lights flashing in front of our house, blocking our road. I woke my younger son and moved him to my daughter's bedroom, telling her to lock her bedroom door and try to sleep so that her older brother and I would be right outside. Her bedroom window faced the fires, I knew she wouldn't be sleeping. My son and I sat up in the dark, calling friends, refreshing social media, and tiptoeing around to peek out windows and listen at doors.

At 12:30am, now April 19th, we could see three fires from our windows, but no firefighters were visible. It was at 12:30am that I called my friend for the last time, still hoping she had just run out of her house in such a hurry she left her phone behind. My son called and texted his friend all night. We reassured each other, there were so many reasons why they wouldn't answer. The night was so quiet, they were probably asleep in bed.

We must have both fallen asleep at some point in the early morning, because I woke just before 6am. The morning was clear and quiet, the RCMP cars on our road were gone, I could find no new information on social media. Everything appeared to be over. I took my dogs outside for a run, we did our chores, and cared for our livestock. Waited for our calls to be returned. Portapique Beach Road was still blocked off. Two hours later, at 8am, the Nova Scotia RCMP tweeted that there was still an active shooter situation and that we should remain in our homes with the doors locked. This tweet came two hours after we had all been outside. Shortly after this, we found out who the shooter was, we learned the names of some of the victims, and I learned that my friend was dead.

That Sunday went by in a blur. After the shooter was killed, my eldest son walked over to the RCMP officers to ask about his friend and her family but wasn't given any information. He walked over several times that day to talk to them, but they couldn't tell him anything. We were not allowed up Portapique Beach Road. Telling my daughter that my friend had been killed was hard. My daughter spent a lot of time at my friend's house, as my daughter was good friends with her daughter. She stayed in bed for the rest of the day.

By 8pm we knew of 13 victims, and still hadn't heard from my son's friend or her family. The 10 o'clock news gave the number of victims as 16. Before the news was over, I received a call from a cousin of my eldest son's friend. I was told that his friend and her parents didn't make it. My son's best friend was in a relationship with her, and having no Wi-Fi and not living in Portapique, was relying on my son for information. I called his parents to tell them the news, then I had to tell my son that his friend, and her family, were dead.

1.1 Turning lived experience into research

Just prior to beginning the final year of my undergraduate degree, in which I knew I wanted to focus my capstone project on my community and the aftermath of the shooting, I received an invitation in the mail. It was a notice for Portapique residents, informing us of a meeting to create a community hall for residents to come together. I attended, and the following month, September 2020, we had our first community workday cleaning out the hall and its grounds. I met new people, spoke to neighbours I knew but never knew well, and for the first time in months, I felt inspired. I also observed the excitement my kids had over the possibilities this project was offering. This, as well as subsequent workdays to follow, led to my interest in how citizen participation impacts community identity. The research question addressed in this autoethnography is: What is the significance of citizen participation in rebuilding a sense of community identity and in facilitating the communal healing process in the aftermath of the public shooting in Portapique, Nova Scotia?

2. Literature Review

Large-scale traumatic events have become more common over the past several decades, whether due to natural disasters or human-made disasters like terrorism (Iacoviello & Charney, 2014). High-profile crimes are covered in national media, creating a negative sense of community identity (O'Leary &Fohring, 2018).

The public narrative of the crime is often different from the individual narratives of the citizens in the community where the crime took place (Aldrich & Kallivayall, 2016); the more time that passes, the more likely it is for personal narratives to diverge from public ones. Aldrich and Kallivayall (2016) further note that public narratives may cause psychological distress for survivors who do not want to be in the public eye or for those identified to the public as "heroes", they may feel undeserving, as if they must appear strong even when not feeling strong (Aldrich & Kallivayall, 2016).

When an individual is exposed to violence or learns that a close friend or loved one has been exposed to violence, there is an increased incidence of negative mental health outcomes, including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and major depression (Lowe & Galea, 2017). When a high-profile violent crime like a mass homicide happens, there are adverse mental health consequences for the community as well, as even indirect exposure to violent crime is associated with an increased risk for mood, anxiety and substance use disorders, and PTSD (Lowe & Galea, 2017). Communities go through stages of grief that can be exacerbated in the event of high-profile public crimes due to having the complexity added of losing loved ones, their sense of safety, and trust in society (Kropf & Jones, 2014). Hawdon and Ryan (2011) state that collective tragedy damages the bonds of social life and the general sense of community that links people together. The gendered nature of mass shootings and those who perpetrate them is notable. Mass shootings are, by and large, conducted by white men with a history of violence (Bridges & Tober, 2022).

Lowe and Galea (2017) found that coping mechanisms involving acting on and cognitively processing the traumatic incidence resulted in lower levels of negative mental health outcomes. Further, Yoder (2008) observed that helping others in the aftermath of the Virginia Tech Shooting was beneficial to her personal recovery process. Altruism towards others has been strongly associated with resilience and can lead to an improved sense of community connectedness, as having a purpose has a positive association with resilience and recovery (Iacoviello & Charney, 2014). Yoder (2008) questioned the motives of helpers from outside the community, asking whether having many outside support can hinder a community's ability to heal itself. Further, when help comes from outside the community, it can reduce the solidarity-producing effect of collective grief that is a source of healing for many people (Hawdon & Ryan, 2011).

Hawdon and Ryan (2011) noted that community events should not be cancelled in the aftermath of tragedy because they can promote community solidarity, enhancing recovery (Hawdon & Ryan, 2011). Ritual memorials have an important role in the community healing process after a traumatic event, and having an organised community that can create and maintain these memorials is a crucial part of the recovery process (Kropf & Jones, 2014). While outside support in creating these memorials or ritual events may be needed, the meaning-making and decisions should come from the community that is grieving or their efforts can hinder the healing and recovery process (Kropf & Jones, 2014).

Iacoviello and Charney (2014) suggest that a supportive social network is among the psychosocial factors that promote resilience at the community level. There is a positive association between having a social relationship network in the community and better health (both physical and mental), a sense of belonging to the community, and improved social cohesion (Colistra et al., 2019). Social interactions are the motivation for citizens to visit public places (Colistra et al., 2019), and those who connect with a community centre have reduced feelings of isolation (leading to reduced depression) due to the increased opportunities for social relationships and interactions (Waters & Davidson, 2018).

A community centre can be a fundamental part of a community's identity, promoting a sense of belonging, providing space for supportive social relationships, and increasing community solidarity when citizens participate in its maintenance and sustainability. Shared history and participation are two aspects of shared emotional connections that contribute to community identity (Ahmad & Abu Talib, 2016).

A community centre also provides the opportunity for citizens to celebrate their community identity as a collective unit (Waters & Davidson, 2018). A sense of community belonging is interdependent between individuals and the community, as individuals who contribute to the community can experience the benefits of their contribution (Ahmad & Abu Talib, 2016). Community-led development has been shown to have a positive impact on the sustainability of community projects (Ahmad & Abu Talib, 2016), and having citizens participate in building, owning, or maintaining a space like a community hall, results in an increased commitment to, and higher use of that space (Waters & Davidson, 2018). The community hall becomes a symbol, and the participating citizens have an emotional connection to it (Waters & Davidson, 2018). Citizens who feel this emotional connection are more likely to take on a role in the community centre, which can create a mutually beneficial relationship with the community centre as volunteering increases self-esteem and confidence (Waters & Davidson, 2018).

Creating and maintaining meaning from a traumatic event is part of the process of identity construction and redefining a community (Hirschberger, 2018). A strong sense of community identity and a supportive social network are traits that can aid a community's ability to organise when that community is impacted by collective trauma.

A community that creates and maintains meaning from a collective trauma redefines their community identity. For this reason, the purpose of this autoethnography is to explore the significance of citizen participation in rebuilding a sense of community identity and in facilitating the communal healing process in the aftermath of the public shooting in Portapique, Nova Scotia.

3. Methodology

Ellis et al. (2010) describe autoethnography as an "approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience" (para 1). Using autoethnography, the first author, who refers to herself as I from this point on, explored personal experiences as the source of primary data. I chose autoethnography so that my

personal experiences with the Portapique mass shooting incident could be analysed and a deeper understanding of them be known. This project emerged out of a capstone undergraduate assignment.

I lived in Portapique for six years prior to the events of April 18th and 19th, 2020, with my husband and kids. Our life was quiet; we gardened, raised animals, and enjoyed working on our homestead. I decided to continue my education in Community Studies, completing my fourth year of study after the mass shooting. My supervisors for my capstone project supported the project from its inception through to the writing of this manuscript (with revisions occurring over one year after I had graduated). They are therefore included as co-authors of the paper.

This data was collected in the form of private journal entries consisting of my experiences and observations. The frequency of my journaling fluctuated from daily entries, each several paragraphs long, in the months directly following the shooting, to shorter, sometimes point-form entries a few times per week. In the immediate aftermath of the shooting, I began to write because I didn't feel I had anyone to talk to, and I needed an outlet for my thoughts. There was no conscious plan on my part initially to use these journal entries for this research. I did not ask myself questions or use prompts to guide my journaling, aside from several entries where I wrote with the specific purpose of recording everything I could remember about my friend, such as bits of conversations, details of things we had done together, for example, that I didn't want to forget. The journal entries I used ranged from April 2020 to February 2021. I chose this range to show the impact that participating in the community had on the themes emerging through my analysis. While individual names included in my journal reflections have been omitted to protect the privacy of those individuals; I recognise that victims' names are public and can be found easily online.

The six phases of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) provided a guide for my own thematic analysis. Firstly, I familiarised myself with the data: I actively read through my journal entries. While reviewing the data, I was able to discern which pieces of journal entries (data) were relevant to my research question, and these relevant pieces were compiled into my data set. Secondly, my initial code list was long, including over 40 codes, and was revisited and refined many times throughout the analysis process with my supervisors. I used inductive coding, as I generated codes from my data through its review. Thirdly, I began searching for and identifying themes in my data set (Braun & Clark, 2006). Identifying themes from my codes helped me to reduce the number of codes I was using and group similar codes together. This allowed me to map out themes and sub-themes, and determine which themes were significant to my research question. My initial semantic higher-order themes were "Psychological Trauma", "Social Interactions", and "Media Responses", further broken down into sub-themes comprised of both positives and negatives.

After reviewing my data set again, I realised this approach was not conveying what I felt were the most meaningful aspects of my data, leading me to switch to a latent approach. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe the latent approach as an approach going beyond semantic content, exploring assumptions and ideas that shape the content of the data. Using the latent approach, I reflected on the deeper meanings behind my codes and themes, revisited the existing literature, I realised I could fit the coded data into two higher-order themes deductively. Having an intense emotional reaction after a traumatic event is common, and there are many ways a person can respond to such an event. There is a spectrum, with posttraumatic stress symptoms on one end (Bardeen et al., 2013) and factors of resilience on the other (Iacoviello & Charney, 2014). These two themes, posttraumatic stress symptoms and factors of resilience, are the two higher-order themes I deductively identified through my thematic analysis.

According to Bardeen et al. (2013), posttraumatic stress symptoms include intense distress, avoidance of external prompts or internal prompts that relate to the traumatic experience, and hyperarousal (feeling "on alert" when there is no present danger). These three areas: psychological distress, avoidance, and hyperarousal (hypervigilance) are the three identified sub-themes that my

data pertained to and that were subsequently used as codes for my thematic analysis. Factors of resilience are comprised of cognitive, behavioural, and existential components (Iacoviello & Charney, 2014), these components being the three identified sub-themes. Iacoviello & Charney (2014) define resilience as the "adaptive characteristics of an individual to cope with and recover from adversity (para. 2)." On the spectrum of stress and trauma responses, factors of resilience are positive responses.

I then created thematic maps and ensured that each piece of coded data fit easily into their sub-theme. Overlapping themes are described as one of the downfalls of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and to avoid this, I arranged my higher-order themes and sub-themes as a spectrum, with the higher-order themes being on either end. Finally, my supervisors were involved in helping me to move from the semantic to latent approaches, acted as critical friends to question the ways in which I defined themes and arranged the data into themes, and pushed me to publish the manuscript.

4. Presentation of Results

What I remember most about the night of April 18th, 2020, was the intensity of the silence. Inside our house, everything was still outside, the lights were still flashing, and the fires were still burning. It felt like the air around was on high alert. The next morning, bright and sunny, didn't seem real. We had no idea what we were supposed to do or how we were supposed to deal with all the awful things that happened overnight and were still happening. This is where we were left. I would like to say that something happened, that someone gave us information or checked in on us in an official capacity (of course, our friends and family did), but there was nothing. When I first started to write this, over a year later in 2021, there had still been nothing. When we woke up the next morning, we awoke into what is our new life of dealing with the repercussions of this event. This is how we woke up every day until I got an invitation in the mail in August 2020 to attend a meeting at the community hall. This was the first time that someone had reached out to us, outside of our friends and family, to explicitly address that something terrible had happened and that we should do something about it.

This event was covered nationally and internationally in the media, forcing a small rural community into a spotlight that it was not accustomed to. Thirteen of the twenty-three victims were killed in Portapique. The influx of visitors began arriving daily in the immediate aftermath of the event and continued coming daily for six months after. While the majority were apparently well-intentioned, there were also "tourists" intent on exploring properties out of curiosity and finding souvenirs from properties where the shootings took place. The high-profile nature of this crime, the stigma derived from the public narrative given by the media, and the current state of emergency due to COVID-19 were significant factors affecting how the community was able to process this trauma.

My personal experiences with temporary and roadside memorials were positive at first in the immediate aftermath of the mass shooting, but these same memorials came to have a negative impact on my mental health in the months that followed. The influx of visitors, sometimes hundreds a day, making it difficult to feel comfortable in the community as my property was consistently trespassed on. I observed many new "No Trespassing" signs go up in the community and read repeated requests from residents in local news asking visitors to leave the community in peace leading me to believe I was not alone in my experience. Having the memorial dismantled and moved to private locations or given to victim's family members (this dismantling of the memorial was organised by the Nova Scotia Remembers Legacy Society (NSRLS)) gave me the sense that the memorial belonged to the community and people affected again. Seeing memorial items in a peaceful and private way at the Portapique Community Hall allowed me to appreciate the efforts of well-wishers wanting to express sympathy and grief for families and the community, something I could not appreciate when the roadside memorials were in place.

The findings of this study will be presented using excerpts from my journal entries organised under the themes of posttraumatic stress symptoms (with the sub-themes of psychological distress, hypervigilance, and avoidance) and factors of resilience (with the sub-themes of cognitive, behavioural, and existential factors).

4.1 Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms

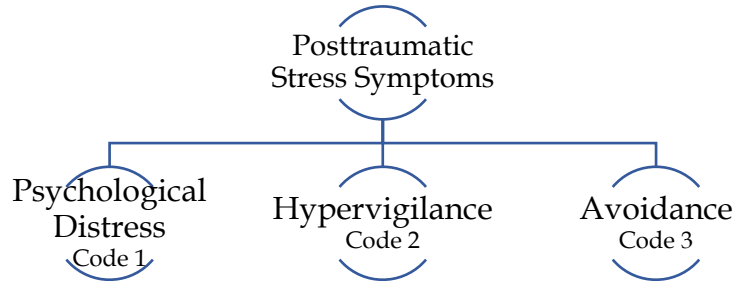Figure 1 shows the theme of posttraumatic stress symptoms, its sub-themes, and corresponding codes.

Figure 1: *Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms*

4.1.1 Psychological Distress

Psychological distress in my journal entries was experienced as many different emotions. I experienced grief as physical lethargy: "[My daughter] didn't get out of bed this morning; I don't blame her. I keep getting up for [my son], but I find myself going to my room to lie down every chance I get." I also experienced disbelief: "I keep thinking about how often [my daughter] was over at [my friends] when he stopped by, and about how likely it was that she would have been over there that night if it wasn't for the pandemic." Another emotion was anger: "[my son] is angry; he chopped the dead tree behind the chicken coop into splinters." Psychological distress also manifested as helplessness, feeling depressed and dwelling on negative thoughts: "I'm feeling so overwhelmed today, I'm having a really hard time. I wish [my husband] was home, I feel like I can't keep everyone safe from everything. I don't like all the crowds, there are too many things going on." I also had intrusive memories of what happened (or could have happened) that I could not control: "Sometimes I'm grateful [my husband] wasn't home; I keep thinking he would have had a gun and been down Brown Loop (Brown Loop is a road near the police barrier on Portapique Beach Road that was not blocked by RCMP) as soon as he heard. He might have gotten himself killed." The sub-theme of psychological distress was prominent in the immediate aftermath of the shooting, with instances only beginning to recede around September 2020. I believe this diminished distress was due to two factors: the potential for community involvement due to the Portapique Build-Up Project and the removal of the public memorial close to our house.

4.1.2 Hypervigilance

Hypervigilance was experienced when I, or someone I was interacting with, expressed feeling a loss of sense of security in the home or community, leading to extreme alert to dangers, whether real or not:

> "[My younger son] came running in the house today in a panic because there were kids, strangers, in his treehouse, and an adult standing under it. Not only do they walk through our woods, now apparently, they feel they can just let their kids play in our backyard."

I included changes in physical and emotional reactions within this sub-theme, for example, responding to a perceived threat in a way that is not typical:

> "[My younger son] and I were cleaning the barn this morning. [My neighbour] pulled up to say hi and check-in. [My younger son] ran in the house, grabbed a knife, and hid behind the door. When my neighbour drove off, he came back out with the knife to 'show me he was watching and ready'."

As with psychological distress, this sub-theme was prominent in the immediate aftermath of the shooting. Instances of hypervigilance in the data set that pertained to my feelings gradually lessened over time:

> "I bought some 'Beware of Dog' and 'No Trespassing' signs today, and we blocked off the end of our driveway with rocks on buckets and pylons. I'm sick of people using our driveway as a turning lane. As I was hammering the sign in, a car pulled into our driveway, and the driver didn't even look at me."

Instances that pertained to my perceptions of my children's feelings followed a different pattern, which was more cyclical with instances rising and falling:

> "It was weird before not being able to leave our property [due to the pandemic], but now it seems so much stranger that we can't leave our house. Especially today, on a weekend… what massive crowds. [My daughter] has started giving a 'murder tourist forecast', it's insane, they're everywhere."

These cycles of hypervigilance have also been ongoing, though diminished significantly today from the immediate aftermath: "The kids and [my husband] came out to the workday with me, and everyone actually had fun, they weren't too nervous being around people they didn't know well."

4.1.3 Avoidance

Avoidance was experienced as feeling detached (from friends and family, or current events) or avoiding thinking about or doing things. For example, not wanting to watch or read the news to avoid information about the shooting, avoiding texts, phone calls, and social media: "This is when I stopped watching the news in front of the kids; eventually I stopped watching it completely."

From the data, I can see that it was due to avoidance that it took me so long to move on to exhibiting factors of resilience. I not only avoided hearing news of the event, but also news of offers of support for the community. It was months after the shooting that I learned grief and trauma support was being offered at the Portapique Community Hall, not because the information was not available, but because I was actively avoiding it.

I did not identify avoidance as a sub-theme because of the number of times I wrote about it specifically in my data set, but rather because I recognised after the fact through my research that it was a theme underlying many of my entries. In the days after the shooting, I was glued to the news and social media, wanting to find out everything I could. I believe what changed this for me was the CBC Virtual Vigil that aired on April 24th, 2020. For me, it was a sad but lovely tribute. For my son, it caused a great deal of distress:

> "The vigil was on tonight, and there was a beautiful sunset. I thought it was nice, but it doesn't seem real yet seeing everyone's faces on tv. When Natalie MacMaster played a "duet" with [my son's friend], [my son] got so angry he went for a run and refused to watch the rest of the tribute. He is so angry that she played over [his friend's] playing instead of just playing [his friend's] video. He is so so angry over this."

a.   Factors of Resilience

Figure 2 shows the theme of factors of resilience, its sub-themes, and corresponding codes.
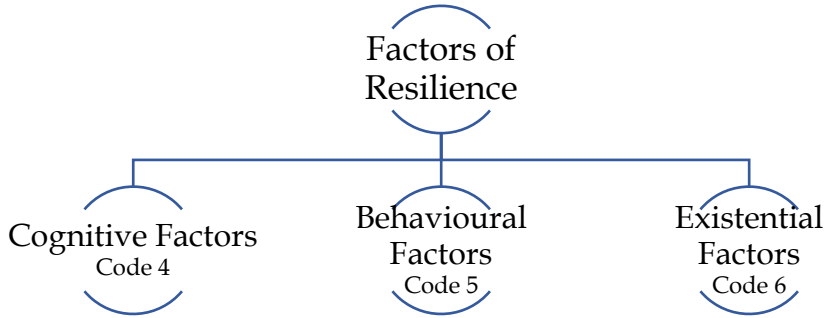
Figure 2: *Factors of Resilience*

4.2.1 Cognitive Factors

Cognitive factors included optimism or feeling positive about the future: "[My younger son] is getting really excited about the playground being built. He wants to ask [neighbour] and [neighbour] if he can cut through their yards so he can get to it without having to walk on the road." Cognitive factors also included cognitive flexibility, or feeling acceptance of the event, being able to minimise the perceived threats we feel, and remembering people we lost in a positive way:

> "I was thinking today about how excited both [my friend] and [neighbour] would have been about this project. It's hard not to think about how much more fun it would be if they were here helping, but it's nice to think that they would have been super happy about it."

Another time, I wrote "[my son] wrote a tribute to [his friend] today for […]. It was so sad and teenage sounding, but it was lovely too." Finally, cognitive factors included maintaining positive core beliefs that people can be trusted and the world is not inherently bad and dangerous:

> "The […]'s brought us some loaves of homemade bread today with a little note. It was so nice getting something from someone in the community, I feel like they must have been feeling the same sense of needing to do something that we were."

Instances of this sub-theme in my data set in the first four months after the shooting were very low, however they increased significantly after September 2020 when crowds began to lessen around the neighbourhood. Upon reflection I believe feeling less threatened in our community was directly related to the crowds leaving the community.

4.2.2 Behavioural Factors

I defined behavioural factors as including actively looking for and accessing supports and resources to deal with the event, maintaining a supportive social network (for example, joining the Portapique Build Up Project, connecting with neighbours, friends, and family), engaging in altruistic behaviours (volunteering our time in the community, making food or gifts for others), or actively trying to make meaning out of the event through memorialising loved ones in a positive way: "I'm joining the Nova Scotia Remembers Legacy Society Board. I'm looking forward to learning more about what they do, but really it feels nice to just finally be doing something."

This sub-theme did not appear until September 2020 in my data set, but after this time, it increased quickly and significantly. This increase in instances was centred around altruistic behaviours and actively trying to make meaning out of the event, mostly due to my joining two local boards as a volunteer (The Portapique Community Hall Board of Trustees and the NSRLS).

4.2.3 Existential Factors

I defined this sub-theme as feeling as if I am a part of something bigger or finding meaning in what I am doing. When I am feeling a strong sense of belonging and community identity.

This sub-theme was only significantly reflected in my data towards the very end of my data set. While not directly specified through pieces in my data set, finding meaning in what I am doing has been an underlying theme. This meaning became apparent to me in my writing through my observations of how my kids are adjusting to life post-tragedy. They love their community and are excited about the prospects that the community work will bring. They have all volunteered with me, my youngest took part in the first program offered at the Portapique Community Hall, and they will be working with me on the one-year anniversary event. As a parent, that is where I find meaning in what I do.

Personally, I'm finding a sense of community identity that I didn't have before the shooting. [My friend] and I were both "come from away" people, and in rural Nova Scotia, this is a label, albeit a friendly one, that can linger. [My friend] and I were "planners"; however, she was also a "doer". I was not. We had all sorts of plans to implement things in the community. She, because she just loved doing things and living in the moment, and I, because I thought it would make it "more" somehow. Summer camps, rural women's networks, walking groups, book clubs, classes, so many ideas. I will not ever come to terms with the shooting. It was not fair, it should not have happened, but it did. Now because of it, I have moved from being a person who makes plans and never realises them to a person who is beginning to realise those plans. My sense of community identity and belonging became apparent to me when I realised that what I thought was missing from this area was here, I was just the one missing it before. It's difficult to identify with a community if you don't interact with it.

5. Discussion

As my analysis covered roughly ten months of journal entries, I noticed a significant fluctuation in which sub-themes represented prominently over time. I found this represented in the existing literature as the three phases that communities experience after a public tragedy. The crisis phase, the processing phase, and the adaptation phase (Kropf & Jones, 2014).

Crisis happens in the immediate aftermath of the traumatic event, when individuals may be experiencing hopelessness, fear, and disbelief over what has happened (Kropf & Jones, 2014). Kropf and Jones (2014) describe this phase as life "unravelling in the community." During the crisis phase in the aftermath of the Portapique shooting, the two prominent sub-themes were psychological distress and hypervigilance.

Kropf and Jones (2014) used Hurricane Katrina as an example to illustrate the critical need for interventions in a community experiencing a crisis to restore a sense of order to the community. This same need for community interventions applied to the mass shooting in Portapique as well. Some required shelter after evacuating their homes, but most sheltered in place, and those who sheltered in place were also in need of interventions to restore order to the community.

In the processing phase, the emergency crisis workers have left, and the community begins rebuilding (Kropf & Jones, 2014). This is the phase where the community needs support in constructing meaning around the traumatic event (Kropf & Jones, 2014). This happened with both the Portapique Build-Up Project and the NSRLS. Once these groups were organised within the community there were people from outside who wanted to offer help and support. Community organising was crucial to the cognitive, behavioural, and existential factors of resilience.

The adaptation phase happens when the event has become a part of the community identity, the community can not be the same as it was before, and the event is now integrated into it (Kropf &

Jones, 2014). Within this adaptation, there are instances when the public tragedy can inspire a community to move forward in a positive way and others that leave a community with a stigma that is difficult to overcome (Kropf & Jones, 2014). In Portapique, while we created community projects and I personally built a community where I had not had it before, the stigma of the shooting was still apparent. Indeed, this event is known as "The Portapique Shooting." It is difficult to come to terms with going from being unknown to being known for something terrible.

Nonetheless, a common result of community tragedy is the need to keep the memory alive collectively, often by memorialising it (Hirschberger, 2018). Assigning meaning to the tragedy can promote community solidarity (Hirschberger, 2018). Cognitive flexibility and optimism, some psychosocial factors contributing to resilience (Iacoviello & Charney, 2014) are crucial to allow citizens to change their outlook of the traumatic event to find meaning and positivity that can help the recovery process. These traits, when present in a community, give citizens the ability to maintain belief in the fact that they will get through the difficult time they are going through while also facing their current realities (Iacoviello & Charney, 2014).

The Portapique Community Build-Up Project and the NSRLS are two organisations that began in the aftermath of the mass shooting in Portapique with the intent of building those supportive social networks in the community. Ultimately, the goal was to take the collective trauma of the community and use it towards positive action, redefining the community identity while maintaining the collective memory of what the community went through.

Tragedy-specific activities contribute to community solidarity due to the communal focus on the activity or event (Hawdon & Ryan, 2011). This community solidarity is sustained through engaging in general activities such as casual conversations with community members, attending community events, and supporting local businesses, as these activities symbolise resiliency and can be comforting to grieving community members (Hawdon & Ryan, 2011).

Future research could explore interventions for youth and parents experiencing hypervigilance after a public tragedy. I believe interventions should have been in place in schools, with extra support given to students in need. Whereas I could rationalise that a situation was probably not dangerous, my children did not seem to have that same capability. In fact, as my own child pointed out to me, "it's not irrational to believe that something can happen twice." My own identity and role as a mother wove throughout my experience. The linkage between the care work that is tied to motherhood and my desire to protect my family (and community) consistently appeared in my reflections on the event (Edmonds, 2019).

6. Conclusion

As the first anniversary approaches, I have become involved in the planned memorial activities. I find myself cycling through the responses to stress and trauma again, and I expect this to be the first of many cycles. My participation as a citizen has not just impacted rebuilding my community identity, it has really defined it by turning the collective trauma into positive action, which both facilitates communal and personal healing and maintains the collective memory of the trauma. While I recognise that the results are limited due to the individualised nature of this autoethnographical study, I feel that the opportunity given to the reader to reflect on this narrative can impact the trajectories of future research by evoking empathy and further inquiry into posttraumatic experiences.

7. Acknowledgement

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