

Consumer Vulnerability as a Shared Experience: Tornado Recovery Process in Wright, Wyoming

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Natural disasters leave people vulnerable because of threats to health and safety and because of losses of lives, financial assets, and possessions valued for functional and symbolic purposes. This article explores vulnerability as a shared experience, examines how responses to individual and community vulnerability facilitate and impede the restoration of control, and shows how vulnerability can transform individuals and a community. The findings demonstrate that vulnerability can be experienced as a social process and as a state of flux and that individuals and social groups actively and constructively work to move themselves out of their vulnerable states. The article concludes with a discussion of implications for theory and for public policy.

Natural disasters, such as tsunamis, hurricanes, tornados, firestorms, floods, and earthquakes, threaten lives, disrupt normal consumption rituals, and, at times, leave community members with few, if any, material possessions that have facilitated their survival and been central to their definitions of self (Belk 1988). Research exploring recovery from a firestorm (Sayre 1994) and from an earthquake (Ikeuchi, Fujihara, and Dohi 1999) suggests that consumers dealing with the aftermath of a natural disaster experience loss that is consistent with the experience of consumer vulnerability. Consumer vulnerability occurs when a person is “powerless, out of control, and dependent in a consumption situation that has negative ramifications on one’s identity” (Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg 2005, p. 134). Victims of natural disasters cope with fears for their own and their loved ones’ safety, the unexpected loss of human lives, and the involuntary loss of collective landmarks and personal possessions.

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On August 12, 2005, the community of Wright, Wyo., was hit by an F-2 tornado with winds of 113–130 miles per hour (Gulley 2005). Although people differed in their degree of victimization, the entire community was affected by the event. Two people died, and nearly one-quarter of the town’s population was left homeless (Simmons 2005). According to county officials (individual interviews), approximately 85% of people who lost their homes were uninsured. One year after the disaster, residents of Wright continued to experience vulnerability and to face the challenge of restoring control to their community and to their individual lives.

The purpose of this article is to explore vulnerability as a shared experience. Specifically, the study examines the form and content of shared vulnerability, how individuals and the collective respond to vulnerability, and how a community can be transformed by its vulnerability. This article contributes to the marketing and public policy literature in three ways. First, by showing that vulnerability can be a shared experience, it extends Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg’s (2005) model, which focuses primarily on vulnerability as an individual state. Second, it highlights how the movement through liminal identity states can be facilitated or impeded by individual, community, and policy responses. Third, the article shows how both individuals and their community can be transformed by their shared experiences of vulnerability and by their collective recovery efforts.

We begin with a brief review of the literature on consumer vulnerability and with a definition of community. Then, we explain the methods of data collection and the research context. Next, we describe and summarize the findings in a model that illuminates the processual nature of consumer vulnerability and how vulnerability differs when it is a shared versus an individual experience. We conclude with a summary of implications for theory and public policy.

Background

Consumer Vulnerability: A Liminal State

Consumer vulnerability is complex, domain specific, and not necessarily enduring.¹ Specifically, Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg (2005, p. 134) define consumer vulnerability as follows:

[A] state of powerlessness that arises from an imbalance in marketplace interactions or from the consumption of marketing messages and products. It occurs when control is not in an individual's hands, creating a dependence on external factors (e.g., marketers) to create fairness in the marketplace. The actual vulnerability arises from the interaction of individual states, individual characteristics, and external conditions within a context where consumption goals may be hindered and the experience affects personal and social perceptions of self.

Similar to previous conceptualizations of vulnerability (e.g., Hill 2001; Peñaloza 1995), this definition emphasizes that both internal and external factors can contribute to the experience of vulnerability. For example, vulnerability for some immigrant consumers may stem from internal characteristics, such as literacy and experience in the marketplace, and from external factors, such as subordination and segregation in the marketplace (Peñaloza 1995).

Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg's (2005) definition emphasizes the individual experience of vulnerability and defines vulnerability as a state, not as a status. Conceptualizing consumer vulnerability as a state avoids the problem of erroneously equating vulnerability with race, sex, income, and other demographic characteristics when there is no empirical basis for doing so (Ringold 1995). In reality, vulnerability typically is a temporary experience that people actively work to reduce in pursuit of getting their lives back to normal (Baker 2006).

In a state of disequilibrium, vulnerable consumers have difficulty navigating the marketplace because navigation requires that they understand "what they want to achieve (i.e., their preferences) and [that they] have the wherewithal (i.e., knowledge, skills, and freedom) to do so" (Ringold 2005, p. 202). Characterized by feelings of an unidentifiable path to a stable sense of self, states of vulnerability can be conceived of as liminal identity states (Gentry et al. 1995).

Liminality, an identity state characterized by feelings of void or of "being in a tunnel," occurs when people experience transitions in states or social positions (Turner 1974, p. 232). For example, plastic surgery (Schouten 1991) and grief (Gentry et al. 1995) have been shown to produce liminal identity states. Transitions occur in three phases: separation, margin, and reaggregation (Turner 1974; Van Gennep [1909] 1960). Separation requires detachment from a stable identity. Values and attitudes tied to past identity markers must be renegotiated to detach fully. In the margin, an individual or a group is in a "between" phase (i.e., in a liminal phase). Identity in a liminal phase is actively negotiated between the old, stable identity and a new, yet unknown identity. In reaggregation, people often assume an identity they believe to be superior to (or at least different from) their

old identity before the transition in state or social position (Turner 1974; Van Gennep [1909] 1960).

For consumers experiencing vulnerability, a compromised sense of future self constrains their ability to identify marketplace objectives (Gentry et al. 1995; Ringold 2005). However, consumers attempt to adapt to vulnerable states by using one or more cognitive, emotional, or behavioral coping mechanisms (Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg 2005; Hill 1992; Stephens, Hill, and Gentry 2005). In addition to individual responses, market or policy responses may either facilitate or impede the restoration of control (Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg 2005).

Although vulnerability is a state and not a status, communities and individuals can remain vulnerable over relatively extended periods (Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg 2005). The complex recovery efforts mandated by a natural disaster may perpetuate the experience of vulnerability for both individual community members and the community as a whole. In this article, we explore the shared experience of vulnerability and show how members of a social group responded to their vulnerability in pursuit of restoring control to their individual and collective lives.

Definition of Community

Exploring vulnerability as a shared experience is grounded in the sociological concept of community. Definitions of community differ widely. Nonetheless, three core elements—a consciousness of kind, the presence of shared traditions, and a sense of moral obligation to the collective—tend to be common across all conceptualizations of community (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001).² Although Wright is a nascent civic community (it was incorporated in 1985), in a sociological sense, all elements of community are present: Complex associations and interactions among community members produce an intrinsic association to the collective and a collective sense of difference from other communities. Furthermore, shared traditions and community symbols perpetuate the notion of community and foster a sense of moral obligation to the collective. "This sense of moral responsibility is what produces, in times of threat to the community, collective action" (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001, p. 413).

Method

We used a qualitative method of inquiry. Our only *a priori* assumption before we entered the field was that at least some members of the community would be vulnerable. We based this assumption on the fact that the tornado that struck the town took two lives, destroyed property, and left 25% of community members homeless. We did not presume that everyone experienced the tornado in the same way. We recognized that individual meanings and interpretations of the disaster were situated within the cultural context and the network of shared knowledge, beliefs, and ideals that characterize the community of Wright (Thompson and Pollio 1994). We let informants tell their stories of how they con-

¹For an extensive review of the literature on or related to consumer vulnerability, see Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg (2005).

²An extensive review of literature on community is beyond the scope of this article. For a summary of the community literature, see Muniz and O'Guinn (2001).

structured meaning out of their lived experiences within the context of tornado recovery (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989). As such, this research is inductive in nature. We allowed the findings to flow from the inquiry. We used informants' reflections on their actions, experiences, values, and beliefs to understand their individual and shared experiences of vulnerability. The nature of the information our informants shared is sensitive. Following Hill's recommendations (1995), we attempted in numerous ways to remain respectful of informants' rights and to make the study relevant to participants.

Data Collection

We collected data over a period of several months so that we could watch events as they unfolded and track meanings as they emerged. As of this writing, some combination of the research team (the authors) had visited the community five different times. Our first encounter was at a city council meeting four months after the tornado, where we obtained community support and gathered referrals for participation. On our second visit, we conducted three focus groups and several one-on-one interviews. In our third and fourth visits, we conducted more interviews and observed various aspects of tornado recovery (e.g., the system for distribution of resources, a planning meeting for the one-year commemoration event). On our fifth visit, we attended the one-year commemoration event, primarily as observers, and reconnected with many of the informants.

During this time, we viewed numerous photographs and had extended discussions by telephone and e-mail. We subscribed to and read the local newspaper, which included testimonials about how people had been affected by the tornado. We heard songs and presentations and read poems written to help community members process the trauma associated with their experiences. We had numerous informal conversations with community members, many of whom we initially met in more formal settings (e.g., council meetings, planning meetings, focus groups, individual interviews). Thus, our data collection has been extended and prolonged within the community. In this article, we used transcripts of the focus groups and individual interviews as data for the analysis; we used the other materials (e.g., songs, poems, newspaper articles, informal interviews, observations) to glean a more detailed understanding of the context.

Conducting both focus groups and depth interviews enabled us to explore experiences at both the individual and the collective levels of the community. We conducted focus groups first to get a general understanding of the community's experience and to realize which issues needed to be pursued in more depth. For approximately 90 minutes, discussions with five to six community members focused on (1) the most difficult things they experienced as a result of the tornado, (2) a timeline of what happened immediately after the tornado, (3) when the immediate responses ended and how they viewed the next chapter, (4) "stories of hope" and "stories of sorrow," and (5) what they would tell someone who had not lived through the experience about what they learned about themselves or their community as a result of the storm. Thus, we developed the focus group guide to chronicle response and recovery events as they unfolded.

The guide helped keep informants' discussions at the experience level versus the abstract level (Thompson and Haytko 1997). Community members helped construct timelines and delineate actions by other parties that were helpful and not helpful. They achieved a shared understanding of their collective experiences, but divergent understandings of the experience also emerged. Participants were forthcoming and open in the setting, and participants and moderators alike displayed intense emotion.

We intentionally attempted to identify information-rich informants who represented different segments of the community affected by the disaster. Our informants were heterogeneous with respect to impact from the tornado and to roles in the recovery from the disaster. Focus Group 1 consisted of six city officials and emergency personnel, such as fire fighters and law enforcement officers. These people were trained to inoculate themselves from the suffering of others. Focus Group 2 was made up of six community members affected by the tornado who had no official role in disaster response. Some had lost their homes, some had homes that were partially destroyed, and others had been intimately involved in helping their friends and neighbors reconstruct their lives. Focus Group 3 comprised five businesspeople from the community; we purposefully attempted to include businesses, such as insurance agencies, that were pertinent to the disaster response. Not every informant from the business community focus group or the city official focus group personally incurred a loss of property. However, two well-known members of the community were killed, and several community landmarks were damaged by the tornado. At some level, all informants had witnessed the devastation of the tornado and thus were able to reflect on the impact of the storm from their personal perspectives.³

Our purpose in delineating the three groups was to obtain information from different sectors of the community to learn how the tornado affected each group and to learn how each group was involved in the recovery process. Their common experiences allowed for a rich interchange of perspectives. As would be expected, perceptions differed both among and within focus groups. A former minister, not from the community, was present at all focus groups. She assisted our research team in administrative details and was available for grief counseling should assistance have been needed.⁴

We conducted 13 subsequent formal interviews with 14 people in the same categories as noted previously; 3 of these informants also participated in a focus group. Some informants were interviewed formally or informally multiple times (we do not count these as separate interviews). Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to four hours, with slightly more than one hour being the norm. We conducted 2 inter-

³The first author moderated Focus Groups 1 and 2, and the second author moderated Focus Group 3.

⁴The former minister was a graduate assistant to the first author and a student in the University of Wyoming's MBA program. We highly recommend that researchers collecting data in sensitive and potentially emotionally charged contexts receive training in grief counseling (see Gentry et al. 1995) or, as in this study, make a trained grief counselor available. At a minimum, researchers should be able to provide informants with information about where they can go within their own communities to receive counseling.

views by telephone. The final sample of informants included county and city officials and employees, including emergency response personnel, community social service agency personnel, nonprofit relief workers, members of a grass-roots disaster recovery team, business owners, and residents who experienced personal property losses from the tornado.⁵ Because of the small size of the community, we do not provide additional demographic information about informants to ensure that confidentiality is preserved.

We told informants that the purpose of the study was to learn how they coped, both personally and as a community, after the tornado and how they viewed the emergency response efforts. During the interviews, we made it clear that we were not crisis counselors and provided some informants with contact information for grief counseling. All participants provided informed consent. Focus group participants received \$50 as an incentive, which could be used for personal or community relief efforts. Most other informants received a small token of appreciation. We transcribed the focus groups and interviews verbatim. These texts serve as our primary evidence in developing an understanding of vulnerability as a shared experience.

Analysis

We conducted the analysis in three stages. First, we analyzed data from individual interviews and focus groups independently of each other. During Phase 1 of the analysis, we compared *a priori* nor emerging themes across data sets; instead, from each text, we developed lists of different domains important to understanding vulnerability and of different responses to vulnerability. During Phase 2 of the analysis, we compared coded data across the various depth interviews and focus groups. We interpreted and recorded commonalities and differences among the different data sets. Finally, we interpreted commonalities among the data sets in the light of Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg's (2005) vulnerability model, which recognizes that vulnerability comes from multiple sources and is responded to in various ways. From this understanding, we developed a new model of shared vulnerability to tie the emerging themes together in a unified conceptual model. This analytical process is consistent with procedures that Thompson (1997) suggests and that Lee, Ozanne, and Hill (1999), Baker, Stephens, and Hill (2001), and Curasi, Price, and Arnould (2004) use.⁶

Contextual Background

Wright, Wyo. (population 1300), was incorporated in 1985 (Arndt-Gosser 2005). Atlantic Richfield mining company developed the town in the hope of attracting a nontransient

population of miners. Thus, most of the adult population of the community came from different places in the state or in the country. The population is employed primarily in the coal-mining industry, but other area residents work in ranching and various private and public services that support the community (Arndt-Gosser 2005).

Recent booms in the mining economy have made the county in which Wright resides one of the wealthiest counties in the state. Despite its economic prosperity, Wright's isolated geographic location and its small size limit the resources available to the community. For the last several years, Wright has experienced a housing shortage. Wright has a town newspaper, a post office, a medical clinic, one motel, three restaurants, one grocery store, one gas station, a secondhand store, one insurance agency, and one general contractor. Towns with full services nearest to Wright include Gillette (39 miles), Casper (87 miles), and Douglas (77 miles). The community has one Red Cross volunteer and a community assistance center, which is funded by grants and the state. Four deputies and two state troopers are assigned to Wright, and one of each is usually on active duty at any given time. With the exception of two full-time firefighters, the fire department is entirely volunteer. In total, there are typically three or four emergency response personnel on duty.

Despite being located in a region where tornadoes occur fairly regularly, Wright lies outside the Doppler radar system. The community relies on a network of storm spotters to watch for funnel clouds and alert residents of approaching storms (Associated Press 2005). On August 12, 2005, the National Weather Service asked for tornado spotters one hour before the tornado touched down. When law enforcement officers spotted the tornado, they sounded the town's siren, giving residents approximately a five-minute warning that a tornado was headed toward their community (Warden 2005).

The tornado took two lives, left more than 100 homes uninhabitable, and left 85 families (about a quarter of the town) homeless (Simmons 2005). The most heavily damaged homes were mobile homes. Many mobile homes older than ten years were uninsured because insuring mobile homes of that age is often cost prohibitive. Many community members had their roofs damaged and their fences, sheds, trees, cars, and so forth, destroyed. On August 16, 2005, Wright was declared a disaster area by the state (Freudenthal 2005). By August 22, President Bush declared a major disaster for Wyoming, initiating the process of releasing federal recovery assistance (Enzi 2005). The Red Cross, Salvation Army, various church and civic organizations, and many nearby towns and individuals also offered aid.

Findings

The findings reflect that people individually and collectively work to reduce their vulnerability and are transformed by their shared experiences of vulnerability. We describe the process of moving through a state of vulnerability by interpreting informants' perceptions of (1) experiences of vulnerability, (2) response efforts that facilitated or impeded the restoration of control, and (3) the community and per-

⁵The first author took the lead on interviewing ten informants, often with assistance from the second author. The second author took the lead on interviewing three informants, with assistance from the first author. Four informants were interviewed using the same interview guide as the focus groups. Nine subsequent interview guides were customized to fit the informants' roles and experiences and to help us dig deeper within specific topics gleaned through previous data collection sessions.

⁶The first two authors analyzed the textual data.

sonal outcomes and transformations that occurred as a result of shared vulnerability.

Vulnerability Experiences

A person's sense of control is grounded in experiences embedded in a social context that can both prevent and provide opportunities for people to exercise control (Skinner 1995). Informants' narratives indicate that community members attributed their vulnerability to threats to health and safety and to the loss of human lives, financial assets, and valued possessions. People experienced vulnerability as an immediate and a sustained state and as an individual and a shared experience.

Threats to Physical Health and Public Safety

When residents became aware that a tornado was bearing down on the community, they attempted to move to the safest possible place and experienced an ultimate loss of control.

As soon as [my two grandchildren and I] got in the middle bathroom, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, glass breaking, everything.... I'm going, okay, this is really happening.... I picked those babies up when the glass started just crunching and kept crunching, and I said, "Okay, dear Lord, these babies aren't done here on earth. And neither am I! So please protect us." And then everything calmed down.... [community member, individual interview]

As the tornado crashed through her life, this informant recognized her lack of control and her inability to protect her grandchildren. To cope with the situation, she gave her control over to a higher power and waited to see what transpired.

As soon as residents realized that the immediate danger was over, they began assessing their own injuries and moving on to check on the safety of their loved ones.

"[Name, Name], where are you?" And I go, "I'm in the bathroom, and I'm gonna STAY in the bathroom!" (laughs). And she goes, "[Name], I'm bleeding profoundly." I mean blood was just gushing out of her. She's screaming to the top of her lungs.... And I said, "You're pumping blood, and I can't find your wound." She walked into my house on a broken foot, didn't EVEN realize this.... I had the cell phone, so she said can she use the cell phone, and I said, "I'm gonna tell you right now, you're not going to get out because everybody else is using their cell phone, we've lost all contact." Well, I got her into the bathroom, and she's still screaming, and I said (thumps on table), "[Name], I have two little babies there. The more you cry, the more they're going to cry. The more you cry, the more you scream, the more the blood that's going to pump. I can't find where your wound is." [community member, individual interview]

This informant needed to help her friend, but at the same time, she needed to protect her grandchildren. She recognized the shared nature of their vulnerability and perceived that helping her friend regain control would also help her grandchildren feel safer.

As residents assessed their and their loved ones' health, emergency response personnel began to formulate a plan of action. In the midst of developing a response plan, many emergency response personnel recognized their own and their community's continued vulnerability.

We were still dealing with the fluidity of—of weather because while we got the initial, um, call for the devastation of the tornado, we were still getting calls of—you've got another tornado that's formin' and headin' your way ... a little lightning in the area, more rain, gas leaks, you know, we—we—the tornado hit, and we still weren't done dealing with the weather aspect of it.... So now you've got people that are dazed and confused tryin' to come out of the area, lookie loos tryin' to come into the area, us tryin' to establish some semblance of a command center, and then we get a call, you guys got another tornado headed your way. And I just started feelin' panic in there, because people are comin' up to us, who are tryin' to deal with what was goin' on, and sayin' there's another tornado comin', where do we go? We don't have a designated shelter in town, so, you know, it just seemed like the problems kept escalating. [emergency response, focus group]

Loss of control, dependence, no designated emergency shelter, lack of manpower, gas leaks, downed electrical and telephone lines, broken water lines, mangled homes, strewn possessions and insulation, continued weather threats, and mass chaos characterize the various threats to physical health and safety that contributed to the shared experience of vulnerability. Some threats to health and safety continued as people sifted through and cleared debris in the days and weeks following the tornado. However, most threats to health and safety were minimized by the end of the evening the tornado struck.

Loss of Human Lives, Financial Assets, and Valued Possessions

The psychological stress inflicted by the tornado was immediate and sustained in the recovery process. After enduring the immediate trauma of surviving the storm, residents needed to cope with the loss of human lives, the depletion of their assets, and the destruction or loss of valued possessions. When reflecting on stories of sorrow, many informants said that the most difficult things for them to bear were the deaths of Connie "Grandpa" Allen (age 97) and Etienne Iriberry Sr. (age 53).

Q: So, let's move to thinking about the future, five years from now.... You're going to have some really vivid memories, okay? And in those memories, there are going to be some stories of sorrow, and there are going to be some stories of hope. Let's talk about the hard one first. What are those stories of sorrow like?

[Multiple informants chorused at same time about the loss of "Grandpa."]

- 1: Grandpa was an integral part of the community, everybody knew him, he—you know, there were not very many people in town who did not know who Grandpa Allen was.
- 2: If anybody referred to Grandpa, we knew who it was. And ... that's, I mean, that's gonna—I'm never gonna be able to forget lifting the wall off of him and havin' him recognize me and feeling so good that, hey, Grandpa made it. And then hearin' from [Name] later on that evening that he didn't.
- 3: Well, and then to find out, his concern immediately upon gettin' pulled out of the house—his whole thing was, hey, I'm not hurt near as bad as the rest of the people around me, so you guys just put a bandage on me, and go take care of the rest.
- 4: [H]e was real visible; he was out in the community every day, you know, he wasn't sitting at home and, you know, people

weren't taking care of him or anything. He was out every day giving advice, talking to kids. He was teaching us all every day, so he wasn't somebody that we'll forget.... And knew everybody. Knew a personal thing about everybody, um, was a joker and a teaser, and, you know, made sure that you knew that he was thinkin' about you.

5: Even the children are gonna remember him. [emergency response, focus group]

The experience of losing two residents of the community was intense and shared. Many informants spoke about life in their small town, about knowing their neighbors, and about the interconnectedness of living in Wright. In the public and shared experience of recovery, residents continually faced reminders of the losses of their fellow community members.

The most broadly experienced type of loss was financial. Nearly every informant incurred some type of financial loss from factors related to the tornado. Insured residents incurred the costs of their deductibles. Many uninsured residents lost everything, including any equity built up in their homes. In addition, many local business owners incurred financial losses both immediately after the disaster and over time. For example, some business owners made financial allowances for residents who were affected by the storm (e.g., free rent, free storage, releases from contractual obligations).

[W]e have a [small service business]. And in that way it was highly impacted, as I donated six months [of free service] to every [client] who lived in the trailer park. And so that was from August until February we donated [the service].... So that was significant financial impact. [business owner, individual interview]

These allowances provided relief to some residents. However, many recovery initiatives of local business owners were conducted behind the scenes (i.e., efforts were not visible to the broader community). As such, many of these recovery efforts were not acknowledged or recognized. Informants reported that though the purpose of their recovery efforts was not to seek recognition within the community, the lack of recognition contributed to their experiences of vulnerability.

In addition to financial losses, the losses of personal and community possessions also contributed to residents' experiences of vulnerability. Vulnerability from loss of possessions stemmed from residents being forced to dispose of possessions that were still valued for their function or for their symbolic meaning (Belk 1988). In the immediate aftermath of the tornado, people needed basic necessities, such as shelter, coats, blankets, pots, pans, baby formula, diapers, and so forth.

[H]elping people get clothing was the first [challenge] because the people weren't allowed back into their homes, and so they were without clothing, without coats. It was cold the next day. [emergency response, focus group]

The exposure caused by not having access to many basic necessities left residents vulnerable. Eventually, donations poured into the community to meet residents' basic and functional needs, and, for the most part, goods valued primarily for their function were replaceable. However, a functional item may not have been recognized as needing to be replaced until the context of use presented itself. For exam-

ple, a missing nutcracker disrupted a resident's Christmas season ritual, triggering an intense emotional reaction to reliving the loss of the tornado. Through the disruption of a family ritual, the loss of a seemingly meaningless possession perpetuated a resident's felt vulnerability.

Informants spoke of replacement items (e.g., clothing, home decorations, Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA] trailers) as reminders of the transitional process through which they were going. Many informants expressed frustration about the FEMA policy of prohibiting the personalization of FEMA trailers. Residents were not permitted to attach anything to the inside or outside of FEMA trailers permanently or temporarily. This policy precluded victims from identifying with their living situation as "home" or "me" or "mine" (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995). Despite being restricted from personalizing the trailers, many informants living in temporary FEMA trailers expressed gratitude and appreciation for receiving federal housing assistance. Many acknowledged the importance of temporary housing to their recovery process. This is consistent with Andreasen's (1984) finding that people in role transitions are receptive to goods and services they otherwise would have considered undesirable. However, it should also be noted that not all informants followed the "rules" to recovery. In attempts to express elements of their identity, some residents hung items on FEMA trailer walls.

Lost or damaged goods valued primarily for their symbolic meaning were difficult, if not impossible, to replace. Souvenirs, collections, favorite possessions, and items accumulated over many years reflect tastes, preferences, and private histories; they tell life stories by communicating ideas about their possessors and by reflecting where they have been (Belk 1990; Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995). Symbolic possessions are important tools for identity construction that cannot simply be replaced. For example, photographs documenting a child's first steps cannot be reproduced. Any attempt to restage the event or recapture that moment will never possess the same meaning as the original (Grayson and Shulman 2000; Kleine and Baker 2004). Similarly, peoples' homes are important possessions for communicating individualized aspects of their identities, and though a replacement home will take on and accumulate new meanings, it could never reflect the same personal history of the original.

You know, the pain's still there. I had a beautiful home. Now I've got—I LOVED my home. I had a blast baking in it—I have an ultimate kitchen now.

Q: Is it home?

It's getting there. I feel like now, okay, I would've probably in the past hurried and put my pictures up. And now they're still sitting in totes in bedrooms. [community member, individual interview]

This informant lost her home and many of her family's possessions. In this quotation, she was fondly reflecting on memories of baking in the kitchen that was destroyed by the tornado. She contrasts the memory of her former home with the "ultimate kitchen" in her replacement house. The replacement kitchen cannot mean the same thing as the original, but she is working on creating meaning for her new home. The recognition of being on the way to somewhere

else is a key characteristic of liminality (Turner 1974). By creating new memories in her new kitchen, this informant will begin to fuse her old identity with her new identity. She will move out of the liminal identity state and into the reaggregation phase. Over time, the new kitchen will become part of her extended self, reflecting an identity that melds her past, present, and future sense of self.

Responses to Vulnerability

The storm brought an immediate awareness among residents that community members were vulnerable. The first official response was recorded exactly five minutes after the tornado was reported to be on the ground. Individuals; residents of other communities; nonprofit organizations; businesses; and federal, state, and local agencies offered assistance. These responses continue through the day of this writing. Relief has come in the forms of information, labor, and monetary and nonmonetary donations. Many responses had the intended effect of moving the community and its members away from vulnerability. However, some response efforts created additional barriers to recovery and to the restoration of control. An exhaustive description of the numerous responses to the community's vulnerability is beyond the scope of this article. We grouped responses by the two major categories of vulnerability experiences: threats to health and safety and losses of lives, assets, and valued possessions.

Responses to Threats to Health and Safety

Immediately after the tornado struck, emergency response personnel were called to action.

The tornado hit, and before we could even begin to think about our response, we started receiving calls.... [T]he very first call that came in was an elderly gentleman who was in his trailer, and the trailer had been destroyed.... [T]here were the three of us to respond; you don't have any choice. We have to go over there and get this guy out of the wreckage. And we were able to, but while we're doin' that, we're also allowing all this traffic and all these lookie loos, as [Name] put it, um, into the park, in a lot of ways, making the situation worse. And it wasn't their intent, but it's just like at a—a traffic crash on the highway; you often get more wrecks because people are slowing down, looking at the wreck, and not paying attention to their drivin'. Here, they're comin' in, they're worried about friends, they're worried about family, they're worried about property, a lot of 'em are literally awestruck by the devastation and just can't help themselves; they wanta look at it—that's human nature—but they don't realize the problems they're causing by what they're doing. [emergency response, focus group]

The impact of the tornado created an immediate threat to the health and safety of Wright residents. Nearly all informants referred to responses directed at threats to health and safety as the "initial response" to the tornado. However, perceptions of when that initial response ended differed depending on the roles of informants in the community. Many residents indicated that the initial response ended about an hour or two after the tornado (i.e., as soon as they had secured their own safety and accounted for their loved ones). This perception contrasts with the perception of first responders (e.g., emergency response personnel, utilities engineers). Many first responders indicated that the initial response did

not end until four to five days after the storm (i.e., as soon as they had accounted for missing residents, restored utilities, and secured the boundary to the impacted area). Perceptions of the timing of the initial response varied because evaluative criteria for assessing control differed among community members. The chaos created by people perceived as outsiders ("lookie loos") and people trying to reunite with their loved ones reflects the shared nature of the vulnerability and the response. Emergency response personnel attempted to minimize continued threats by securing the area, but their response was needed in multiple places at once, and there were a limited number of people on active duty.

Volunteers from both inside and outside the community responded to the disaster. They brought tractors, loaders, dump trucks, rakes, gloves, and other resources. Driven by a desire to restore order, volunteers committed their time and energy to the recovery effort. Informants stated that they felt united by a Wyoming value that suggests that when times are tough, it is necessary to take care of the problem and "cowboy up." At times, this self-reliance presented additional threats to volunteers' health and safety.

[T]he hard part of the whole clean up was,... particularly the mobile home park, was just covered, littered with little dime-size pieces of fiberglass insulation and other stuff and the only way to get that picked up was by hand.... You really don't have much control over it.... [T]he area that we're in—a lot of mining, methane construction outfits—a lot of people have equipment, moving equipment, trucks, and stuff. We had a lot of people who volunteered that.... What I had [at the mobile home park] was about all we could handle to keep it safe. [city employee, individual interview]

Informants spoke of volunteering in the community's recovery effort as a way to feel more in control of their own recovery process. Although the volunteer assistance was critical to the community's collective recovery, it simultaneously created a secondary crisis of control for city officials. In addition to working to restore control to the community, city officials needed to maintain control over the safety of the recovery effort itself. Therefore the cowboy-up value system also inhibited recovery when people assumed that they should be able to take care of themselves and avoided asking for assistance.

Responses to Losses of Life, Financial Assets, and Valued Possessions

Loss of life was publicly mourned through obituaries, stories, and editorials in local newspapers; funeral services; public memorials; and a "wiping-of-the-tears" ceremony inspired by Lakota mourning rituals. Such responses were organized by the efforts of many members of the community. These collective responses to loss tended to be highly visible among all members of the community.

Insurance and the declaration of Wright as a disaster by both state and federal authorities facilitated the rebuilding of individual and community assets (e.g., homes, churches, schools). Nonetheless, some residents did not understand the process for receiving aid and expressed frustration toward FEMA. The following quotes illustrate differences among residents in the perceived efficacy of responses to loss.

I was so grateful when FEMA came in because that answered a lot of prayers here—I mean housing. I remember visiting with the mayor, and I said, “[T]here’s no place for these people to live. I mean we’re in a boom here, energy boom, and the apartments had what, 80 people on a waiting list I heard.”... I said we’re going to lose a lot of the community ‘cause they can’t live here. And then, that was one of the things, ya know, the governor stepped up, and FEMA came in, and we were just grateful. [nonprofit relief worker, individual interview]

I learned that FEMA’s way was not what people thought it ought to be. There was a lot of anger because people expected someone to come and take the pain away, to take their problems away. They thought FEMA just came in and took care of them. And that wasn’t FEMA’s role.... FEMA comes in and, um, they’re supposed to be not your first, it’s not your first response. It’s actually your third response. ‘Cause you have your local, your city, and ... your county, and then state, and then [federal] government. They’re filling in and doing what the others, what your state and local, don’t do. And I think that was a lot of the anger. [community member, individual interview]

A lack of understanding of some policies impeded some residents’ efforts to restore control. Although, in general, FEMA’s response was perceived by the community as positive, some FEMA policies themselves inhibited the restoration of control for various residents.

Yeah, I mean, you have insurance, so, but at that moment, we don’t have that money, the insurance will “cut you a check”; do you understand what I’m sayin’? But we were one of the ones that like, well, you have insurance so [FEMA] can’t help you, and all. And it still, to this day, it’s still, NO, you have insurance. [community member, individual interview]

Disaster victims who have insurance are prohibited by FEMA policy to receive housing assistance. This created a gap in coverage because settlement of insurance claims lagged the immediate need for replacement housing created by the tornado.

People responded to their loss of symbolically important possessions by redefining themselves and by renegotiating the meanings of their favorite possessions. In the following quotations, the informant describes how a quilt she received from people she did not know helped her through the transitional process.

My thing was to get my living room done ‘cause that was my show room and that was my sitting room.

Q: Why is it important to have a show room?

Because there is a quilt hanging on my wall that was given to me ‘cause I lost my home and the quilt was made by 30 quilters in Casper, Wyoming. And it says [crying], “As you pick the pieces up,” and I want to put that on display. And that’s why that room, I had to get that room done. If I didn’t get any other room done, that was the room that was....

Q: For this quilt?

For this quilt. And I have the temple on this side, and I have the Lord’s picture on this side. And once that room was done, I had a picture from Germany that got rained on from the tornado, that we sit, we literally sit with Q-tips ‘cuz it was an \$800 picture we got in Germany 20 years ago. It’s still sitting on my closet. Why isn’t that important to get it up on the walls? [community member, individual interview]

This informant pointed out that hanging a special picture was no longer important. Several informants similarly redefined their associations with treasured possessions. Just as identifying with new possessions is key to negotiating a new sense of self, so too is detaching from treasured possessions that were lost or destroyed by the storm. The processes of detachment and attachment were primarily carried out in private and were not visible to most community members.

Many informants actively worked to recover their assets, but even when assets were recoverable, informants spoke of the process of getting them back as unbearable.

1: The biggest [challenge] that I have faced that hasn’t gone away yet is paperwork and confusion. That is like, I must say, some days about the last couple of weeks even, I could just scream. It was like, almost seemed like it wasn’t even worth trying to do everything any more. If it would just go away, it might be worth it.

Q: Paperwork? What kind of paperwork?

1: Well, because after the tornado, if you had damage, you had to fill out FEMA forms; in order to do that, you had to fill out SBA loan forms; then you had to deal with your own insurance companies; then, if you moved into a FEMA trailer, you had to deal with that paperwork... And then you have to call people back, and call ‘em back, and then fill out paperwork, and then call. And then Katrina happened right after the tornado, and then you couldn’t even get through to SBA people, to anyone....

2: Too much red tape.

Q: So it never goes away?

1: And I can’t wait until I can just get in my house—my new house—and sit there and grieve and not have to think about havin’ to do anything else. [community members, focus group]

This informant tried to respond to her vulnerability actively, but the layers of communication and bureaucracy associated with insurance companies and acquiring federal and state relief exacerbated vulnerability and impeded efforts to restore control. It is noteworthy that her desire to grieve in the comfort of a new home is a private way of coping with vulnerability. Individual responses could be characterized as a mix of acts that were very private, such as grieving at home, and acts that were very public, such as displaying humorous or patriotic symbols on damaged homes (see Figure 1). In contrast, collective responses (e.g., removing debris, repairing the elementary school) were, by their nature, public and highly visible. Given the small size of the community, the receipt of money for home repair or for car replacement was also highly visible to other community members. As such, judgments of the equity of collective responses played out in community discourse. Informants discussed discrepancies between the visible signs of community recovery and their personal feelings of vulnerability. Occasionally, a public symbol of community recovery served only to remind people of their personal grief.

Responses to losses of valued possessions began immediately and continued throughout the recovery process. Soon after the tornado, the Red Cross provided residents with vouchers to Wal-Mart or Kmart in Gillette (39 miles) so that they could acquire things to meet their most basic needs.

Figure 1. Shared Vulnerability with Movement Toward Community Recovery



Possessions valued for their symbolic and functional properties were rendered useless.
Photo by Holly Rexrot, Wright, Wyo.



Symbols of hope reminded residents of their shared vulnerability but eventual recovery.
Photo by *High Plains Sentinel*, Wright, Wyo.



Local ranchers began cleanup almost immediately.
Photo by Holly Rexrot, Wright, Wyo.



Humor helped the community cope.
[Trailer reads: "4 Sale 3 2 Beds w/Sundeck"]
Photo by *High Plains Sentinel*, Wright, Wyo.



FEMA trailers symbolize liminality.
Photo by Stacey Baker, University of Wyoming



Releasing of balloons at the one-year anniversary event is symbolic of at least partial recovery.
Photo by Ted Brummond, *UWYO Magazine*

Informants spoke of being overwhelmed by the generosity of people, some who had connections to the community and others who did not.

People would give things, um, money was pouring in here.... Like manna from heaven. Ya know, people from all over the country sent money. So and so's cousin from New York sent in some money, and people from California sent money. There was a truckload of furniture that came in here from Tennessee. Just furniture to help people. [recovery team member, individual interview]

To facilitate the disbursement of donations, the community temporarily rented two large buildings and a former hardware store for storage of donations. The former hardware store was converted into the Tornado Distribution Center; there, items were sorted and displayed for residents to acquire. Informants reflecting on their experiences at the Tornado Distribution Center spoke of being overwhelmed by an acquisition process that felt foreign. A sign at the entrance to the center read, "Tornado Distribution Center—These items are not for sale. They are for replacement only." The items were intended only for people who had lost homes or personal possessions. Any Wright resident could have received basic necessities, such as food, toothbrushes, and so forth, but comfort items and larger durables, such as appliances, electronics, furniture, and toys, were reserved especially for those who had suffered material losses. As such, in the Tornado Distribution Center, the medium of exchange was not monetary. Instead, residents exchanged their degree of loss to acquire the goods and services they needed to recover from the storm. Informants often viewed this unfamiliar negotiation process as diminishing their individual sense of control. However, for the community as a whole, relying on the degree of loss as a metric of value provided an important market mechanism by which to ensure the equitable distribution of recovery resources.

Replacement was not an easy task for many residents. Personnel at the center noted that many people were emotional about replacing lost possessions. Some informants considered the replacement items a further reminder of the identity markers they had lost. The center tracked what was disbursed to ensure that donations were distributed equitably. By the first part of February, the center had disbursed approximately 10,000 nonfood items and approximately 7000 food items. The community also received and disbursed approximately \$400,000 in cash (individual interview).

Perceptions of the replacement-item response differed among community members. Some people did not understand why donations were tracked. Some residents wanted more control over how they were allowed to use monetary donations. Rather than having their utilities directly paid or being given a voucher to a specified retailer, some residents wanted the freedom to spend their financial compensation as they decided. That is, acquisition on the part of some community members was guided by a desire to exercise personal choices and to consume objects reflective of their personal tastes. This objective was often in conflict with the objective of equitably distributing resources and the need to account for disbursements to ensure integrity in the process.

Town meetings became public forums for residents to fight back and to ask for accountability and for city employees and volunteers to explain the need for equity among residents. When differing perspectives were shared, conflict came to the surface. This conflict was important because it presented an opportunity for "opposing" sides to understand the different ideologies guiding the recovery of individuals and guiding the recovery of the community. Ensuring equity and accountability is vital to maintain the public's trust. The ability of people to reclaim their identities and rebuild their life narratives using possessions is also important. Individuation and equity do not exist at opposite ends of a continuum in natural disaster recovery; instead, they exist side by side, and each requires active and constant negotiation and monitoring.

Perceived Outcomes of Recovery Efforts

When reflecting on the outcomes of various responses to the disaster, informants spoke of experiences of transformation, of reaching a new sense of self and/or community.

It really opens your eyes, a tragedy like that. I mean, you know, to stop and smell the roses.

I can't like look away from things now—other people.... You get wrapped up in your own life and your own family, what your plans are, and ... you really don't want anything to slow you down. You know,... you hear something about somebody that maybe something's going on with. Before I would've maybe kept on with what I was doing. Now I don't. If somebody needs something or I hear that somebody, you know, is having trouble or needs to talk, I just make time and go. [community members, focus group]

These informants' comments reflect feelings that are consistent with the reaggregation phase of liminality (Turner 1974). By vowing to take time for immediate experiences, informants are assuming identities that are different from those they held before the tornado. They are not who they were before the storm; they have integrated the lessons they learned with ideas about who they were to develop a revised self-conception.

Both behavioral and normative considerations are necessary to alleviate vulnerability. That is, marketplace interactions and judgments of current versus past feelings of being in control are anchors for judging transformation. Informants spoke of transformed values and changed behaviors that resulted from individual and collective responses to vulnerability.

I guess it showed me what I can do.... I learned how to multitask like on a level I'd never multitasked before. You know, at the very beginning when you're doing volunteer work, and stuff was coming in, and, you know, you had ... things going out, and they were giving lots of assignments from the office.... I learned how to practice being assertive but careful. [community member, individual interview]

In this case, an improved ability to multitask was attributed directly to this informant's volunteer work in helping sort and distribute items dislodged from residences by the tornado. She reflected on an outcome entirely behavioral in nature—namely, an improved skill. However, many infor-

mants discussed changes in their values as a result of their recovery process.

For me, one of the things that I would've never done is I actually ... went down to the bookstore ... and picked up a [book] on crisis counseling and trauma and have been reading it.... And so, I feel like I'm growing in that area. [recovery team member, interview]

This response from a recovery team member was reflective of several comments about changed personal values. Among the individual responses, there was a great deal of consistency in the devaluation of material possessions in favor of interpersonal relationships and of the natural world.

In addition to personal transformations, informants were aware of changes in the collective values of the community and changes to their personal ties to the community. Furthermore, responses to vulnerability resulted in changes to community procedures, to community infrastructure, and to community values.

[Wright] has had history of kids who are nervous every time it clouds up or the wind blows. I'm more cautious about when we set off the sirens for tests and so forth. I mean, I was cautious before, but we have deliberately avoided a couple of tests this year because ... the weather's a little crummy.... We're much better at doing work on [the sirens]. We're gonna announce it well in advance before we do it, so that if the siren goes off at a weird time when the guy's working on it, nobody freaks. [emergency responder, individual interview]

Everyone knows now who the mayor is. Everyone knows the council members, the commissioners. Everyone knows the people who work at the newspaper, who the Red Cross people are, who the volunteers are, who the people are from the tornado recovery team. Everyone knows pretty much who all these people are in town now. [community member, focus group]

That's another good thing, too, because before, you know, kids kind of had a tendency of thinking that policemen and firemen are people who ... stop you and give you a ticket. Or they might

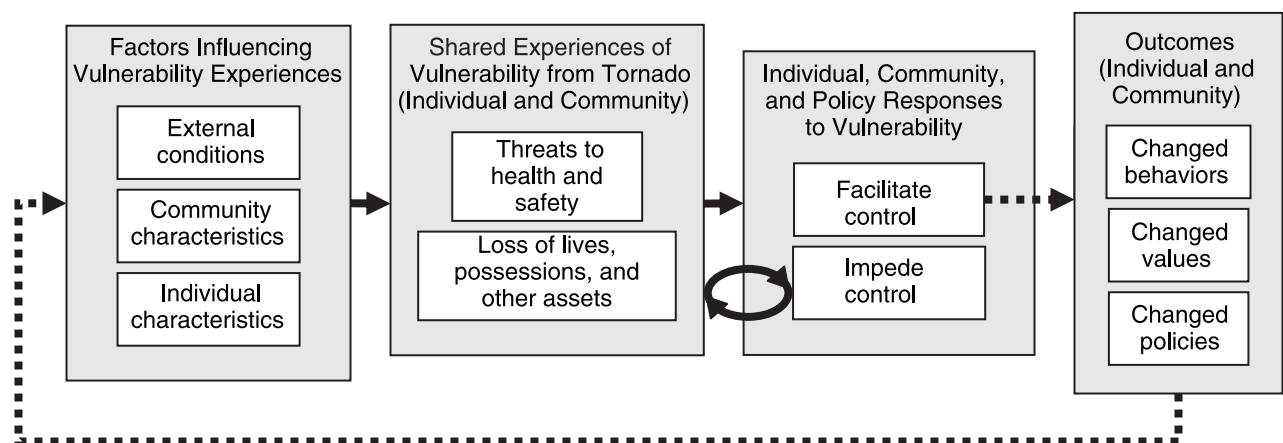
hear mom and dad say, "Oh, here comes the cops, buckle your seat belts." Well now, all of our kids know that they're for a lot different reasons than that. That was a good thing. [community member, focus group]

These quotes suggest that, *together*, the residents of Wright had experienced devastation—loss of human lives and loss of homes and valued possessions—and *together* they are moving to a new normal. The process of recovering from the tornado heightened all members' awareness of their intrinsic connections to other members of the community. This consciousness of kind is a core component of community (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). The common memories and the shared experience of recovering from the storm provided a focal point around which Wright residents constructed a new sense of community identity.

Conceptual Model of Vulnerability as a Shared Experience

Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual model that emerged from our analysis. External conditions (e.g., weather, lack of an early warning system), community characteristics (e.g., economic base of community, community history), and individual characteristics (e.g., insurance status, roles) are pre-existing conditions that affect the form and content of shared experiences of vulnerability and of shared and individual responses to vulnerability. In this context, experiences of vulnerability were perceived as threats to health and safety and losses of lives, financial assets, and possessions. Individual, community, and policy responses impede or facilitate the restoration of control. When a response impedes control, vulnerability is perceived as a state of flux. When a response facilitates control, people move away from vulnerability and toward recovery. The recovery process occurs over time, in incremental shifts, and across multiple responses. Recovery results in changed values, changed behaviors, and changed policies and procedures. Thus, vul-

Figure 2. Model of Vulnerability as a Shared Experience



Notes: The circular arrows between responses that impede control and the shared experiences of vulnerability indicate a state of flux characterized by failed responses and continued vulnerability. Dashed lines indicate incremental shifts and movement over time.

nerability experiences are transformative at both individual and collective levels. External conditions and community and individual characteristics change but restabilize over time. The feedback loop illustrates the potential for vulnerability responses to impede control for individuals and the community.

The photographs in Figure 1 provide further context for the study. The sequence of the photographs visually illustrates the textual data we presented, including the experience of individual and shared vulnerability, the movement away from vulnerability, and symbols of transformation (e.g., releasing the balloons).

Implications

There is little doubt of the difficulty of helping communities transcend their shared vulnerability after a natural disaster. The network of stakeholders is complex and includes individuals and organizations guided by different ideologies and perceptions about what a recovered community and a recovered individual look like. Although this study focused on only a small piece of this problem, important theoretical and policy implications emerged.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the literature on consumer vulnerability. Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg's (2005) model of consumer vulnerability illustrates the factors that influence the likelihood of *individual* vulnerability and the form and content of that vulnerability. We extend that model by showing how vulnerability can be a shared (collective) experience. The model of vulnerability as a shared experience (see Figure 2) illustrates that vulnerability is a dynamic process in which control is achieved in some domains before it is achieved in others. For example, replacing products that met basic needs was easier than replacing products important in reclaiming identity. People perform multiple roles and operate in multiple domains simultaneously; thus, being in control and being out of control are not mutually exclusive. People can be in control in some domains and not in others, and people may be propelled back into (or further into) a state of vulnerability when something (e.g., the wind, interactions with other people) reminds them of the original catalyst for their powerlessness. Over time and with repeated responses, individuals and communities can regain a sense of control. Transformation (reaggregation) occurs when community members realize that they cannot reclaim their past identities, and in response, they move to a new understanding of self and community (Turner 1974; Van Gennep [1909] 1960). Interactions among community members at different stages of their personal recovery processes reflect the dynamic negotiation of a collective sense of being recovered.

Disentangling which elements of residents' vulnerabilities are related to their being consumers and which elements are related to their being human is difficult in this context. Consumption rituals, objects, and marketing systems symbolize life priorities and values and are part of the fabric of everyday lives and of what it means to be human (Baker 2006). As such, they are important in the processes of defining self and defining community. In general, individuals and

communities do not invest energy thinking about how intricately their lives are intertwined with marketing systems (utilities, grocery stores), consumption rituals (shopping, eating breakfast), and consumer products (toasters). Natural disasters force an awareness of market embeddedness. The marketing and consumer research literature has documented the difficulty of restoring a sense of self after objects valued for their symbolic properties have been lost (e.g., Ikeuchi, Fujihara, and Dohi 1999; Sayre 1994). Objects and marketing systems valued for their functional properties have received less attention. This study demonstrates how vulnerabilities can be related to both utilitarian and symbolic attachments. This study also illustrates how reliance on objects and marketing systems can contribute to experiences of vulnerability and to dependence on external forces (e.g., social support; local, state, and federal assistance; policy standards on the distribution of resources) to restore control.

As the conceptual model of shared vulnerability shows, communities have preexisting characteristics that affect experiences and responses to vulnerability. Preexisting community characteristics could include the economic base of the community, its resources, and its collective symbols and values. Because Wright is an agricultural and mining community, it had resources (heavy equipment, multiple people trained in disaster response) readily available that could help move the community away from vulnerability. The marketing system in Wright (e.g., one grocery store, one gas station) was not extensive. In this sense, the community's relative isolation and its residents' lack of reliance on local market infrastructure facilitated recovery. Cowboy up (taking care of the problem) was a norm for guiding individual and collective responses in Wright. In other communities with different economic bases and cultural values, a different set of experiences and responses would likely emerge. Yet the framework we developed in this study can be helpful in thinking about the variables that affect experiences of and responses to vulnerability. In interpretive research, it is the framework, not the findings, that is generalizable (Peñaloza 1994).

The current conceptualization of vulnerability also recognizes that people have preexisting resources and skills that can be leveraged in times of vulnerability. In contexts in which vulnerability is shared, different people's resources and skills can be employed. However, conflicting roles and conflicting units of analysis create differing perceptions of how to move forward and what recovery means. For example, different ideologies are embedded in different roles. Competing ideologies of individuation (a person getting his or her unique identity back) and of equity (treating everyone the same) may lead to a mutual misunderstanding of the effectiveness of the distribution of recovery resources. When people are informed of the underlying values that guide various policies, they may be better able to reach a collective understanding of their shared experience. Conflict can sometimes be intense and painful, but it creates an opportunity for information to be shared. As such, conflict may be a necessary part of the shared experience of vulnerability and a catalyst to move a community toward a shared feeling of recovery.

The current research context also has implications for the extant literature on community. Research on communities

acknowledges a distinction between communities rooted in a geographic place and imagined communities that are sustained by notions of understood others (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Our data suggest that in response to a threat to the collectivity, community members evoke place and nonplace identities differently, depending on their roles within the community. Community members reflecting on their experiences as victims tended to draw on a sense of place identity (e.g., "We learned what it meant to be a Wright resident"; "[A]s Wyomingites, we know how to cowboy up"). In contrast, first responders tended to draw on a sense of vocational identity that transcended ties to place (e.g., "the training we receive as EMTs"; "[A]s first responders, we just stay focused on the task").

Residents took comfort in knowing that first responders could engage the recovery process without being inhibited by the collective sense of vulnerability associated with the loss of Wright's civic and market infrastructure. Similarly, first responders depended on residents' sense of moral responsibility to the town to galvanize the response effort. As such, our data reveal a dynamic process that draws on both place and nonplace identities in the negotiation of a collective sense of community. This suggests that future inquiries into the structure and processes of community should not only reflect distinctions between geographically bound and nongeographically bound communities but also acknowledge the dynamic and interactive process between the two.

Public Policy and Consumer Welfare Implications

Several policy implications can be taken from this study. First, informants reported that interacting with nongovernmental organizations and government relief agencies helped them obtain a sense of control over their personal recovery process only when the agencies gave volunteers autonomy in the management of the community's recovery process. When agencies did not give volunteers autonomy in managing the recovery, informants reported that their volunteer activities perpetuated their personal vulnerability. This is consistent with the vulnerability framework in that the reclamation of power is a vital element in the process of achieving a sense of control. Thus, government agencies and nongovernmental organizations should not prescribe to community volunteers the roles they must play in a recovery process. Instead, agencies should provide volunteers with information about the recovery process and allow them to define their roles themselves. That is, relief agencies should not view their roles as *managing* a recovery. Instead, they should view their roles as *facilitating* grassroots recovery efforts. The structure of the relationship between relief agencies and community volunteers is more than simple procedure. Agencies should strive to structure these relationships in a way that directly influences a community's recovery process. The latter approach empowers communities and facilitates the movement away from vulnerability.

Second, public policies facilitate restoration of control when they provide a mechanism for resources to be distributed equitably. For example, FEMA averts conflict over the equitable distribution of temporary housing by having all

temporary homes appear exactly the same. Ironically, these policies, which are focused on creating fairness, impede restoration of personal control. However, these restrictions on use are not necessarily a bad thing. The restrictions keep trailers in a temporary state, reminding community members that they are in a transitional phase and that, eventually, some will need to make decisions about their futures.

Third, technologies, or the lack thereof, contribute to vulnerability. For example, because Wright is off the National Weather Service's radar, the community's likelihood of experiencing vulnerability from a tornado is high. To be equitable, public policies should ensure that all communities are on the radar, especially when a community is in an area prone to tornados. In addition, technologies that coordinate efforts among organizations that offer assistance could facilitate the restoration of control. If each household filled out only one needs-assessment form, the emotional energy involved in the paperwork process would be diminished. People could sign legal waivers to allow for the sharing of information between agencies.

Finally, responses to natural disasters force trade-offs between individual and collective well-being. To qualify for disaster assistance, a community must meet specific parameters in terms of lost property and damage. As a result, sometimes homes that are potentially restorable are declared a disaster to improve the community's likelihood of receiving assistance. Although this declaration may be beneficial for the collective, it is detrimental to some individual home owners. Thus, individual well-being and collective well-being can sometimes represent conflicting motives that mandate a dynamic negotiation process to restore normalcy to a community.

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