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There's No Place Like Home: Post-Secondary Student Stories of Disaster-Induced Home Loss

by

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Abstract

In the iconic 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz,* Judy Garland's character Dorothy exclaimed, "there's no place like home" (Fleming, 1939, 1:38:55). With the click of her heels, she awakes in her bed. Her wish to return to her most beloved place granted after a tornado turned her world upside down. Unfortunately, real life is often nothing like the films we view at leisure, and for many of us who have lost our homes due to a disaster event, our journey to find home again presents far more challenge and change than is depicted on the big screen. This difficulty is further compounded by concurring life factors, such as being a student.

This research explores the transitional experiences of adult learners that navigated disaster-induced home loss in Alberta while enrolled in a full-time post-secondary program. Using a narrative methodological approach (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), and guided by Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1981) the experiences of seven participants were storied from interviews and analyzed collaboratively.

The findings of this endeavour suggest that the adult learners experienced a high degree of simultaneous transitions because of their disaster-induced home losses but noted that these transitions were often not recognized while they were occurring. When considered alongside their full-time post-secondary programming obligations, the participants noted that their educational experience had both a protective and inhibiting influence on their ability to manage the resultant change. This research has implications for policymakers and educators as they work to better support and understand adult learners in similar contexts, as well as implications for the adult learners themselves.

Keywords: disaster, socio-natural disaster, home, home loss, navigating, transition, change, post-secondary, student, narrative

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Dedications

This research would not be possible without the stories shared so willingly and selflessly by the individuals who took part in this journey. My efforts are dedicated to the participants, and their efforts are dedicated to the people and words that inspire them:

To my family, friends, and university roomies – thank you for keeping me sane though one of the hardest things I've had to go through. Despite being displaced, I always had somewhere to call "home".

To my hard ass educator with a heart of gold, thank you for giving me the grace I needed to get through.

To those, in any situation, who find the courage to share their truth. It is because of your stories that positive change can be influenced. It is also where people can find themselves and know that they are not alone.

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To all the first responders who risk their lives daily to put the needs of others above their own, especially during a disaster.

To those that need a reminder, you must find the root of your wound and kiss it all the way up.

To Squishy, all the kids who outgrow their hometowns, and to the loved ones they leave behind.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As I sit here attempting to write, the "ding" of phone notifications constantly serves as a reminder of the urgency of my topic. I have been trying to contextualize disaster-induced home loss. The past several days has been spent collecting information for a section within this study, but most of what I have written is no longer accurate, as news that several communities are, once again, experiencing disaster inundates all media. This writing setback is frustrating, but the consequences, for me, are ultimately minimal. Unfortunately, this is not true for a handful of my classmates and the many other people who live in the flooding regions. They are at risk of losing their homes and all of the meaning and importance held in those spaces while simultaneously navigating the turmoil that disaster events bring.

My own experiences, which you will find woven throughout the pages of this research, noticeable through italicized font, prompted me to explore disaster-induced home loss and what it means to be a post-secondary student at the same time. So often, while I explained this pursuit, I was met with questions like "is this even an issue?" or "are you sure there will be a large enough participant pool to pull from? That experience seems like it would be pretty rare." Unfortunately, those questions echoing in my brain were quieted by that day's unfolding events. Disasters continue to occur, homes continue to be lost, and adult learners continue to carry those burdens into their educational spaces.

The purpose of this study was to explore the narratives of adults who experienced disaster-induced home loss in Alberta while simultaneously navigating a full-time post-secondary program. This study aimed to intentionally add student voice to the scholarly conversations happening within academia about disaster-induced home loss. This continues to be a needed addition because this kind of loss has the potential to impact post-secondary students

uniquely, due to the multiple transitions being experienced by adult learners as they engage in formal educational endeavors.

Perhaps if you are reading this, you have a curiosity about disaster-induced home loss. Maybe you are a fellow educator, or a student that has experienced similar events. Regardless of the reason that brought you to these pages, you likely have questions about this pursuit and its importance. In the following chapter, I hope to answer some of them. Below, I have responded to the most common queries people asked when I discussed my ideas for this project. Questions like: “Why disaster-induced home loss in Alberta?” “Why post-secondary students?” “Why transition?” and “Why narrative inquiry?” are all discussed. I also present some questions of my own, concluding with the assumptions I brought to this study and by paving our path through subsequent chapters.

Why Disaster-Induced Home Loss in Alberta?

There is certainly evidence to suggest that home loss, regardless of its cause, can seriously impede a person's ability to function (Miller, 2019; Nowicki, 2014; Pickover & Slowik, 2013; Thompson, 2007). Events such as foreclosure, warfare, and home accidents like electrical fires can result in the loss of a home and have devasting consequences for individuals and potentially even entire communities (Nowicki, 2014; Pickover & Slowik, 2013; Stern & Kerry, 1996). So, why did I choose to focus on disaster-induced home loss, specifically? Well, home loss rates related to the causes mentioned above have remained reasonably stable throughout recent years in Canada (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2022; Clare & Kelly, 2018). Some, such as accidental home loss rates, are even on the decline (Ahrens & Maheshwar, 2021). However, the same cannot be said for disaster-induced home loss.

There is a widespread perception that although dramatic, and intense, disasters are also rare and improbable (Lalonde & Roux-Dufort, 2013). Unfortunately, this perception could not be further from the truth. Our ongoing global climate crisis has caused instances of disaster, such as forest fires, tsunamis, hurricanes, tornadoes, mudslides, and floods, to rise in frequency and intensity (Klinenberg et al., 2020). These events increasingly impact communities and, subsequently, homes and the people that live within them (Makwana, 2019). In these past ten years, approximately 23 million people around the globe lost their homes as a result of a so-called “natural” disaster event, a sharp spike from years prior (United Nations, 2015).

When my family moved to Alberta in 1996, I was mesmerized by the vast diversity of landscape that surrounded our new home. Large hills, vast swaths of trees, farmland, and a beautiful lake welcomed us as we started our new life some six-thousand plus kilometers from our old one. Unfortunately, with this land and its beauty came an unknown danger that I would not recognize until a couple of years after our arrival. Sitting in my grade four classroom, I watched through the window as embers and ashes fell on the playground outside while our class lesson continued. Terrified, I was assured that this was a regular occurrence, resulting from living in an area surrounded by boreal forest. "It will pass without harm, Alisha," and it did. For years, similar experiences marked the beginning of the spring season, and soon, I would grow to normalize these events in the same manner my classmates and teacher had in that grade four classroom. Smelling smoke without fear and wiping ashes off car windshields like snowflakes in the winter became a familiar occurrence. But, unbeknownst to me, my relationship with these behaviours would change drastically after one fateful day in May 2011, when a fire, just like those that casually danced along the perimeter of our town in years prior, invaded the place I had learned to love. A place I called home.

The Slave Lake Wildfire of 2011 is only one of the over twenty significant disasters that have resulted in Albertan home loss since 2002 (Public Safety Canada, 2022). While it is challenging to determine the total number of homes that have perished as a result of disaster events in Alberta, in only four, the Slave Lake Wildfire of 2011, the Southern Alberta Floods of 2013, the Fort McMurray Wildfire of 2016, and the Fort McMurray Flood of 2016, 17,553 homes were deemed uninhabitable or lost entirely ("Alberta government estimates", 2013; ("Slave Lake residents", 2011; "Two years later", 2018). The number of all disaster-induced home loss is safely assumed to be much larger based on insurance and government reporting of disaster costs. "The Government of Canada estimates [expenditures of] insurance providers, federal and provincial governments, and other entities in Alberta from 2003 to 2009 were $329 million. From 2010 to 2016, disaster costs in Alberta increased by over 2,500 percent to approximately $9 billion" (Auditor General of Alberta, 2020, p. 6). This staggering growth highlights the increase of disaster events within the province of Alberta and the sheer magnitude of losses incurred by both communities and individuals.

Why Post-Secondary Students?

While the financial ramifications of these sizable losses are certainly cause for concern, I felt compelled to do this work because of experiences in my life that made me consider the practical and emotional consequences that individuals endure as a result of disaster-induced home loss. Specifically, I was, and am, interested in the experiences of post-secondary students because, in separate instances, I lost “home” while completing post-secondary studies. One of those two experiences was due to a disaster event, as mentioned above. Simultaneously navigating a home loss, school work, and other daily obligations felt exceedingly difficult and, at times, impossible. While these competing demands and constant changes caused me to struggle,

I had difficulty communicating that hardship with others, especially when attempting to advocate for myself and my needs. Now, in my role as a post-secondary educator, I want to always work to better understand student experiences of disaster-induced home loss because, due to the spiking of disaster events, it is logical to assume we will see an increase in students navigating the resulting hardship. Already, I notice that every year I have at least one student navigating disaster-induced home loss along with their studies. I often have more than one, and I wonder about the challenges they are trying to overcome, the transitions they are trying to manage, if they will successfully complete their studies, and if there is some way I might be able to help them.

At the time of writing, Alberta was home to 25 publicly funded post-secondary institutions. These institutions, based on the enrollment statistics available, provided educational services to 264,785 post-secondary students in 2020. Of that number, 152,412 were enrolled in full-time studies (Advanced Education, 2021). While there is a plethora of published works related to this body of students, the same cannot be said for works specific to student experiences with disaster-induced home loss, which is unusual given the volume of disaster events our province has experienced. Existing research related to disaster and students are primarily focused on the outcomes of individuals in pre-school, elementary, or secondary school (Al-Baldawi, 2021; Arshad et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2021; McDonald-Harker et al., 2021a; McDonald-Harker et al., 2021b). Searches not specific to Alberta found similar results, with the majority prioritizing children in educational spaces and their adaptation post-disaster event. Additionally, scholarly discourse about either emergency preparedness (Lovekamp & Tate, 2008; Tanner & Doberstein, 2015; Tkachuck et al, 2018; White-Lewis et al., 2021) or clinical mental health diagnoses are common (Housel, 2020; Peek-Asa et al., 2012; Ritchie et al., 2020), with the latter

topic being the most prevalent. Discourses in disaster-induced home loss and adults, not related to post-secondary experiences were also found (Katz & Nathaniel, 2002; Lee & Lee, 2018; Stern & Kerry, 1996; Ursano et al., 2017). While these resources are valuable, most academic conversations fail to speak to the heart of this study, which pairs disaster and home loss, relates this duo to full-time post-secondary students, and asks the question, how do students navigate all of these life circumstances at the same time?

Why Transition?

The day after my second experience with fire, I arrived at work on time, ready to teach my online class. Hair dishevelled because I no longer owned my necessary hair products, I sat at our communal office table to debrief with my colleagues, many of who had lost their houses a few years prior in the Slave Lake Wildfire. As we sat, through laughter and tears, I explained that I was wearing my younger sister's old pants, the only pair I could find in my parents' home stretchy enough to squeeze myself into. I felt vulnerable, as if my less polished physical presentation screamed to the world, "this lady has just lost her home!" Hours passed, and the reality of what I had lost, beyond my work attire, started to set in. I had an assignment due and no computer, textbooks, or notes. I no longer had my favourite pen or the comfy sweatpants I would put on whenever I felt ready to do some serious writing. Gone was my office, arranged purposefully and filled with items I loved. So many things were different, and so many things were the same, and for some reason, this sharp contrast cut like a knife into my soul. How was I going to manage this? To everyone else, I was the same person, but in just 24 short hours, the whole world felt different to me.

The previous elements of this study were determined, at least to some degree, before I began my doctoral program based on my deep connection to both the topic and post-secondary

environments. However, finding a conceptual framework that would coherently weave the various elements of this study together proved to be challenging. Despite this difficulty, the word “navigate” kept popping up in my writing and in conversations with others while developing this project. When I considered this word, a particular film scene always came to mind. In *The Perfect Storm* (2000), Captain Billy Tyne and his crew found themselves caught in a hurricane. Pelted by heavy rains and gale-force winds, they attempted to battle the sea that surrounded them. Suddenly, the music got softer, the waves started to settle, and the sun appeared. “Skip, I think we’re going to make it,” but, knowing what was to come, the captain did not reply. The music became percussive again, and darkness settled in; they had only made it through half of their battle (Petersen, 2000, 1:51:08). To navigate, by definition, means to “steer a course” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In addition, for me, it also speaks to the hardships, the letdowns, and the hopes that come with our most significant journeys.

So, what exactly are adult learners navigating after a disaster-induced home loss? As I explore further in Chapter Two, many transitions occur within post-secondary students' lives. There are also many transitions possible after a disaster-induced home loss. This compounding of multiple transitions simultaneously demands a level of personal navigation not common in our everyday existence (Carales & López, 2021; Patton & Davis, 2014). By examining transitions, we can better understand experiences holistically and, through that process, "weave together [useful] skills and knowledge" (Anderson et al., 2021, p. 24). While a variety of scholarly works could have aided in the pursuit of this knowledge production, Schlossberg's Transition Theory (2011), and especially the 4 S's: situation, support, self, and strategies, felt most promising. The theory examines the context of transitions, the impact on the individual that has experienced the changes, and the overall perception of the transitional experience (Schlossberg, 2011). This

encompassing approach made practical sense when attempting to understand disaster-induced home loss from a former post-secondary student's perspective. It allowed for the recognition of post-secondary experience and the examination of the student's life in its entirety. Participants were also free to assert the level of positivity or degree of harm resulting from the transitional experience, which allowed for candid and open discussion. This option to be open and expressive is something that I always seek, and something that my chosen methodology required.

Why Narrative Inquiry?

You might assume that because I have experienced a disaster-induced home loss event while a full-time student, I would be the perfect educator to help others overcome the difficulty involved; no research needed. However, while it is true that my personal experience provides me with a degree of empathy that is likely unique, I must not generalize my perspectives and apply them to those around me (Shuman, 2005). A wide range of personal trajectories exist that one can experience after a disaster-induced home loss (Gorman-Murray & McKinnon, 2014; Ursano et al., 2017). Indeed, many outcomes are possible while navigating a full-time post-secondary program as well (Hardin, 2008). Uncovering these layers of personalized difference and perhaps similarity is essential in truly understanding the simultaneous navigation of disaster-induced home loss and post-secondary programming. For this reason, I sought a methodology that allowed me to speak with various individuals to understand their lived experiences, adding depth to the comprehension desired.

The collaborative meaning-making pursuit of narrative inquiry requires both researchers and participants to think of stories as valuable data, and to gather them in a manner that fosters relationships, mutual understanding, and personal interpretation (Morris, 2001). Not only is construction of meaning essential for individual’s post-disaster (Ursano et al., 2017), meaning

found through narrative can help fill topical gaps within the academic realm (Rahiem et al., 2021). Perhaps most enticing, is the ability for narrative inquiries to go beyond a researcher's initial conception of a study or topic. While my experiences and questions guided this endeavor, relationships fostered through the methodology provided the fuel that propelled our journey forward. By heeding the advice of others and navigating the uncertainty of narrative inquiry, stories were exposed and questions I was unable to consider on my own, answered (Goodson & Gill, 2011).

My Questions

"Good qualitative questions are usually developed or refined in all stages of a reflexive and interactive inquiry journey" (Agee, 2009, p. 432). With this understanding, I present the following research questions as the starting place for conversation about this topic. I acknowledge that subsequent questions have resulted from discussions that I had with the study participants, and this process is detailed further in Chapter 3. The following questions primarily guided my research:

1. How do adult learners, who have lost their home to a disaster, experience navigating home loss and their full-time post-secondary education simultaneously?
2. What transitions occur in the lives of adult learners after a disaster-induced home loss?
3. How does the post-secondary experience influence the transitions experienced after a disaster-induced home loss?

Researcher Assumptions

The questions presented above, and the work done on this project are based on several assumptions that I carried with me into this study. The first, is that post-secondary students, after a disaster induced home loss, are experiencing several transitions. This assumption was based on

existing research regarding student transition and post-secondary learning (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002), but further exploration was, and still is, needed focusing on disaster-induced home loss and the subsequent transitions experienced by learners. As an educator that has witnessed students navigate such events, and as a person that has undergone it myself, I believe that, at least to some degree, disaster-induced home loss while a full-time student is a unique experience in need of specialized understanding. By choosing a qualitative, narrative-based design, I assumed that best way to comprehend student experience was through personalized engagement, interviews, open-ended questions, and talking to the learners themselves. While I could have chosen to speak to professionals in a variety of post-secondary settings, experiences are best articulated by those who have lived them (Frechette et al., 2020), and for that reason, I assumed that adult learners would provide the most valuable contributions. Lastly, I "recognize that different people may well inhabit quite different worlds. Their worlds constitute for them diverse ways of knowing, distinguishable sets of meanings, separate realities" (Crotty, 1998, p. 64). The narratives I collected and the themes derived from the data only reflect the contextual and time-based reality of the individuals sampled and my interpretations of what has been collected. While these themes can still be helpful in their intended manner, the narratives and analysis of them represent only a selection of the many beliefs and attitudes that inevitably exist concerning the questions posed.

Chapter Summary

To conclude, this chapter has sought to provide information regarding the background, rationale, and significance of this work. Additionally, the foundational assumptions of the study were discussed. In subsequent chapters, an in-depth review of the literature related to this topic is explored, and a detailed outline of the chosen methodology, utilized methods, ethical

considerations, and limitations are determined. To round out the research, participant narratives are shared, along with the most significant findings, interpretations, and lessons that have resulted from this project.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

"It feels as though my skin has been ripped off, and I am exposed, just dangling there, lost amidst a group of people I do not know as I search for my place, my new skin. I fervently try to sew together ripped shards of the old me, hoping they will hold. To my dismay, they never do, and so I continue my search for my new skin" (Dungan, 2007, p. 41).

While not my own, the above words perfectly depict a disaster-induced home loss and the changes that individuals attempt to navigate post-loss. A loss of this nature feels like everything that has been protecting you and representing you has been torn away, and, suddenly, you are left bare, to heal, with little understanding about how to do so. The experience is a unique one, and the complexities of such an event are further compounded when a victim is navigating post-secondary student obligations as well. The purpose of this chapter is to understand that complexity better. In section one, adult learners are described, and the post-secondary transitional experience explained by introducing Schlossberg's Transition Model. Section two builds a basic understanding of disaster, home, and home loss. Then, to conclude, section three returns to post-secondary studies, where Schlossberg's 4 S System, the conceptual framework being utilized within this study, is used to analyze the situation, support, self, and strategy factors of an adult learner navigating disaster-induced home loss.

Adult Learners and Transition

My body felt electric; while I had legally been considered an adult for some time now, walking through the halls of this new space confirmed that fact. Seemingly overnight, there was a shift in the world; I had become a university student, a "real" adult. Mesmerized by the independence and fear, I felt ready to assume this new role.

Adult Learners

When I dreamt about my post-secondary experience, I had expectations about what it would be like. According to my movie-esque conceptions, I was fairly sure that I would feel prepared to tackle the world, its triumphs, and its tragedies. I would be steady and convicted in myself, hopelessly in love with my life, and, of course, exceptionally well dressed. However, my adult learning reality has been, admittedly, far less glamourous. While I have felt fearlessly independent at times, I have also felt hopelessly fragile attempting to overcome struggles far more complicated than my younger self could have predicted. I have carried all of these experiences into every environment I have occupied, including my educational spaces. Like most post-secondary learners, I found myself unable to fit into the idealized notion of what I thought it meant to be a student. The ability to engage in a fully-committed educational discourse, where studies are the top, or perhaps only, priority, is a privilege for only a select few. Instead, today's adult learners are a diverse group defined by their multitude of equally, if not more, important responsibilities to tend to alongside their education (Iloh, 2018; Soares, 2013). Merriam and Bierema (2014) stated that adult learners often "may be going to school, even full-time, but they add the role of student onto their other often full-time roles as caretaker, worker, and citizen" (p. 11). This sentiment is one shared by Groen and Kawalilak (2014) in their presentation of adult learners as "individuals who are 18 years of age or older and who may be located at various points along [a] continuum of maturity and responsibility" (p. 16). My understanding of the term adult learner aligns with these scholars, as the nature of navigating disaster-induced home loss and full-time studies as an adult inherently means that the learner cannot commit their entire selves to their education, regardless of their specific age or place within their educational journey. It is a time of much change and this change, undoubtedly, comes with challenges.

Adult Learners in Transition

Transitions are defined as a turning point or time of renegotiating roles or versions of self (Anderson et al., 2021). The post-secondary experience, independent of other obligations, is filled with such transition (Arthur & Hiebert, 1996). While many have examined student transitions to post-secondary settings from different environments, like a young adult's transition from high school to college, there is a growing interest in the transitions that occur at other points during post-secondary programming (Gale & Parker, 2014). Experiences like honing your identity as a learner, entering a new phase of your program, or preparing to graduate would all be examples of such transitions (Gale & Parker, 2014). In many written works, these transitions are situated as linear stages, with transitional points of instability sandwiched between two more stable moments in the overall experience or lifespan (Compton, 2006; Karmelita, 2018; Karmelita, 2020). However, the reality of transition is likely far more fluid, as individuals continually work to traverse the ebbs and flows of daily life, in addition to events they are navigating or anticipating within their post-secondary environments (Gale & Parker, 2014). These fluctuations can "lead to profound change and be an impetus for new learning, or they can be unsettling, difficult and unproductive" (Ecclestone et al., 2010, p. 2). Regardless, post-secondary transitions cause a great deal of emotional strain, and one's ability to navigate this strain is dependent on many factors. These factors are best examined within a framework to be fully understood, and Schlossberg's Transition Model (STM) easily applies within the context of this study.

Schlossberg's Transition Model

In her seminal work, Nancy Schlossberg (1981) opposed notions that tied transitions across the lifespan to chronological age. Instead, she asserted that "a transition … occur[s] if an event or nonevent results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world" (Schlossberg,

1981, p. 5). The model or framework, often referred to as a theory by scholars other than Schlossberg, focused primarily on what she considered crisis events and how a person can or cannot adapt to such events. Researchers have utilized this work in a variety of topical areas, including counselling, education, nursing, athletics, career development (Anderson et al., 2021; John et al., 2019; Karmelita, 2020; Sullivan & Ariss, 2021; Wall et al., 2018) and more, and it has evolved considerably since its initial conception (Anderson et al., 2021). Today, the model examines "adult transitions and gives consideration to how context, psycho-social development, and meaning may influence how an individual is able to adapt to change" (Karmelita, 2018, p. 145). STM is broken into three distinct parts:

1. Approaching transitions: Transition identification and transition process
2. Taking stock of coping resources: The 4 S System
3. Taking charge: Strengthening resources. (Anderson et al., 2021, p. 38)

The first phase of this model, approaching transitions, involves analyzing the transition from the individual's perspective and determining the type of transition, its context, and the implications of such events (Wall et al., 2021). We will discuss the latter two model components, taking stock and taking charge, in subsequent sections of this review.

Approaching Transitions

The first step in analyzing a transition experience is identifying what type of transition is occurring (Anderson et al., 2021). According to Schlossberg (2011), there are three kinds of transitions: anticipated, nonevent, and unanticipated. Anticipated transitions include events such as entering and navigating a post-secondary program, marriage, or planned retirement. Transitions of this nature tend to be significantly more manageable than the other two types, as the individual is afforded time to rehearse the new experience, either mentally or practically, before the transition occurs (Anderson et al., 2021). Additionally, such gains, losses, or

significant life alterations are seen to occur across the lifespan predictably (Patton & Davis, 2014). Nonevent transitions are experiences or events that the individual has been preparing for or anticipating, but they do not occur. For example, a child who was never born or a relationship that never materialized would fall into the nonevent category (Schlossberg, 2011). Nonevents carry a variety of emotional and practical consequences, depending on the event and an individual's relationship with it. "It can be difficult to process feelings of grief when there are no rituals to acknowledge [such] … loss[es]" (Anderson et al., 2021, p. 8), even though they are common. Unanticipated transitions occur with minimal warning, if any (Anderson et al., 2021). These occurrences leave individuals with no time to prepare and force change when an individual may not be ready or able to deal with the consequences of such a shift (Fouad & Bynner, 2008). Because of this lack of control, individuals typically perceive unanticipated transition as harmful, disruptive, traumatic, or crisis-like in nature (Patton & Davis, 2014). Disaster-induced home loss events exemplify the meaning of an unanticipated transition as individuals are thrust, without warning, into a situation where they lack preparation and, potentially, the resources to support them in this considerable change.

Multiple Transitions

Schlossberg's Transition Model provides a strong foundation for discussing a transition event. Still, it has been criticized for failing to acknowledge the unique experience of navigating multiple transitions at once and the stress that can be experienced as a result (Patton & Davis, 2014). This valid critique has presented a problem when attempting to utilize the model to better understand a student's experience of already navigating an anticipated transition while also dealing with the unanticipated transitions that go along with a disaster-induced home loss. Other works can be utilized here to bolster STM and its use in this study, such as the recent research conducted by Carales and López (2021) post-Hurricane Harvey.

Within their study about students navigating college after a disaster, the researchers found that students became more overwhelmed by the transitions and obligations of their academic pursuits when also navigating the hardship they incurred after the hurricane. Students interviewed indicated a multitude of competing difficulties.

> They were repairing their homes, completing insurance claims, supporting their family members, and sometimes living in transitional housing such as hotels, RV trailers, or with other family members. One student described studying in an RV where she stayed with eight family members; another described studying in a closet of the apartment where several families were staying. Once school resumed, some of our participants were still displaced physically from their homes or lacked transportation. During this transition period they faced difficulties in their physical and mental health, family life, personal life, and academics. (Carales & López, 2021, p. 8)

Many students suggested that the unanticipated transition of the hurricane caused them to question their place within post-secondary entirely or seek a reduction in workload. On the other hand, others noted they felt a rejuvenated sense of purpose and clarity (Carales & López, 2021). Interestingly, this layering of anticipated and unanticipated transitions seems to have manifested as stress, anxiety, and self-doubt for some, but as a recommitment to the post-secondary setting for others (Carales & López, 2021).

To summarize, adult learners are a unique and diverse group working through the anticipated transitions related to post-secondary studies. These transitions, while straining, are manageable for typical learners. Events outside of the post-secondary experience, that result in unexpected change, are called unanticipated transitions, and these are commonly far more taxing for individuals. To better comprehend the experience of navigating multiple transitions at once,

an understanding of the specific transitional events discussed within this study is required. In the next section, disaster and home is explored, along with the implications that disaster-induced home loss presents for individuals.

Understanding Disaster and Home

There are many examples of unanticipated transitions, but as one iteration, disaster-induced home loss is expanded upon for this study. To comprehend disaster-induced home loss, first, an overarching definition of disaster must be determined and the various iterations of disaster examined. The phases of disaster recovery are also be presented to help contextualize the various sub-transitions that occur after a disaster event. Separately, home, as it is broadly defined and offered throughout scholarly discourse, is discussed. Finally, the ontological security provided by home is elaborated upon so that the implications of disaster-induced home loss, and its subsequent impact on the transitional process, can be understood.

Disaster

I walked outside and a shiver surged up my spine. The air didn't feel right. I insisted that we needed to pack a bag even though the radio was telling us it was still too far away to do any damage, but this one didn't feel quite like the experiences before. By the time the sun set, a quarter of our town was gone, and the fire was still burning.

It is difficult to put the experience of disaster into words. How an event can feel so calm and chaotic all at the same time is impossible to explain, and it is a feeling I wish never to relive, but it is, unfortunately, a feeling that an increasing number of people can relate with. As mentioned in Chapter 1, disaster frequency is on the rise globally. In Canada, exposure to disaster is relatively common, "with 12.4 million Canadians reporting having experienced a disaster in their lifetime" (Ritchie et al., 2020, p. 1). Understanding these events is exceptionally

important because they hold unique meanings for victims, which subsequently results in the kinds of behaviours people exhibit post disaster (Katz & Nathaniel, 2002), as they transition from their pre-disaster life, to a new one.

Crisis, Trauma, or Disaster?

It is commonly accepted that a disaster is an event that severely disrupts and overwhelms a community's functioning and resources and threatens the safety of people who live there (Morganstein & Ursano, 2020, p. 1). Disaster is an often referred to concept within the literature, but it is also commonly confused with other events or occurrences and is, therefore, misunderstood. This misunderstanding is likely rooted in the intersecting and muddled use of the term's crisis, trauma, and disaster. While they are often written about together (Everstine, & Everstine, 2013; Lopez Levers, 2019; Shaluf et al., 2003), they are all distinct and should be regarded as such within scholarly discourse.

A crisis, unlike a disaster, does not need to impair the functioning of a person or community significantly. Instead, a crisis is "a situation that has reached a critical point" (Everstine & Everstine, 2013, p. xii). As individual experiences, crises can happen for many reasons and at any age; however, they are primarily internal events that external factors can influence. Everstine and Everstine (2013) stated that "the experience of crisis is to think of one's history as "catching up" with [them]. For instance, a [person] comes to the realization that [they are] not going to be promoted by the company [they have] served for years" (p. xii). This realization may cause significant distress, and become a personal crisis, prompting a change in course for the individual. Additionally, crises can also exist at a community level and are best understood as a turning point that has already resulted in some amount of societal difficulty (Shaluf et al., 2003). Our ongoing global climate crisis is an excellent example of this conception.

In comparison, trauma is a physical or psychological wound, although primarily utilized in the psychological sense within social science writing (Garland, 2002). Psychological trauma is a personal and prolonged response to having witnessed or experienced an unexpected, sudden, or emotionally overwhelming event or series of events (Flannery, 2020). However, while caused situationally, trauma must be examined from outside of the event itself, as the many pervasive and complex consequences of trauma last long after a specific experience (Everstine & Everstine, 2013).

When considering the definitions of crisis, trauma, and disaster, disaster can be best seen as the trio's overarching term, which is especially powerful because disasters can be the cause of both a personal crisis and personal trauma.

Disaster Categorizations

You have likely heard of disaster being discussed within two categorical frameworks. The first, “natural” disaster, often also referred to as “acts of God”, includes incidents such as tornadoes, wildfires, floods, earthquakes, and mudslides, among others (Zibulewsky, 2001). The second grouping, man-made disasters, are “unnatural” caused solely by the actions or errors of humans. Events such as war, nuclear explosions, and mass shootings would fall into the man-made category (Zibulewsky, 2001). While seemingly a straightforward approach to disaster categorization, several recent works have contested this separation of human-caused and naturally occurring disasters (Chmutina & von Meding, 2019; Makwana, 2019; Morganstein & Ursano, 2020). This resistance is due to mounting evidence that most “natural” weather events are caused by how human beings engage with the world via the consequences of climate change and deforestation (Makwana, 2019). Additionally, disaster does not exist without human peril. "An earthquake that happens in an uninhabited area is not considered a disaster. While earthquakes, droughts, floods, and storms are natural hazards, they lead to deaths and damages—

that is, disasters" (Chmutina & von Meding, 2019, p. 284). While it would be misleading to state that there is no naturally occurring component to disaster hazards, as instances of lightning, wildfire, and heavy rainfall, as examples, occur outside of human control, promoting the notion that these events and their dire consequences are entirely unavoidable because they are "natural" plays into a depoliticized narrative void of responsibility (Chmutina & von Meding, 2019). "Environmental problems are in fact a direct outcome of… predatory capitalism, economic development, corporatization, and a market economy that buys, sells, and finds the cheapest methods possible with little regard for human or ecological well-being" (Clover, 2013, p. 55).

So, what do we do? Do we simply call all disastrous events "disaster"? Some say yes; the term accurately describes any event that severely disrupts and overwhelms the functioning and resources of humans. There is no need to categorize events beyond this point, as doing so can lead to misinformation and manipulation (Chmutina & von Meding, 2019). However, this is not the only solution to this vocabulary conundrum. Others insist that new terminology is needed and have proposed entirely new or adapted vocabulary that they feel can more accurately describe environmentally based disasters. Morganstein and Ursano (2020) utilized the terms "ecological disaster" and "climate-related disaster" in their study, in an attempt to bring awareness to the correlation between human beings, climate change, and disaster events (p. 1). While their word choices improve the discourse and present the reading audience with alternative terminology, "natural disaster" has a particular word association unlikely to be replaced by an entirely different term any time soon. After all, "natural disaster" has been, and is, used in everything from government policy, news media, to casual conversation (Chmutina & von Meding, 2019). This frequency of use presents a practical problem, as their article does not surface easily in searches using the words interested scholars might utilize. Alternatively, some academics

suggested using the term “socio-natural disaster” (Cannizzaro, 2020; Luke et al., 2021; Rodríguez, 2021). This term preserves the established notoriety and searchability of “natural disaster”, making it easily accessible for readers who may wish to engage with the topic while highlighting the social element of disaster events, which is most relevant to this study. The general term “disaster” is also used, where applicable, for the above reasons.

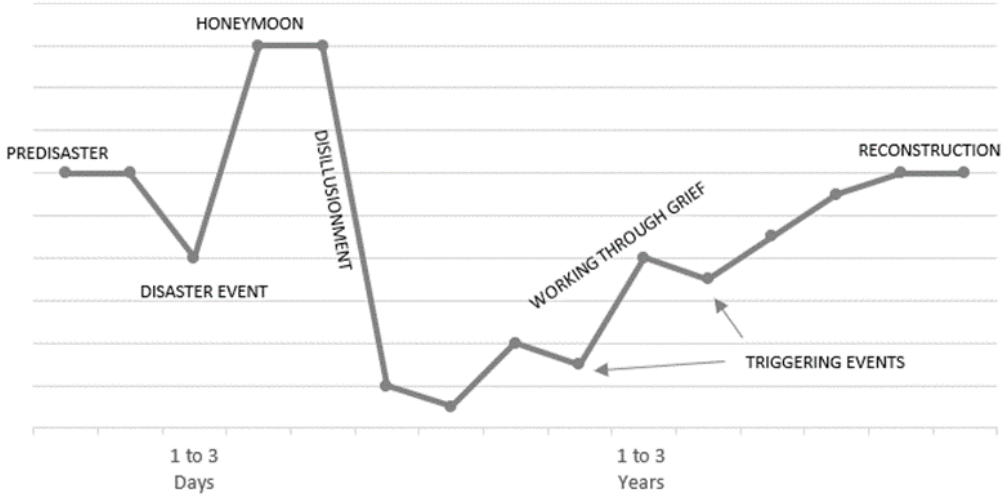
Phases of Socio-Natural Disaster

Now that we have a basic understanding of what socio-natural disaster is and how it differs from other commonly used terms, we shift focus to the phases of socio-natural disaster. The intimately woven relationship between socio-natural disasters and humans guarantees significant implications (Del Moral & Walker, 2007). We can generally categorize these implications into transitions or phases that signify the shared experiences and emotions survivors are likely to have within a post-disaster timeline. Often, those unaffected by disaster assume that the moments during and immediately after such events are most challenging; however, this is untrue. “In the early phase of a disaster, at the population level, there is often a sense of cohesion and a “honeymoon” of working together” (Ursano et al., 2017, p. 5). After the first week, however, these close-knit bonds of camaraderie that have been sewn through shared struggle begin to unravel. This unraveling is referred to in the literature as the disillusionment phase and is marked by intense and growing feelings of polarization, loneliness, and distress (Felix & Afifi, 2015). The reality of post-disaster life sets in, and much of the assistance and general emotional support people receive shortly after a disaster comes to a halt (DeWolf, 2000). A heightened sense of fear, paired with things like financial pressure, and time constraints, results in mounting stress and fatigue for individuals at this time (Ursano et al., 2017). When victims begin the process of grieving their pre-disaster lives, tactics such as scapegoating and hypervigilance will often be utilized when first attempting to establish normalcy (DeWolf, 2000). However, these

actions are quickly replaced with acceptance and personal growth in most cases. Below is a visual (Figure 1.1) of the typical sequencing of a victim's emotional state post-disaster event.

Figure 1.1

Phases of Disaster Recovery



Note. Adapted from *Textbook of disaster psychiatry* (p. 6), by R. J. Ursano, C. S. Fullerton, L. Weisaeth, and B. Raphael, 2017, Cambridge University Press. Copyright 2017 by Cambridge University Press.

While victims typically follow a similar recovery pattern, it is essential to note that scholars cannot determine a specific timeline as "each survivor has a combination of personal assets and vulnerabilities that either mitigate or exacerbate disaster stress" (DeWolf, 2000, p. 5). This in an understanding accepted by Schlossberg's Transition Model, as one's ability to cope with a transition is based on the liabilities and assets they possess internally and externally (Anderson et al., 2021). One of the most significant liabilities that can result from a socio-disaster is the loss of home. In terms of grief response, destruction of home is similar to losing a family member or friend because so much of what is familiar and comfortable is destroyed when a home is lost (Fuqua, 2016; Smid et al., 2018). The intertwining of grief and trauma associated with a disaster,

and subsequently a home loss, cause a compounding effect that can significantly impede an individual's ability to cope (DeWolf, 2000).

Home

When I heard the buzz of a text message after ignoring several phone calls, I was unreasonably irritated. That was, until I glanced down at the message. "Hey honey, I know you're teaching right now, I need you to end your class. Dexter and I are fine, but our house is on fire." My annoyance quickly shifted to panic as I abruptly ended my night class and rushed to meet my husband and dog on a cold, dark street. Together, we stood shoulder to shoulder and watched as it burned. In the months leading up to this day, I spent hours searching real estate websites trying to find something bigger, something better. However, in that moment, I would have done anything to get to spend just one more night in that too-small house, in my own bed, in our home.

What is most interesting about home, at least for me, is that I almost entirely forget about what it means as I meander about my day-to-day life. Home is a peripheral entity, only really thought about when missed or lost entirely. So, how does one define an often-forgotten, sometimes painful concept? Not easily. "Any researcher engaging with the concept home is faced with the dilemma of how to distill workable principles from such a vast literature" (Meers, 2021, p. 3), and this is the challenge I hope to tackle below.

Home as it is Broadly Defined

Various iterations of the meaning of the word home saturate our minds and our pop culture. When examining the lyrics of multiple songs, this permeation becomes quite clear. For example, Kreviazuk (1999), in her song "Feels like home," sang, "if you knew how I wanted someone to come along, and change my life the way you've done, feels like home" (1.07). She references home in its relational sense, the feeling of being at home with a person or people.

Aplin (2013), on the other hand, sings of home in the past tense, as a place dear to her in the song "Home" by singing, "'cause they say home is where your heart is set in stone" (0.49). Lastly, Denver (1971), in his song "Country roads," spoke of home in its iteration as a dwelling or a place as he performed the lyrics, "Country roads, take me home, to the place I belong, West Virginia, mountain mama, take me home" (0.30). These songs are a representation of the vastness of how home, as a term, is casually utilized within the English language.

Think for a moment, about what your version of home is. What visual comes to mind when you think of home? Are any of your senses ignited? With good likelihood, we are all recalling different spaces, places, feelings, senses, or even people, across great distances of time and space. The Collins English Dictionary (n.d.) defines home in 35 distinct meanings, further separated into subcategories of nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs. Home is a universal and fundamental concept, but it is layered in its meaning resulting in great range in the way the term is utilized and the emotional weight that these uses convey. "Home is variously described as conflated with or related to house, family, haven, self, gender, and journeying" (Mallet, 2004, p. 65). Many scholars have taken up work to better understand these concepts of home and the meanings held within them.

Home: A Brief History

Throughout the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and into the early 1990s, literature about the meaning of home, defined most often by home occupants (Despres, 1991), began gaining traction within scholarly circles. Based on the research and its preoccupation with occupancy, it is clear that many presumed home was tethered exclusively to a physical space (Cooper, 1974; Despres, 1991; Fried, 1963; Sixsmith, 1986). While this placed-based idea of home limited its conceptualization, researchers did seek to better understand home from this viewpoint and its many potential meanings. Despres (1991) identified several common themes in this era of home

literature, including, but not limited to: home as a reflection of ideas and values, home as permanence and continuity, home as a space of refuge, and homeownership. While many of these topical themes remain in the literature today, problems regarding perspective are apparent in this wave of writing. Most notably, beyond the limitation of home as a place, is the lack of diversity within data and participants. Focus was placed on nuclear families in North America, most often white and middle class, residing in owned single-family detached dwellings. The 1990s, fortunately, signaled a significant shift in home literature, as calls to involve single parents and childless individuals, minorities, and the perspectives of those that lived in spaces, such as apartments, or rentals, mounted (Case, 1996; Despres, 1991).

Home as a multidimensional and multidisciplinary research endeavor took flight in the 1990s and into the 2000s. Scholars from fields such as anthropology, architecture, sociology, human geography, psychology, history, and philosophy, among others, began having conversations about home and its meaning within their discourse (Mallett, 2004). Special attention was placed on the contradictory notions of home within past literature, as home and our scholarly understanding of it started to morph into something beyond a specific place. Mallett (2004) does an exceptional job of outlining the many notions of home written about during this period. They include: contesting the experience of home as an exclusively positive or accurately remembered experience, presenting problems related to the perception of home as a private, sanctimonious space (Case, 1996; Hepworth, 1999). It is a space of work for many people, especially women (Duncan, 1996; Jones, 2002); the cross-cultural implications of home, specifically for those that have immigrated or sought refuge (Case, 1996; Olwig, 1999); and home as a symbolic and salient entity detached from physical space altogether (Ahmed, 1999). These contributions added a depth that was missing from previous conceptualizations of home,

however, some recent scholars argue that home has become so analyzed and pondered, that it is now impossible to determine its meaning (Meers, 2021).

Contemporary Constructs of Home

Today, scholars take issue with the notion of limiting our understanding of home, as every meaning defined within the literature comes with a contradictory and equally compelling or accurate definition (Meers, 2021; Carr et al., 2018). Instead of trying to describe what a home is, conversations about what home is not and how notions of home can be changed or destroyed have become common (Boccagni & Nieto, 2021). Wonderings about the embodied experience of home, particularly concerning sensory experiences (Sou & Webber, 2021), and how climate change and socio-natural disaster implicate our feelings about home (Tschalert et al., 2017) have made their way into the discourse and have particular relevance to this research.

The seemingly endless and open pursuit of the meaning of home is overwhelming, especially in the context of a study that requires a solid foundation from which to build. However, Meers (2021) offered some helpful structure for researchers, such as myself, that wish to utilize home within their studies. First, "there is no politically neutral concept of home" (Meers, 2021, p. 11). With this recognition, it becomes essential for researchers to engage in reflexive research practice, vocalizing explicit bias, understandings, and experiences with home within their work. Secondly, "researchers using the concept of home … should present their arguments in a way that recognizes the concept's essential contestability" (Meers, 2021, p. 12). Home, as I am using it, reflects the meaning put forth by Wise (2000) as "the creation of a space of comfort" (p. 178). While filled with subjective and symbolic meaning, this space must also be literal, in the sense that it must be able to be physically inhabited and subsequently destroyed.

Home as Ontological Security

Honing in on “what” home is may be most important to some, but I am interested in how home provides security during times of transition. This security is referred to in the literature as ontological security (Dupis & Thorns, 1998; Padgett, 2007; Rosenberg et al., 2021). Defined by Giddens (1991), "ontological security is one form, but a very important form, of feelings of security… The phrase refers to the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity" (p. 105), which is determined, in part, by the environments they inhabit. Dupuis and Thorns (1998) expand on this thought by stating that home is an essential source of ontological security because:

- home provides constancy
- home is a place of essential daily routines
- home is where people feel in control
- home is a secure base from which one can construct their identity. (p. 29)

While it is correct that these idealized notions of home are not accurate for some, as stated by Blunt and Dowling (2007), and we should not minimize negative experiences of home, home as a haven is still an authentic experience for many (Mallet, 2004). The ontological security provided by home has been conceptualized as important for health and well-being, which results in identity development and an overall positive sense of self (Padgett, 2007). These implications are due to home providing a "protective cocoon" (Giddens, 1991, p. 41) for individuals to utilize as a "firewall against chaos" (Mitzen, 2006, p. 274) experienced outside of the literal or symbolic home space.

Home Loss

So, what happens when people lose home? Does this have implications for ontological security and, subsequently, how an individual navigates transition and change? Recent works

have sought to explore the loss of home and its consequences. Notably, Hawkins and Maurer (2011) used the concept of ontological security to examine "the physical and psychological loss of home … following Hurricane Katrina" (p. 143), finding that when home was destroyed, individuals sought to restore, not rebuild, nostalgic notions of home and former self. However, the intangible and "ambiguous loss(es) of resources, identity, routines, patterns, and community" (Hawkins & Maurer, 2011, p. 154) are seemingly impossible to restore, leaving individuals in a place of prolonged uncertainty and instability. Other, more recent studies, have come to similar conclusions about disaster-induced home loss. Home loss, or the loss of a loved one, causes the most persistent kind of disaster-related distress (Smid et al., 2018). This distress is likely because disaster-induced home loss, specifically, results in more than a single loss; instead, it causes a spectrum of losses (Dahlin-Ivanoff et al., 2007; Hawkins & Maurer, 2011). These losses present practical issues for the individual, like finding a new place to sleep safely or completing daily tasks (Carales & López, 2021), but they also present psychological hurdles. These psychological difficulties include "feelings of anxiety and depression, concentration difficulty, anger and hostility, sleep problems" (Smid et al., 2018, p. 649), in addition to intrusive thoughts about the lost home and disaster experience (Smid et al., 2018).

This second section aimed to provide an overview of disaster and home and describe the practical and deeply personal consequences disaster-induced home loss imposes upon its victims. In the following and final section, a return to the post-secondary student is required. By utilizing a component of Schlossberg's Transition Model, the 4 S System, a complete perspective regarding the effect of unanticipated transitions while completing post-secondary programming is garnered.

Conceptual Framework: The 4 S System

I sat, trying to write an email like the one I had written in my previous program all of those years before. My palms were clammy, but ultimately, I thought I knew what to expect. News of my home loss would reach my educator's inboxes, and at some point the next day they would offer their condolences. Then, they would say there was little they could do. Maybe they would recommend that I remove myself from the program proactively, an option I wasn't ready to consider but had heard countless times throughout my previous experience. You see, being a student felt like it was the only remaining piece of my life, and I desperately clung to it, hoping that someone, anyone, would assist me in doing just that. Much to my surprise, my educators responded with unwavering support and compassion, offering gestures that, still today, make my eyes well up with gratitude.

At this point, a general understanding that post-secondary students navigating disaster-induced home loss are experiencing both unanticipated and anticipated transitions within their lives has been reached. Additionally, the process of transition post-disaster and the importance of home as a means to transition securely has been explored. Now, it is time to return to the post-secondary setting and evaluate students' transitional experiences navigating disaster-induced home loss using the Schlossberg's Transition Model 4 S System. This framework is utilized in subsequent portions of this study to harvest and analyze participant data.

Taking Stock: Schlossberg's 4 S System

According to Anderson et al. (2021), once a transition experience has been identified, the next step is to determine the forces that one can utilize to manage or reflect on the transition, or the transitions in the case of this research. The transition experience is extraordinarily complex,

but four overarching factors, or the 4 S's as they are commonly referred, can influence an individual's ability to manage a transitional experience meaningfully. They are:

- your situation—your situation at the time of the transition
- your supports—those people and assets that bolster you
- your self—who you are, your optimism and ability to deal with ambiguity
- your strategies—what you do to cope. (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002, p. 45)

The 4 S System of STM rests on several assumptions about change and the individual. First, many different factors play into how individuals cope with a transition. These differing factors explain why various people can respond differently to the same event (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Additionally, regardless of circumstance, every individual has resources and deficits that aid or hinder their ability to respond to change. These transitional supports or setbacks can differ based on time or circumstance (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002).

While STM has not been widely applied to disaster-induced home loss, it has been utilized to gain insight into transitions within post-secondary settings (Khan et al.; Warren, 2021). In addition, it has also been used to determine the assets available to individuals in various unanticipated transitions (Collom et al., 2021; Nyar, 2021; Tønseth, 2018). Therefore, the following section frames relevant research related to each of the 4 S's of STM and details the assets and liabilities adult learners navigating disaster-induced home loss may bring to the experience or access, according to existing literature.

Situation

Have you ever heard the phrase, “begin with the end in mind”? Stephen Covey famously popularized the statement as one of his seven habits of highly effective people (Diver, 2018, p. 593). While taken up differently, this is fitting because those that want to utilize the 4 S System also need to examine endings before collecting other information. “Transitions always begin

with an ending of sorts, and understanding this ending is important" (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002, p. 3), as the permanency of these conclusions is an essential factor used to determine how challenging a transition may be (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Post-secondary students note a multitude of semi-permanent and permanent transitions resulting from their participation in higher education. Chickering and Schlossberg (2004), in their study of students at various points in their educational endeavors, noted that learners "reported changes in their daily routines. These changes were very unsettling, … Late-night studying after dinner and the dishes were done … the time they woke up and went to sleep, fitting in grocery shopping, carpooling, and classes" (p. 8) all presented situational difficulties that students had to navigate. More permanently, within the same study, student plans for their futures also changed, along with their friendship and relationship preferences, political sensitivities, and overall capabilities (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002).

Literature about socio-disaster events and home loss indicates additional factors that may make disaster-induced home loss especially difficult for a post-secondary student to manage. There are practical problems, such as needing to "rebuild their lives along with their dwellings" (Noerager Stern & Kerry, 2016, p. 71), or having to find another place to live, momentous endeavors for individuals who also often lack the resources required to do so. "Records, books, even pencils and papers" (Noerager Stern & Kerry, 2016, p. 71) are typically lost in a disaster-induced home loss event, along with other necessities such as clothing. Not only are these survival basics in need of replacing, but also the resources required to facilitate coursework such as computers, textbooks, and notes. "Uninsured victims [suffer] terrible financial problems-sometimes never recouping the losses. When a victim [is] insured, endless lists of home contents

[need] to be complied – often from memory" (Noerager Stern & Kerry, 2016, p. 71). These situational practicalities must be managed while also navigating the requirements of student life.

Support

The Beatles (1967) famously sang, "I get by with a little help from my friends" (0.26). While friends are not the only group a person can access during times of hardship, it is crucial that people can identify social supports they can access during a transitional experience. This is because transitions require financial, emotional, or social supports to maneuver meaningfully. In the case of post-secondary challenges, students get by, if they are lucky, with the support of multiple social relationships, including their family units, peer groups, faculty, support staff, and campus programming (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Supporting behaviors from these resources include affection, empathy, affirmation, caring feedback, and tangible assistance through help like tutoring services or financial aid (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Morganstein & Ursano, 2020). While these supports may seem simple enough to obtain, "going to college involves new relationships—meeting new friends, teachers, advisors. It also means letting go of some previous relationships, and changing others. For some students, … [this] is difficult" (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002, p. 8). These changing relationship dynamics could mean that students are unsure of where to turn for support while navigating their programming.

This interpersonal instability is an important consideration when examining the support available to students after a disaster-induced home loss. Not only is it possible that they are navigating the everyday student experience of not knowing where to turn, after such losses, "individuals may also isolate themselves, reducing access to available healthcare and social support resources" (Morganstein & Ursano, 2020, p. 4). Supportive assistance has a tremendously positive and protective effect after a socio-natural disaster (West et al., 2013), and interestingly, "many individuals … prefer social and community support over formal

intervention" (Morganstein & Ursano, 2020, p. 9). This resistance means that it is essential that academic and social supports initiate reaching out to individuals. The greater the social support, the smoother the transition, and educational communities are among the many essential systems that can bolster the physical and emotional security of a student post-disaster-induced home loss (Ursano et al., 2017).

Self

The analysis of self is, perhaps, the most challenging component of the 4 S System. The concept is overwhelming and frustrating, as the term's vagueness, along with the synonymous use of separate significant concepts, such as identity, makes "self" impossible to apply universally (Talaifar & Swann, 2018). Even within the system, understanding "self" comes with a whole list that one should use to determine how individuals use self to cope with a transition. This list includes stage of life, health, psychological resources, ego, values, outlook, and resilience, among others (Anderson et al., 2021). While specific characteristics, such as gender, socioeconomic status, and age, have correlated to increased vulnerability during times of change (Gorman-Murray et al., 2014; Griffin & Gilbert,2015; Morganstein & Ursano, 2020), self-identified psychological resources are the primary focus of this study. Anderson et al. (2021) stated that within the 4 S System, self is how we examine what the individual brings to the transition and what they get from it. "Self is both a product of situations and a shaper of behavior in situations" (Oyserman et al., 2011, p. 70). So, to this end, I have examined how individuals identify experiencing transitions and how personally perceived psychological factors, such as optimism, hope, or grief, may limit or enhance a person's ability to work through such experiences.

"Transitions not only change roles, relationships, and routines, they can change the way you see yourself and the world" (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002, p. 9). Within the post-

secondary experience, these transitions can make students feel excited and hopeful, but they can also prompt challenging emotions as students grieve failed expectations or their past lives (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Studies have identified that many students in post-secondary institutions experience a variety of negative emotions and coping challenges due to their studies, undiagnosed mental health conditions, and a general lack of help-seeking behaviors (Wei et al., 2021). These existing difficulties are brought into other transitions occurring, which is an important consideration when examining the emotional upheaval of being a post-secondary student in a disaster-induced home loss situation. "Emotional instability, stress reactions, anxiety, trauma, and other psychological symptoms are observed commonly after [a] disaster" (Makwana, 2019, p. 3094), and as mentioned in sections above, individuals also often lack the ontological security necessary to work through these emotions efficiently (Hawkins & Maurer, 2011). Additionally, "there may be grief over loss of tangible items such as home, possessions, and cherished mementos" (Morganstein & Ursano, 2020, p. 12). The shock of the event paired with grief often results in acute stress reactions, emotional numbness, or hypervigilance in victims (Shuei & Gibson, 2020). These responses become the center with which an individual's life revolves, causing disorientation (Ursano et al., 2017). A reorientation of values and goals is necessary for victims to find a new version of normal and self, but this is a pursuit that must also be balanced with academic obligations in instances where a home loss victim is also a student.

Strategies

Strategies refer to the varying abilities, actions, and behaviors that a person can utilize to manage a transition (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Anderson et al. (2021) identified three sub-themes of transitional strategies, modifying the situation, controlling the meaning of the experience, and managing stress during and after the transition. They note that recent studies have also discussed coping flexibility, which refers to a person's capacity to adapt existing coping strategies to new

or compounding stressors (Anderson et al., 2021; Heffer & Willoughby, 2017). Adult learners within post-secondary settings must utilize all of these transitional strategies as they tackle their new obligations if they wish to be successful (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Students might drop a course if their workload is too taxing, modifying the situation to make it less challenging. If they cannot do this for practical reasons, they might seek to change their perspective about the class, or reduce their grade expectations, to control the meaning of the experience. Lastly, they might engage in proactive studying behaviors or seek the support of a counselor to help them manage stress. The previous strategies are examples of healthy coping behaviours that students may utilize to manage the post-secondary transition. Unfortunately, unhealthy transitional coping strategies are also common among post-secondary students. Studies find that students overuse social media to avoid stress and worry (Corazza, 2021) and increase their use of mind-altering substances such as drugs and alcohol (Esmaeelzadeh, 2018). Similar maladaptive issues are cited in the literature regarding disaster-induced home loss, with victims being more prone to addictive behaviors than those that have not suffered a disaster or home-loss event (Makwana, 2019; Morganstein & Ursano, 2020; Ritchie et al., 2020; Ursano et al., 2017).

There are many healthy coping strategies that a student experiencing disaster-induced home loss may utilize, but one commonly discussed within both home loss and disaster research is meaning-making (Maffly-Kipp et al., 2021; Park, 2016; Rateau, 2010; Thompson, 2007). It is crucial that people can find meaning and purpose within a transition event (Anderson et al., 2021). Park (2016) described meaning as being based on two levels of understanding. The first, global, refers to a person's belief about themselves, the world, and their place in it. The second, situational, refers to how individuals' beliefs about themselves influence interpretations and reactions to a transitional occurrence (Park, 2016). Authentic meaning-making results in various

"changes in situational or global meaning, including changes in appraisals of a stressful event … and perceived stress-related or posttraumatic growth" (Park, 2016, p. 1236). Searching for meaning while simultaneously navigating disaster-induced home loss as a student seems to be a beneficial strategy to employ while attempting to recover from such an event.

This final section of this review connects the anticipated transition of post-secondary student life with the unanticipated transition of disaster-induced home loss, emphasizing that navigating both simultaneously is a unique and challenging occurrence. Using the 4 S System, various factors that contribute to a person's ability to navigate transitions well were explored, and a complete perspective regarding the complexities of experiencing disaster-induced home loss while being a student gained.

Chapter Summary

"Alisha, please answer this. Would you be interested in reading a novel without the occasional plot twist?" I laughed; our appointments always seemed to end in these types of questions, "oh, I've read many of those stories, certainly not what I'd consider enjoyable." He replied, "okay, think of your life as a novel. Don't you want to look back one day and recall an interesting story with a dynamic plot?"

Transitions add a richness to our lives that certainty cannot. However, for individuals to get to the place required to enjoy this richness, they must first navigate all of the hardship and complexity that comes with life's transitions. As explored within this chapter, disaster-induced home loss events are extraordinarily complicated and frequently misunderstood, making it difficult for victims to feel that they have meaningfully traversed the changes that consequently result from such losses. These changes are even more challenging for adult learners as they attempt to complete formal education while dealing with the implications of losses incurred. By

seeking to understand this experience and the factors that may influence an individual's ability to manage multiple transitions meaningfully, this study is better situated to gather specific student stories about disaster-induced home loss.

Chapter 3: Research Construction

The previous chapter discussed the various meanings of home, among other concepts relevant to this project. While reviewing material for this chapter, I found myself circling back to that section continuously, wondering what research "home" I belonged within and what kind of space I wanted to construct for my research participants. Patricia Leavy (2017), in her text *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches*, thoughtfully compared the process of crafting a study to the process of designing a physical dwelling; a house as an iteration of home. Building upon this comparison, like an architect drafting blueprints, many factors needed consideration when outlining the structure of this research. First, I considered the foundation with which this study would rest; a reflection of the values and orientations that I carried into this endeavor, perspectives that would support all other decisions moving forward. Upon this foundation rests the structure, a framework that contains the necessary components required while also allowing for the development of a space that feels reflective of me and my co-researchers. Lastly, there needed to be a roof, without it the structure created could be irreparably damaged. The roof is the final piece needed to keep the participants that live within the pages of this study secure and ensure the integrity of its composition. In the following sections, I have described how these components were constructed in greater detail.

The Foundation

I watched as she attempted to navigate this new world filled with its wide variety of perspectives and lifestyles, a world that she recalls feeling utterly ill-prepared to participate in. Coming from a small town in rural Canada, a place where, at the time, homogenous viewpoints

were accepted as truth, and any ideas beyond the norm were swept urgently under the rug, college was a shocking experience for my mother.

Her upbringing was based on the premise that humans pursue single truths, and when these truths are obtained, there is no information left to gather, no questions left to ask. My childhood was rooted in the pursuit of stories. Intentionally, I was exposed to tales different from my own and asked about what I had learned from them. Much to my mother's credit, knowledge became something that I understood as ever-changing and something I actively sought, but perhaps more importantly, knowledge became something that I felt all should have access to because she showed me that we all help create and inform it.

The collaborative nature of knowledge acquisition has always been a part of my life. I like to think that this value, in part, is what led me to my career in education. However, I did not connect this value to research until more recently. I begin the construction of the chapter by providing an overview of my journey to research as a formal endeavor. A general overview of qualitative methodology and my relationship to it is examined, and the personal paradigms that led me to this design are explored.

Why Qualitative?

When asked why I am drawn to qualitative research, it is easy for me to quip that I have always been a qualitative researcher at heart. Many qualitative methodologies reflect the way I was taught to answer exciting questions as a child by seeking to "[understand] how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to [them]" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6). However, sometimes the obvious choice is not the one we are inclined to make, and my path to qualitative design took some time. For much of my life, I clung to the idea that research was a prestigious endeavor that happens outside of oneself; an act that occurs in sterile labs with white coats and clipboards by people with fancy accolades

pursuing single answers to significant problems. This admittedly singular and reductive notion of research felt glamourous and seductive, but it also did not feel like a world I would ever be capable of participating in. I was the girl that struggled for every single percentage of my abysmal math grade and the student that did not understand the experiments being conducted at the science fair or the value people placed on them. Of the research types available; qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, arts-based, and community-based participatory research (Leavy, 2017), I was formally exposed to only one in my early academic life.

As you have probably guessed, based on my writing thus far, quantitative studies were likely never going to be a research space where I would feel at home. A discourse defined by its "deductive approaches to the research process …linear methods of data collection and analysis, … neutrality, [and] objectivity" (Leavy, 2017, p. 9) is not a space I have ever felt called to join. By the time I had begun pursuing post-secondary education, the idea that I would ever conduct research was so far from my mind that I did not even consider it a possibility for my future. This sentiment remained true until I entered my first graduate program. There, for what felt like the very first time, I saw people like me and voices like my own within studies being conducted, read, and discussed in a formal context; pages of work done by people with an "acceptance of much more than direct conclusions from sense-data" (Crotty, 1998, p. 30). Denzin and Lincoln (2018) state that:

> Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artifacts, and cultural texts and productions, along with observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. (p. 10)

Despite being critiqued as a method that constructs fiction, not science (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), the kinds of exploration offered by a qualitative research design are needed as they allow for the identification of “variables that cannot be easily measured” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 45). This motive reflects the kind of work I wish to do and the values I hold dear as an individual.

Social Constructivist Paradigm

Ontology and epistemology are two faces of the same coin (Daniel & Harland, 2018) and are often challenging to separate. "Ontology is the study of being. It is concerned with 'what is,' with the nature of existence, [and] with the structure of reality" (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). Leavy (2013) defines ontology as "a philosophical belief system about the nature of the social world" (p. 12). In contrast, or perhaps more accurately, in continuation, epistemology addresses the assumptions we have about knowledge. Ultimately, "it answers questions about who can be a "knower"... and the kinds of things that can be known" (Reid et al., 2017, p. 10). It also addresses how knowledge is deemed legitimate and how it can be acquired (Snape & Spencer, 2003). These systems together form our personal paradigm and appear both overtly in declarations we make, and more subtly, in the choices we defend (Leavy, 2013; Powell, 2015).

It is clear to me now that the discomfort I felt in spaces that prioritized quantitative methodologies and the excitement that surged though my body when reading about qualitative forms of inquiry for the first time, were the result of a personal paradigm I had not yet uncovered. A social constructivist paradigm rooted to a deep curiosity about, and value of, lived experience. “Everyone has lived and everyone has life experiences. These experiences make us unique, but they can also unite us. Whether consciously or subconsciously, hidden or in full view these very experiences can shape [us]” (Sandhu, 2017, p. 15). Through this shaping and reshaping, we formulate meaning that is valuable, ever-changing, and contextualized (Clandinin

et al., 2018). This meaning is actively cultivated as we engage with others, and these engagements ultimately result in new and more significant understandings about experience and life (Clandinin et al., 2018). Because of my belief in the deeply personalized nature of knowledge acquisition, the notion that there is a reality to find independent of the individual is not one that resonates with me. Instead, I align with the belief that "we interact with the world in order to know the world" (Clandinin et al., 2018). These interactions are unique, and therefore, so is our perception of reality.

This first section aimed to highlight the foundational beliefs and values that drive me as a researcher and an individual, a social constructivist perspective that have undoubtedly provided the basis for all decisions related to this study. In the next section, this foundation is built upon. By discussing narrative inquiry, and the steps that have been taken to facilitate this research, a structure to house participant thoughts, feelings, and perceptions are be formed.

The Structure

The bricks, the [paint], the earth below,

The solid walls of what we know,

The space we fill, the scenery,

Does this make all this place can be?

Or rather, are we hearts and minds,

With bricks and mortar left behind?

The bonds we form, the friends we make

The things we need not pack to take… (Stolnikova, 2022, n.p.)

When attempting to envision the structure of this research, building a sound framework while also developing a space that fostered bonding and collaboration felt like competing

demands. Finding a qualitative methodology that aligned with my paradigm, supported the purpose and questions posed by this study, and allowed space for my unique insider/outsider perspective on my research topic, I assumed it would be easy. As Creswell and Poth (2013) stated, "those undertaking qualitative studies have a baffling number of choices of approaches" (p. 8). The quantity of methodologies that seemed to fit initially felt overwhelming, but ultimately, I chose narrative inquiry for its contextualized nature, its honoring of individuality through story, and the ability to create something with both structural integrity and meaning. In the upcoming section, I discuss narrative inquiry as a methodology in more detail and explain how I am housed within it. To conclude this section, the structure of this study, including the data collection and analysis processes are outlined.

Narrative Inquiry

Within narrative inquiry, narrative serves as both a process and a product (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This complex interweaving of research, reflection and literary art compelled me to explore its use within this study. “We dream in narrative, day-dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative” (Hardy, 1968, cited in Kim, 2019, p. 33). Through narratives, we make sense of our experiences and seek to understand the world around us (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and as such, it feels natural for me to engage in formal research in this same manner. I am not alone in this pursuit. Scholars from psychology, sociology, cultural studies, health, and education have used this methodology to better understand diverse human experiences (Liu & Tseng, 2020). More recently, narrative inquiry has been deemed particularly beneficial when examining disasters. It allows researchers to understand crises better and ascertain a sense of an individual’s complex personal experience with such events (Rahiem et al., 2021).

What counts as narrative inquiry differs among researchers (Azzahrawi, 2020), but the underlying assumption, regardless of discipline, is that "stories are a means of understanding experience as lived and told" (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007, p. 459). Often used interchangeably with the term narrative, as within this study, "story" can be best described in this context as the culmination of several narratives. "Thus, a story is a detailed organization of narrative events arranged in a structure based on time" (Kim, 2019, p. 33). Cultivating and harvesting such stories provides many benefits to the research, researcher, and participants. "First, humans are natural storytellers, and as such, it is easy to elicit stories. Second, gathering in-depth data is easily accomplished as narratives usually provide thick descriptions. Last, it is possible to gather in-depth meaning as participants usually reveal themselves in their stories" (Butina, 2015, p. 191). This process of sharing also allows participants to "become better acquainted with their own story" (Conle, 2000, p. 51) and it places value on these significant contributions to research (Azzahrawi, 2020).

Thinking Narratively

While the contributions of stories are found in all narrative inquiries, the use of stories or narratives alone does not necessarily identify the study as a narrative inquiry (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009). The distinction lies within how the researcher and participants think about the stories being told and built and how they interact with them. This, for me, was the most challenging aspect of conceptualizing the structure of narrative inquiry related to this project. Like others (Maple & Edwards, 2010; Kim, 2019), I discovered that there are no defined steps to take when conducting a narrative inquiry. "Unlike most quantitative and qualitative methods that clearly provide generalized steps for undertaking the process, … [in narrative inquiry] there [are] limitless ways in which the focus [can] be directed" (Maple & Edwards, 2010, n.p). As a novice researcher, this was both liberating and terrifying. Fortunately, Connelly and Clandinin (2006)

outlined a way of thinking about engaging with narrative inquiry that broadened my understanding. “To become a narrative inquirer means more than learning appropriate techniques of field text collection and subsequent interpretive processes for the creation of research texts. It means learning to think narratively from the outset as studies are designed” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 481). It seems fitting that before outlining the design of this study, I spend a moment to consider what thinking narratively means to me and this work. In the style of Kim (2016), I have outlined four of Connelly and Clandinin’s (2006) seven considerations for narrative thought below, the remaining three are discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Imagining a Lifespace

As I engaged in this work, I "plan[ned] to be self-consciously aware of everything happening within [the research] space" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 481). This cognizance required that I pay close attention to how the participants utilized their pasts to inform their present and their comfort or discomfort in uncovering those, perhaps new, realizations and recollections. Also, this imaginative process required that I be mindful about what I brought to the research space as a collaborator. Past experiences influence the present in a continuous flow that informs our future (Dewey, 1938). My own narratives, representations of the thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences guiding this work are sewn throughout this research as a reminder of my presence in this study to myself and readers. They too, are incomplete and impermanent; understandings that reflect the moment of writing, as all of the stories presented in these pages are and will be.

Living and Telling as Starting Points

“Each story, whether personal, social, institutional, cultural, familial, or linguistic, is alive, unfinished, and always in the making; stories continue to be composed with and without

our presence" (Huber et al., 2013, p. 227). A crucial component of narrative inquiry is this fluidity and recognition of a story's lack of a true starting point or finite conclusion. As narrative inquirers, we must hold space for participants to determine entry and exit points into their lives through the sharing of experience while also recognizing that more life lies beyond what is shared. "Thinking narratively involves imagining the life as lived in the past …and living the life under study as it unfolds …Telling is collected through interviews… and so on, and living is acquired through living in the research field through observations or/and participant observations" (Kim, 2019, p. 94). This research is primarily a pursuit in telling recollections gathered through interviews and discussion. However, I also documented the lived nature of this research through my reflexive practices independently and in collaboration with the participants.

Defining and Balancing the Commonplaces

The "three commonplaces of narrative inquiry [are] temporality, sociality and place … what makes a narrative inquiry is the simultaneous exploration of all three" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). By honoring these commonplaces, I recognize the contextual nature of narrative and the impermanence of human experience as described by the teller.

Temporality requires acknowledging the transitional nature of a narrative, and where possible, "an event or a person [should be] described in relation to a past and a present, projecting a future" (Kim, 2019, p. 94). In this research, a time-based relationship means prioritizing the story beyond the disaster event and the story of "before".

Sociality provides a space for the personal and social conditions of the participant and the inquirer to be explored as interweaving elements of the story (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). My relationship with the participants influenced their story and how they understand and communicate it, as they influence my story. Throughout their development and reformation, our stories are also subject to other social influences.

Finally, *place* is "the specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries … where the inquiry and events [happen]" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). Researchers must conversationally explore the specific locations told in a story to enhance meaning and understanding; places can dramatically impact experience. This consideration is also essential when determining where an interview occurs, as spaces bring meaning to all life experiences.

Tethering a story to the three commonplaces prevents meaning from being generalizable but does allow for a rich description of the unique conditions surrounding an experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The commonplaces are also highly compatible with Schlossberg's Transitions Theory, and in particular, the 4 S's (Anderson et al., 2021). Both the narrative methodology and the conceptual framework harmoniously work together to foster depth of understanding through sharing.

Investment of the Self

Lastly, "narrative inquirers need to be self-conscious of their potentially intimate connection with the living, with the field texts collected, and with their research texts" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 482). As outlined above, this means paying close attention to the research space and honoring the perspectives and values we bring to the project, but it also requires personal investment. "As we design a narrative inquiry, we need to invest ourselves as part of the inquiry, collecting data living in the field. In doing so, we may find ourselves intimately intertwined with the lives of our participants" (Kim, 2019, p. 94). This collaboration of participant and researcher is something that I highly value and sought out when determining a methodology. Due to my intimate connection to the topic of inquiry, bracketing myself out of the study felt entirely impossible, so I chose to bracket myself in (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This married relationship transitioned throughout the composition of this project, but it feels

disingenuous and irresponsible to present the illusion that I could somehow remove myself from its creation willingly.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

Often viewed as co-researchers in narrative inquiry due to the collaborative nature of the process (Butina, 2015), participant contributions and selection are essential components of any narrative inquiry. Within this study, participants were recruited via a Facebook© post with an attached survey, hosted by SurveyMonkey© to determine eligibility, in a purposeful sampling process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The post which outlined the research purpose and preliminary consent parameters was distributed to public "community discussion" groups in Albertan communities that had a) experienced at least one large scale socio-natural disaster resulting in home loss since 2010, and 2) were within a 100km distance to one or more post-secondary institutions. The communities that meet these eligibility criteria were Slave Lake, Calgary, High River, High Level, and Fort MacMurray.

"There is growing evidence to suggest that Facebook© is a useful recruitment tool... When compared with traditional recruitment methods (print, radio, television, and email), benefits include reduced costs, shorter recruitment periods, better representation, and improved participant selection" (Whitaker et al., 2017, p. 1). While Facebook© recruitment has been criticized because of its tendency to attract young white women (Whitaker et al., 2017), scholars have highlighted that this is similar to the sociodemographic characteristics of traditionally recruited participants (Whitaker et al., 2017). Others state there is more possibility of diversity (Kosinski et al., 2016) because social media can "decrease barriers to connectivity and can dramatically extend the prevalence and reach of communication between researchers and study participants" (Gelinas et al., 2017, p. 11).

Preliminary Survey and Sample

One aspect of Facebook© recruitment that concerned me is that "social media users often lack knowledge of how to manage privacy settings and fail to grasp the full extent to which they render information shared over social media publicly available" (Gelinas et al., 2017, p. 6). For this reason, I was uncomfortable with having potential participants reach out to me in the Facebook© "comments" section of the posts or to me directly via messenger. Instead, those interested were prompted in the post to complete a preliminary survey via an external SurveyMonkey© link and provided my email address for follow-up questions. The survey (Appendix B) asked basic demographic and eligibility queries, such as if the respondent lost a home while completing a post-secondary program, and short follow-up questions including how the home was lost, the academic program the student was enrolled in, and if they completed their program. Additionally, in a similar fashion to Wolski (2014), potential participants were asked for their basic contact information and permission to be contacted to arrange an initial meeting. "Participants might not always be the best judges of the potential consequences of their participation" (Smythe & Murray, 2000, p. 329) and therefore it was my responsibility to determine the suitability of interested individuals by way of an informative conversation, and an invitation to participate in the research (Smythe & Murray, 2000). While I could not initially guess how many eligible individuals would be interested in participating, especially considering the complex nature of my topic, I ultimately found seven wonderful and willing individuals to join me. Within qualitative research, it is recommended that sample sizes are small enough to allow the researcher to engage with everyone deeply but also large enough to present a new understanding (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Given that my research question had not been explored in any studies I was able to locate, my projected participant sample of 5-8 participants felt adequate based on these recommendations. In the event that more than eight individuals were interested

and eligible, I planned to utilize collected survey responses to purposefully choose participants from different places and educational institutions, in addition to different genders, ethnicities, and age groups, when possible, in a practice described by Creswell and Poth (2018) as "maximum variation sampling" (p. 158). If a smaller participant pool was located, I intended to ask participants in the preliminary interview if they knew anyone that might be interested in participating in the study. Called snowball sampling, this technique asks participants to refer and recruit others that meet the study's criteria (Sadler et al., 2010). In my experience, the participants shared the study within their contact groups without my prompting.

Zoom-Based Interviewing

"New forms of qualitative data continually emerge in the literature, but all forms might be grouped into four basic types of information: interviews … observations … documents … and audiovisual materials" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 160). Web-based interviews, facilitated via Zoom©, were the primary data collection method utilized within this study. Interviews serve as a means to construct new knowledge and promote understanding between two or more people (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The facilitation of this learning in an online setting felt natural to me, as I had been an online educator for eight years before the study was conducted and an online student for all my post-secondary education. Additionally, web-based platforms make interviews more feasible for the researcher and provide both the researcher and participant with the ability to choose comfortable spaces to engage in discussion, cultivating a more natural sense of ease (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Specific to Zoom© are other benefits, such as the built-in transcription and recording features, the ability to password protect recordings and meeting entrance, and an e-scheduling feature (Oliffe et al., 2021). While issues with connectivity and location (distractions, noise, etc.) have been cited as limitations to the Zoom© platform (Oliffe et al., 2021), the positives listed, in addition to the control participants were

afforded in terms of comfort and degree of anonymity seemed worth these minor inconveniences. I provided participants with a one-page “how-to” guide for Zoom© before the interview and a plan of action if connectivity is lost or unstable to mitigate tech-related issues, because of the technical literacy level of all of my participants, this was a non-issue. Lastly, I joined each session with my camera on, with a blank wall as my background, to avoid any power imbalances potentially perceived by participants based on my visible surroundings.

Data Collection and Analysis Plan

Narrative inquiry is a sense-making and knowledge construction activity (Barkhuizen, 2019), whereby data collection and analysis are often deeply interwoven, as they are in the case of this study. However, as mentioned previously, many narrative inquiries fail to be explicit about their data collection and analysis processes (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). Those that do are critiqued as lacking a consistent approach (Barkhuizen, 2019). I outline the clear plan I followed to combat these issues. Based on Connelly and Clandinin’s (2006) four terms to structure the narrative inquiry process: telling, living, retelling, and reliving, the proposed data collection and analysis plan for this study is presented below.

Stage 1: Telling

"Much - perhaps most - narrative inquiry begins with telling; that is, the researcher interviews participants who tell" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 478). While the participants and I already informally discussed the study and signed formalized consent forms, we continued building our relationship with one another and with the study from the onset of our first formalized data collection stage. Interviewees often want to know the interviewer better before exposing their stories to a stranger (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2019), so a briefing always occurred before recording any conversations. Within this briefing, I reviewed the study, purpose, data use, and the process we were about to engage in. I also opened myself up for questions, should the

interviewee wish to know anything about my relationship to the topic or my interest in it and to varying degrees, all participants did. Lastly, I provided an additional reminder regarding continuous consent and the participant's ability to refuse to respond to questions posed or withdraw select responses; this step began each stage involving participant and researcher interaction.

The recording started with the participant's permission, and the first of two semi-structured interviews within a three-month period began. In semi-structured interviews, general questions are prepared and utilized to focus the interview rather than determine its direction rigidly (Kim, 2016). These questions, provided in Appendix C, were created to reflect the overall purpose of the study, Schlossberg's Transition Model (2011), and "to promote a good interview interaction" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2019, p. 7). Utilized as a guide, questions were loose, flexible, and were reordered based on participant responses and engagement (Kallio et al., 2016). Constructed to ensure clarity and prompt rich discussion, questions were also reformulated based on effectiveness, and refined with each interview to improve participant interaction and understanding (Kallio et al., 2016). As stated by Brinkmann (2018):

> Compared to more structured interviews, semi-structured interviews can make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee, and the interviewer has a greater chance of becoming visible as a knowledge-producing participant in the process itself, rather than hiding behind an interview guide. (p. 579)

This recognition of the interactive nature of story construction is essential to narrative inquiry. When conversations took unexpected or particularly interesting turns, I remained flexible, following up and clarifying the narratives' meanings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2019). Additionally, I

listened attentively and actively to participants and refrained from focusing primarily on taking notes, opting to rely on the recording as the primary data collector. Instead, I wrote down single words or themes that emerged as I listened to use as a starting point for Stage 2.

Once all questions were asked and thoroughly considered, a debriefing period commenced, as is recommended by interview scholars (Brinkmann, 2018; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2019). This debrief allowed the participant to share anything that I did not ask about that they felt relevant, including anything they noticed about their narratives or tensions that occurred during the process. We closed by discussing our shared experience with Stage 1, including my sharing of the main points learned from the interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2019). The duration of this stage varied between participants, but averaged approximately 80 minutes. Concluding our first stage of data collection, the recording stopped, and upon the participant's exit from Zoom ©, I immediately engaged in Stage 2.

Stage 2: Living

"Reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher" (Lincoln et al. 2018, p. 143). In this next stage of data collection and analysis, I ensured reflexive practice by recording a video journal after each participant interview in Stages 1 and 4. Within this journal, I critically reflected upon the similarities and differences between my experience and the participants, based on the narratives shared (Dodgson, 2019). Due to my intimate connection to the topic, this was essential. It allowed me to specifically interrogate the various selves that emerge within my interpretations and understandings of the participant's responses (Lincoln et al. 2018) in as close to “real” time as possible. Furthermore, this process provided a space for me to capture my initial feelings, tensions, and considerations regarding the interview and its content, including a review of the words and themes I documented as the interview was taking place. "This process of continual and deep self-examination takes effort and practice" (Dodgson, 2019,

p. 221). Setting a specific time for this endeavor and recording it allowed for a valuable situation of self within this study, and unexpectedly a way of engaging with my psychological responses to the material being shared in a safe and productive way.

Stage 3: Deliberation and Construction

Stage 3 marked the beginning of a formalized data analysis process. While data analysis was ongoing up to this point by way of reflection and journaling, which is common within qualitative research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Spencer et al., 2014), narratives were re-storied for the first time during this phase. Re-storying is the composition of narratives into a chronological story-like framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By first reviewing the Zoom© transcriptions and editing them according to the recording for accuracy, I utilized both the physical transcriptions and audio recordings to construct a storied version of each participant's experience with disaster-induced home loss and simultaneous post-secondary navigation. During this process, I took notes about any aspects that needed further explanation to promote understanding; these notes were used to form the questions asked in Stage 4. Upon completion, I sent the stories and transcripts via email to their respective interviewees for verification, clarification, and approval (Patton, 2015). The goal was to provide each participant with their story two weeks before engaging in Stage 4, along with some thought prompts related to the conceptual framework being utilized. This time was sufficient and allowed me to make any immediately necessary modifications to reflect the participant's story more accurately. Additionally, it enabled the participants some time to begin thinking about the themes that could be present in their story.

Stage 4: Collaborative Retelling

Our second interviews varied in length and location, depending on the participant. Some met with me for a second time via Zoom© for approximately 45 minutes on average, while

others utilized telephone calls and email over a series of days. Both options began with a consent and question briefing. The primary purpose of this follow-up interview was to collaborate while analyzing the story composed (Nasheeda et al., 2019). In the first phase of this collaboration, I asked any questions I noted during the storying process that were not rectified during the concluding portion of Stage 3. Additionally, the participants and I worked together via the screen sharing function in Zoom©, or via email, to finesse any areas of their story that were not satisfying or accurately representative of the participant's experience. Once the participant felt satisfied with the representation of their story, we moved into thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

"A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Based on the completed story and approved transcripts, we cooperatively worked to identify inductive, semantic story themes; that is themes that may reflect or go beyond Schlossberg's Transition Model (2011), using information explicitly identified within the stories produced (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These themes, represented by single word codes or small phrases were paired with specific quotes from the story for support (Appendix D). Often, I shared the themes that I noted during Stages 1 and 2, and asked the participant for feedback regarding their accuracy; accurate themes were added to our collaborative analysis. When we both felt confident that we had located all relevant themes, our final debriefing period began, concluding by thanking the participant and detailing the unique way their story contributed to the research. Upon completing Stage 4, I revisited the reflexive practice outlined in Stage 2.

Stage 5: Formalized Synthesis

After all participants had the opportunity to engage in Stage 4, my final data analysis process began. By reviewing, comparing, and contrasting the themes determined collaboratively

with each participant in Stage 4, I prepared a meta-level overview of all of the stories and themes gathered, noting similarities and differences between stories and participants. Guided by the three commonplaces (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), I engaged in a cyclical practice of defining and refining themes, "identifying the “essence” of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall), and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). I included any themes in my findings that had sufficient support to be included but are outside the study's frameworks. Additionally, I removed themes identified in Stage 4 that lacked sufficient accompanying data across the various stories collected. When the defining and refining process was exhausted, and the themes that told the most accurate story about the study as a whole were established, themes were formalized through a process of detailed analysis, clearly described as what they are and are not within the context of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes were utilized to provide insight to readers about the experience of navigating disaster-induced home loss as a post-secondary student and the gaps that may be identifiable and in need of further study.

In the previous section, a framework was created to ensure that all practical measures were in place before requesting that participants engage in this journey. In the upcoming and final section of this chapter, ethical issues and research trustworthiness are discussed. In so doing, the final element of this study is placed, and the components necessary to move forward are established.

The Roof

I was in third grade when my friend popped a "bad" movie into her VCR and insisted that we should watch it. Shy, but very interested in being cool, I felt a dilemma brewing. I was keenly aware of the trust my parents had placed in me when they allowed me to spend the night at my

friend's house. This movie choice felt like a betrayal of that trust, but I lacked the confidence to express my concern. Panicked, I muttered something like, "sounds great, let's watch it," and then I proceeded to spend the rest of the movie awkwardly preoccupying myself with errands to avoid watching the tale unfolding on screen. Bathroom visits, snack runs, fake sleeping, obscure aerobic stretches; you name it, I tried it. Unfortunately, I also spent the rest of the night awake, so riddled with guilt that I could not wait to leave the situation and cleanse myself of the evening. The following day, I returned home, and before my shoes were off my feet, I exclaimed, "I watched Titanic." My parents laughed and asked me how it was.

This scenario was a low-stakes ethical conundrum. I can see that now, but at the time, my relational responsibilities and the conflicting nature of my perceived obligation to my parents and my friend were overwhelming. I had not anticipated that such a situation would occur, and I was ill-prepared to navigate my internal tension. As a much older, and hopefully wiser version of myself, I recognize that ethical issues are best considered before they occur, when possible. Issues of trustworthiness and validity must also be considered. In this final section I engage in building a roof for this study; the final piece that acts as protective shield for the participants, myself, and ultimately the integrity of the work produced. First, the relational ethics of this study are considered utilizing Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) last three of seven considerations for conducting a narrative inquiry as a guide. Second, the trustworthiness of this endeavor, as determined by Guba and Lincoln's (1989) four criteria are discussed. Lastly, limitations and delimitations are noted.

Relational Responsibilities and Ethics

"Ethical considerations permeate narrative inquiries from start to finish: at the outset as ends-in-view are imagined, as inquirer-participant relationships unfold, and as participants are represented in research texts" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 483). The same can be said about

the ethical obligations of research examining the impacts of disaster events, especially when studies intend to examine resulting loss (Collogan et al., 2004), as this study does. It was not sufficient to simply complete an ethics form for approval. I had to also consider the relationships I would build with study participants, the value of our time together, and the ethical responsibility resulting from this shared commitment and close contact (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). As explained previously, I engaged in a multi-stage process to collect stories from individuals about their experience as a former post-secondary student navigating disaster-induced home loss. While the general ethical principle of harm avoidance is ideal when engaging in qualitative research (Smythe & Murray, 2010), complete prevention of potential harm was not possible when engaging in a narrative inquiry about disaster and home loss. "Narrative researchers … must confront the potential risks involved in inadvertently touching on highly charged emotional issues in the course of an interview" (Smythe & Murray, 2000, p. 321). Additionally, while most people experience a decline in psychological distress after the first eighteen months following a disaster event (Smid et al., 2018), it was essential for me to acknowledge that the mental health status of potential participants might have varied from this identified average. When examining this information, the most significant ethical consideration of this study became clear. I needed, to the best of my ability, to protect individuals that had already experienced disaster and loss, including myself, from further emotional harm. However, this responsibility was not mine alone, and through cultivating continuous dialog, forming collaborative relationships, and providing additional support services, this study served, rather than harmed, those who engaged with it. Necessary strategies used to address specific ethical concerns are outlined below.

The first practical protective element of this study began with recruitment. During the eligibility determining process, potential contributors and I had an informal conversation to judge the individual's emotional readiness to engage in sharing. While sharing stories of disaster experiences can be beneficial for meaning-making and identifying purpose, as the researcher, I "[needed to] be prepared to exclude individuals who [I] believe might have considerable difficulty" (Smythe & Murray, 2000, p. 330) discussing their home loss event and its subsequent implications. Therefore, being mindful of indications that a person is not yet ready to engage with their experience, such as expressing heightened and distressing emotions when casually discussing the event and failing to return to pre-event routines and responsibilities (Eriksen, 2007), was essential. I also asked potential participants to identify protective factors such as time elapsed since the event occurred, social support networks available, and personal perceptions about readiness to engage in this study (Eriksen, 2007).

Upon collaboratively determining suitability, we formally discussed a continuous informed consent process, and participants provided written consent. "Voluntary informed consent is the cornerstone of research ethics. All forms of research should be viewed as optional, and the refusal to participate should be respected" (Ferreira et al., 2015, p. 37). This is true not only as it relates to the collection of data, but also as it relates to the conversational boundaries identified by the participant. Additionally, because participants often divulge more than they initially anticipate (Josselson, 2011), consent could be withdrawn at any point during Stages 1 through 4 of the study and, as articulated in those sections, participants were free to revise and redact information they were not comfortable sharing publicly. Several participants engaged in this process when reviewing their transcripts and stories.

Beyond consent, I had an obligation to the well-being of the participants and myself. Therefore, before engaging in any conversations with individuals interested in sharing their stories, I provided referral information for available virtual and community-based emotional support services should they experience emotional distress while preliminarily conversing with me or throughout the study. I was also mindful of my emotional wellness as someone who has experienced disaster-induced home loss. “The stories narrated by disaster survivors are often elaborate, filled with suspense and emotionally charged” (Eriksen, 2007, p. 275). I continued to regularly meet with a registered psychologist to ensure that I was in the best mental space possible to receive the stories. This is a practice that I would recommend to any researcher as I found it immeasurably valuable.

My last ethical consideration was anonymity and confidentiality. Often confused as synonymous terms, anonymity is when the researcher does not know the true identity of the participant, whereas "confidentiality … refers to the fact that researchers know the identity of the participant but commit to not revealing the person's participation and identity" (Roth & von Unger, 2018, p. 8). Both options were possible within this study based on the participant's discretion. For example, individuals could have chosen not to utilize the camera feature on Zoom© and use a pseudonym as their screen name when conversing with me. However, confidentiality was the universally requested pursuit. So, to the best of my ability, I removed all identifying information from the data collected and stories produced, including the names of the post-secondary institutions the participants attended. Any names utilized are pseudonyms. All data was stored on my computer and password-protected, except the personal stories shared with the participants for editing, emailed to an address provided by them.

Trustworthiness

From a practical perspective, ethics are the measures taken to cultivate trust between researcher and participant. On the other hand, trustworthiness is best described as the decisions made to ensure the study is perceived as trustworthy by the outside world (Loh, 2013). Positivists often question the trustworthiness of qualitative studies, and in response to that criticism, several scholars have discussed measures to decrease issues of reliability and validity within qualitative projects (Shenton, 2004). Of these contributions, Lincoln & Guba's (1985) trustworthiness framework remains the most utilized by qualitative researchers (Lindheim, 2022). Their four criteria guide this study due to popularity, the consensus of quality, and the plethora of resources available. The following sections outline credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability and the measures I took to ensure that these necessary elements were included in this study.

Credibility

"In the quest for credible qualitative results, findings must appear truthful and capture a holistic representation of the phenomenon under exploration" (Billups, 2022, n.p.). There are many ways in which qualitative researchers can pursue credibility within their study, and within this one, peer debriefing and member checking were the strategies predominantly utilized. Peer debriefing refers to "the review of the data and research process by someone who is familiar with the research... A peer reviewer provides support, plays devil's advocate, challenges the researchers' assumptions, pushes the researchers to the next step methodologically, and asks hard questions about methods and interpretations" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129). I am fortunate to have a research supervisor that I met with regularly. She provided beneficial and thoughtful feedback about my thought processes and work. I also met regularly with three writing partners;

mutually supportive relationships that have and will continue to foster the best quality of research and writing.

In addition to peer-reviewing, member-checking is a significant credibility measure throughout Stages 1 through 4 of this study. Participants had the right and were encouraged to test any of the interpretations and depictions I made based on the stories they graciously offered to share (Azzahrawi, 2020). Not only was this an essential relational endeavour required to build trust between researcher and participant (Smythe & Murray, 2000), but it also checked researcher bias and ensured accurate depictions are portrayed (Maxwell, 2008). By soliciting "feedback on your preliminary or emerging findings from … the people that you interviewed … [you rule] out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126). This practice maximized accuracy and allowed participants to be autonomous collaborative partners in the research process.

Dependability and Confirmability

Determining dependability and credibility requires researchers to ask questions about the degree to which other researchers can confirm their study and whether or not the results produced are accurate (Billups, 2022, n.d.). Technically two different criteria, a demonstration of dependability ensures a degree of confirmability, and vice versa (Shenton, 2004), so they are paired together within this section. To establish both dependability and credibility within this study, I utilized the expertise of an external reviewer and also completed an audit trail. An audit trail is essentially a log or a journal detailing "how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 253). I avidly take notes, and in addition to the recorded reflective journal (outlined in Stage 2), note-taking continues to be a big part of my research process. As per the advice of Merriam and

Tisdell (2016), I wrote my reflections, questions, and decisions I made regarding issues, problems, and ideas that I encountered while collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data.

Transferability

This research pursuit aims to provide findings that foster understanding or can be applied in similar contexts, not to produce generalizable conclusions to be applied to the masses. "To enhance the possibility of the results of a qualitative study "transferring" to another setting, several strategies can be employed. The most commonly mentioned is the use of rich, thick description" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 257). This kind of description requires that the writer give a detailed account of the setting, the participants, data collected, and the themes determined so effectively that readers have the "feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). Thick description aligns well with Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) three commonplaces and Schlossberg's (2011) 4 S's, both outlined previously, and supports many of the methodological decisions made by narrative inquirers, including myself. The primary goal of narrative inquiry is to engage "active subjects [in constructing] a narrative that is particular, personal, and contextualized in time and place" (Kramp, 2004, p. 105). This contextualization allows others to be "able to determine the extent to which their situations match the research context, and, hence, whether findings can be transferred" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259). This personalized engagement is something that I value and aimed to contribute to the scholarly discussions being had about disaster-induced home loss.

Limitations and Delimitations

"A limitation of a study design … is the systematic bias that the researcher did not or could not control and which could inappropriately affect the results. In contrast, a delimitation is a systematic bias intentionally introduced into the study design or instrument by the researcher"

(Prince & Murnan, 2013, p. 66). These biases are necessary to identify from the outset of a study so that readers can make informed decisions about a study's findings and, ultimately, its value to them (Prince & Murnan, 2013). While it is impossible to predict all limitations before an investigation is underway, anticipated limitations include the degree of participant involvement, participant and researcher bias, and the lack of research available to reference concerning disaster events beyond fires and floods.

Former student stories of navigating disaster-induced home loss are the primary data collected in this study. As is true with all interview-based studies, but especially in the case of a highly collaborative design, varying levels of interest and involvement from participants was expected throughout the stages of this project (Dundon & Ryan, 2010). While continuous consent parameters were adhered to at all times, allowing individuals autonomy meant allowing them the space to be as involved or uninvolved as they wish in certain aspects of this pursuit, specifically the story editing and data-analysis phases. To mitigate potential reluctance, I utilized the skills I have acquired as an educator that can be applied in research situations, such as establishing trust and rapport, being open to questioning, and facilitating non-judgmental conversation (Dundon & Ryan, 2010). Despite these techniques, there was a varied degree of participant collaboration, dependent on the level of engagement offered by each individual. A related limitation are the biases that each of the people engaged in the study brings to it, including me. I chose to conduct this study because I value student voice and believe that understanding disaster-induced home loss is essential. Anyone that agreed to engage in this study likely holds similar values. These values appear in sources I utilized, the questions I asked, but also appeared in the answers given by participants and our shared analysis of the data collected. These elements are also time-based and ever-changing. To ensure integrity was maintained,

ethics and trustworthiness practices were followed. Finally, a practical limitation became obvious while conducting my literature review. While socio-natural disaster research, discussed in Chapter 2, speaks to various disaster events, much of the research available regarding disaster-induced home loss samples fire or flood victims only (Brown et al., 2019; Caroll et al., 2009; Felix & Afifi, 2015; Fulton & Drolet, 2018; Mamuji & Rozdilsky, 2019; Peek-Asa et al., 2012; Ritchie et al., 2020; Stern & Kerry, 1996; Tapsell & Tunstall, 2008). While this study did not limit participant contributions to a specific kind of socio-natural disaster, I knew that it would be likely that, based on the disaster events most common in Alberta, the sample depicted in this study would be fire or flood-related.

As noted above, "delimitations clarify the boundaries of [a] study" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 114). Identified previously in this chapter, this research was delimited to include only former full-time post-secondary students. Time is an essential factor in recovering from a disaster event. Therefore, I felt obligated to ensure that individuals had enough time to practically deal with their disaster-induced home loss before committing to this study. Individuals start to resume feelings of normalcy, on average, eighteen months after their disaster event (Smid et al., 2018). So, ensuring at least a year and a half has passed since the home loss was ethically essential and important to me personally.

Additionally, I wanted to recruit former students that had completed their program of choice without delay to ensure that a comprehensive and reflective narrative would be available. Perspectives of students who did not complete their program or chose to take a break from their studies after a disaster-induced home loss can undoubtedly provide insight into the experience but would likely not capture the multi-transitional experience required of this research. Those stories will be best captured in subsequent studies. Participants who lived in Alberta, Canada,

during their disaster event have been studied exclusively to allow for a contextualization. Finally, the sample size was limited to a maximum of 8 to allow for necessary depth of conversation and analysis.

Chapter Summary

This is a place where I don't feel alone... This is a place where I feel at home, and I built a home, for you, for me. (The Cinematic Orchestra, 2007, 0.47)

I began this chapter by explaining the need to return to the notion of home, so that I may construct a conceptual place suitable for myself as the researcher, the participants that have graciously offered their stories, and the overall purpose of this project. By detailing my foundational values and perspectives, providing an overview of the various stages of data collection and analysis, and considering the ethical and trustworthiness implications, a research home, worthy to house this topic has been constructed. It is my hope that others will see themselves reflected in this space and feel called to walk through its doors.

Chapter 4: Stories of Disaster, Home Loss, and Post-Secondary Navigation

"You're a doctoral candidate. Your ethics application received approval. It's time to put this thing you've been working on for over a year into the world, Alisha." Thoughts rushed through my brain, confidence curbed by crushing self-doubt. What if this won't matter to a single person besides me? Will I look stupid? Admittedly, for a person prone to thoughts like these, canvasing for participants on public social media forums wasn't an ease-filled experience. Still, it was one I thought might work if there was anyone to respond to my call. With shaking hands and a racing mind, I clicked "post" and instantly felt vulnerable in an entirely unfamiliar way. I walked downstairs and told my husband, "I did it, but I don't think anyone will sign up." As the words exited my mouth, the familiar chime of an incoming email radiated from my phone and filled the room. We held our breath, hopeful but relatively sure it was just a piece of junk landing in my inbox. Then, eyes wide, I exclaimed, "I got my first response, and they want to be interviewed!" Just like that, I was no longer alone in this metaphorical house I'd built; there was someone willing to live in it with me.

There are no words to adequately express my gratitude to the participants who chose to join me in the production of this research. Mack, Jane, Addi, Diane, Myka, Taylor, and Ava have all left pieces of themselves within this chapter, and without their contributions, these pages would be empty. The responsibility of accurately conveying the emotional weight of their words has felt terrifying at times, but doing so has also provided me with a great deal of joy. This intense juxtaposition is a fitting one because just as my task of collecting these stories has been a rollercoaster of highs and lows, so too were the journeys shared by the participants. I thank them for their vulnerability and willingness to open their lives to you and me.

In this chapter, I begin by briefly outlining participant demographics based on the information they shared in their interviews and their recruitment surveys. Next, the stories created with the participants about their journeys navigating disaster-induced home loss are shared, along with a summary of the stories collected. From there, I present the themes that the participants helped to identify based on critical elements within the data. The latter portion of this chapter utilizes those themes to support the reader's understanding of what it means to be a student working through all that comes with disaster and home loss while also participating in full-time studies**.**

Participant Demographics

Of those that responded to my preliminary screening survey, seven participants were selected based on personal availability and eligibility criteria. At the time of their interviews, they all identified as women and were in their thirties. As required of the study, they have all completed a full-time post-secondary program and experienced a home loss due to a socio-natural disaster event in Alberta, Canada during their enrollment. Interestingly, all my respondents, including those selected to participate, named wildfire as the disaster type responsible for destroying their homes and, in some cases, communities. Specifics about the disaster location and the names and details of the post-secondary institution they attended have been removed from the data collected to add an extra measure of security to those that have chosen to share their experience.

Additionally, four of the seven participants selected pseudonyms, and the remaining three were determined by a name generator and approved by the participants. While all participants note disaster-induced home loss and their subsequent navigation of school as a significant life event, the degree of generalization or specificity shared greatly depended on the individual and their comfort level. This variance is typical of experience sharing (Colori, 2022, p. 726). As

mentioned previously, all participants were consulted during the creation of their stories to ensure a product reflective of their unique perspectives.

A Collection of Stories Shared

"Stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break ... people, but stories can also repair" (Adichie, 2009).

You'll read in the stories below that many of the participants have felt at various points in their lives that their story of disaster-induced home loss should be kept hidden in the recesses of their memories. At one time or another, they thought they shouldn't share their story or that no one would want to listen. However, as highlighted in the quote above, all stories matter, and these stories are certainly no exception. Participant reflections were formed from the conversational narratives collected using the thick description required of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Additionally, each story has elements of Schlossberg's (2011) 4 S's: details of the situation, self, support, and strategies deemed most important by the participants in their recollections. The order of presentation reflects the sequence in which the stories were completed and approved.

Words directly from the participants are woven throughout each of their stories, and identified in italics to intentionally demonstrate their presence as you read. Their stories serve as a reminder that disaster-induced home loss is a taxing experience, and students navigating it deserve to be supported and heard. As a listener, I have felt sorrow, delight, rage, confusion, and perhaps every other emotion in between. But, more importantly, I have learned something from each person, and I hope you do, too. So, with that, I proudly introduce Mack, Jane, Addi, Diane, Myka, Taylor, and Ava.

Mack: A Bird's Eye View

Fire danced along the outskirts of town, but Mack went to sleep, confident that the worries she'd had about its proximity to their homes would calm by morning, but they did not. Instead, the next day was one of shock for her, her peers, and her family. Flames entered her community while she was some thousand-plus kilometers away completing a certificate program, watching the horror unfold via a television screen and frantic calls home. Mixed messages plagued her. *It was like my mom had no clue what was happening because, on the ground, people were getting their information via word-of-mouth … we are going to be fine …we are not going to be fine … we are going to be fine.* Informational whiplash, grounded only by updates provided to Mack by images from helicopters via news outlets. She was getting a live, bird's eye view and, as a result, could see what people in the community could not. Her town was on fire, and soon her home would be too. As her family awaited updates alongside other community members in a large parking lot, Mack felt the creeping burden of this new knowledge. Would she be the one to have to tell her mother their home was gone?

Unsure of what to do but certain she couldn't stay away, Mack caught the next flight and reunited with community members in a nearby city; this was a time of great comfort as she shared space with others that were grieving. Her decision to step away momentarily from her program was one her educational institution responded positively to, offering condolences and assurances of assistance. *All of our new skills were done … I left feeling very supported*. Their encouragement, paired with nearly being finished with her year-long accelerated certificate, allowed her to depart without additional worry; a feeling that would not be long lasting. Upon her return to school, Mack was informed that she would not obtain her credential due to the two weeks she'd missed. Rage set in. *I was like, no absolute way. I have been through the wringer… I will not let you do this to me when I am so close… I will challenge the final exam, [I'll] do it*

right now even, and if I get the required percentage, then what? Are you still going to tell me that you will not give me my certificate? The institution eventually conceded, but not without a fight. *I got over a 90%,* and the certificate was reluctantly awarded.

Although the credential was a victory amidst chaos, the experience tainted Mack's perception of the institution, the people, and even the city, which resulted in her decision to move back to her home community, adding additional complications to an already overwhelming time. Her provincial certification was delayed due to financial and scheduling constraints caused by the fire and moving back to a rural area where work experience and exam times were limited. These challenges halted the career progress Mack envisioned for herself, adding another disappointment to a string of difficult events. Additionally, the social dynamics of moving back to her high school stomping grounds, a place also recovering from loss, were complicated and distracting. *My life was typical of a small-town person who moves away to a city and is somewhat one foot in … their community, and then one foot [wanting] to break away from it… If I had stayed in the city, I would have developed a circle there, but I had just gotten to that place of maybe making meaningful new friendships when the fire happened, which stopped a lot of that.* Her deep desire to return to a familiar place was met with the jarring realization that "familiar" no longer existed. She'd have to find another way to move forward.

Ultimately, Mack's experience navigating disaster, home loss, and post-secondary schooling was one filled with turmoil, but it was also a time of significant growth and learning. *I would say that the fire accelerated my desire to further my education more than anything … I might have just gotten comfortable with the certificate … but then I wouldn't be happy*; this is perhaps the most striking part of Mack's story. Despite so many odds, she is a charismatic, compassionate, determined leader who chooses to define life on her own terms in pursuit of the

happiness she deserves. She says it best: *I may have always been an empathetic, old soul person, as they call it … but I didn't let my struggles take that away from me. I didn't let it harden me as a person. I leaned into it more... I'm willing to, even in my worst moments, work towards having a good life.*

Jane: Walmart Woes

Maybe you've had an experience similar to this one; too many minutes stuck in a Walmart aisle trying to determine the best course of action. Should I get the house brand laundry detergent or the more expensive name brand one with a better smell? This or that. A choice between two insignificant options. But a day in May presented Jane with a different kind of decision, a Walmart woe of epic proportions. *From the parking lot, we could see the fire coming… if it got any closer, we would need to jump in the river. I am not a good swimmer… if I got in that water, I knew I would die.* As a child, Jane had tried to prepare for this moment. Always fearful of fire, she would plot escape routes and plan packing lists in the event that the unthinkable happened. However, this experience was unlike anything her younger self could have predicted. Drown or burn? A decision no one should have to make.

Fortunately for Jane, her partner, and the many others gathered in that open parking lot, the fire slowed, and a third option presented itself. They would drive north to a nearby camp, a less than ideal plan; *you're just going further into the tinder… it was really scary… I remember looking in the rearview, just to make sure the fire wasn't chasing us*. The would-be thirty-minute drive took nearly nine hours due to traffic, but they eventually made it, largely thanks to a stranger who graciously refilled their gas tank at a card lock station. That night, she lay in a cold, dark, unfamiliar room, stomach empty having not eaten since breakfast. Jane wondered if they had reached safety or if this was just the beginning. She didn't sleep a wink.

The months leading to September were full of highs and lows. *At one point, I walked into a Winners and just burst into tears. I didn't know where to start.* After a summer of insurance lists and overwhelm, it was time for Jane to return to her schooling, a safe space filled with the routine she craved. *I didn't find the school part challenging because it was something I knew I was good at, but I found the psychological aspect of it tough.* Independently, Jane was attempting to navigate various stress-related issues, *my hair was falling out in clumps… and I was having a lot of nightmares related to the fire.* In addition, there was a new and notable feeling of isolation. *The school didn't say anything about the fire, and because they didn't say anything, I just kind of thought everyone else had moved on. It was such a big thing for me, but I didn't want to be the person that was like, "hey, do you remember that event? I'm still struggling". I wanted people to ask about it… I wanted to tell my story until it became not as scary for me.*

By Christmas, the burden of carrying her disaster-induced home loss had caught up with Jane. Encouraged by her mom, she sought therapy outside of her school environment. *I was always in the mindset of "it could have been worse"…I minimized it a bit because I felt that people had been through much more… turns out, that is what traumatized people say*. Equipped with this new knowledge and surrounded by unwavering practical and emotional support outside her post-secondary institution, she started to heal. Today she's in a very different space. *I know now I can do hard things. I did the ultimate hard thing... I faced my biggest fear, and I am okay.*

Addi: Severed Ties

The scent of fresh baking filled every room, and notes from the piano hung delicately in the air; this space, once physical, was exiled to memory in an instant. Although Addi had left that home in pursuit of education and a level of excitement that only a place beyond the confines of childhood can offer, she was confident that this space was one that she would return to often and perhaps one day would return to permanently. *It was where I left my most sentimental items.*

That's where my family was, where I'd completed school... A part of me always imagined I'd end up back there. However, after receiving word that the backyard was on fire and her parents were attempting to flee, she felt all the anguish that comes with the realization that you might never go back. The distance between her, her hometown, and her loved ones felt immense. *I remember feeling really upset and just wanting to do something and being like, oh my god, what can I do in this situation… I have no idea because I'm here, and they are there.* A spur-of-the-moment decision resulted in Addi driving with her partner to another city to meet up with evacuated friends and family. *I wanted to be there… because I still felt like a part of the community at that point… When you lose so much physical space, you just need to reconnect with what you have left.*

The year that followed was a blur of inseparable events perpetuated by the usual chaos of an early twenty-something's life. *There was the home loss, but also I entered a new relationship that year. I started a degree after dropping out of another program... I struggled with various mental health issues… and that was all coming to a head… so much happened.* Although the extent to which these instances were the result of or were perpetuated by the fire is difficult to distinguish, one thing she knows with certainty is that the blaze drew a charred line through her life. Pre-fire Addi was gone, replaced by a familiar but different version. *I think those that stayed were bonded by that trauma. From my perception, I became an outsider… I had always wanted to return and teach at my old high school … that place and my home were the two biggest ties to my identity at that point… but since my parents left [after the fire], I decided I was "leaving" too. I just severed myself from the community entirely.* The finality of this decision was perpetuated by a lack of reminders of her life "before". *We lost photos, we lost videos, we lost all of our artifacts, and now it's just gone.*

This void, while jarring a difficult, did allow space for positive transitional experiences to occur in Addi's life. *I finally let myself build community in my new city in a really meaningful way, having let go of my hometown … I had to find my own community again… and there was a sense of urgency to that for me.* Notably absent for her, though, was a supportive community environment within her educational institution. *The university culture did not make me feel safe to express [my needs or feelings] at all.* As a result, she took it upon herself to reduce her academic workload by one course a term, extending her academic year into the spring to better balance it all, but this was far from a perfect solution. Weighed by the complexity of having to support her parents through their grief and loss along with her own, she acknowledges that some of her coping mechanisms weren't healthy and that school services might have been able to help. *Having somebody to talk to and sort through and validate my feelings would have made the process… less painful, absolutely.*

As a current educator, Addi works tirelessly to cultivate the classroom environment she wishes she had. When asked how other educators might help those recovering from disaster-induced home loss, she offered heartfelt advice. *See your students as human beings with lives outside of academia … so if there is an emergency, students don't feel afraid to communicate with you about it thinking that they're going to be chastised or ignored or discounted… Opening the door to that conversation [from the very beginning of your relationship] is essential*. The conviction and passion in her voice make it evident that she practices this, building educational communities that allow students to feel safe and heard. She has constructed a life that reflects her most authentic self and, more admirably, has used the bumps in her journey to ensure a smoother future for others travelling similar paths.

Diane: Let Go and Grow

Code orange! Code orange! Tense excitement filled the room. Gowned and ready, it was go-time. A rush of air flowed through the automatic doors, followed by a flood of first responders and gurneys. Patients were delivered one by one, bodies bloody and bruised, waiting for the team of competent medical professionals to plan and execute their care. It was a chaotic day, but there had been far worse. This mayhem offered a different thrill than usually experienced during an emergency room shift. As the day came to a close, Diane and her colleagues decompressed as they sat together and discussed what had occurred; *I really enjoyed that mock disaster event.*

As a new healthcare professional, Diane had taken a keen interest in disaster response, attributable to the fire that had wreaked havoc on her community some years prior and resulted in the loss of her childhood home. A well-positioned four-level split with a large garden in the back and a busy kitchen at its center, for her, home was only that place, and fire took it away. She spent her last day there like she'd spent many others, with family intently listening to the radio reporting a wildfire on the outskirts of town. *I don't think anybody actually believed that it would come in and burn people's homes down… We didn't leave thinking we weren't coming back.* As they drove out of their smoky neighbourhood, burnt orange filled the sky, and flames appeared on homes across the street. Later, aerial images would confirm what they'd heard but hoped was incorrect; the unbelievable had occurred.

Diane had arranged a temporary place to stay before the disaster, a sub-lease situation to fill the months between when she moved out of residence and into her fall accommodation. Little did she know that it would become more needed than initially planned. She journeyed with few possessions from her scorched hometown back to the city, where she resumed her studies. *What do you do when something like this happens? I didn't know. I reached out to one of my*

instructors, I think he wanted to be supportive, but he didn't know what to do either. He just said I'm sorry that happened, and that was the end of it… Is asking for support during something like this, does it make you look weak? I didn't know, and I didn't reach out again. Emotionally raw and overwhelmed, Diane had factors weighing on her outside of school, too. The ongoing tasks required of insurance were one thing, but her concern for family and friends was most challenging to navigate. *Not only am I dealing with my own stress and mental health around the traumatic experience that just happened alongside my educational obligations, but then also the mental health and emotions of my family because we all experienced this. It was very stressful.*

In hindsight, Diane wishes there was mental health support offered, flexibility regarding assessments, and follow-up of some kind. *Initially, you're just in fight or flight mode. You're not even thinking. You haven't processed any stages of grief… So, I think, immediately after the disaster, you might not need mental health support, but once the grief has kind of "sunk in" a couple of weeks after, that's when I think that would be most significant.* Fortunately for Diane, she could access support outside of her educational institution in the form of family and peers willing to lend an ear and a shoulder to cry on. Still, the pressure of everything caused her to question her place within academics. *Did quitting cross my mind? Absolutely, but being halfway through my degree was a positive factor in helping me continue.* Partnered with an unwavering dedication to the field of medicine and a knack for organization, she successfully progressed through the remainder of her program. That credential has taken her to places she never dreamed she'd go, but she acknowledges that so much of her journey is partly a result of her home loss too. *I'm just a stronger person now, more independent… Letting go and changing the idea of what home is has allowed me to grow as a person and really live my life… I don't need to physically be anywhere to be home; it's all about who I'm with.*

Myka: Easy as Pie

We've all heard the phrase “it's as easy as pie”, but is pie all that simple? It starts with a crust, then a filling, and finishes with a topping of some sort, a seemingly unassuming dessert prepared for people to enjoy. Yet, despite its air of simplicity, many variables can impact the outcome. There are endless flavour combinations based on preference or ingredient availability; the baker's technique, and the oven it's prepared in all matter a great deal. On the day of her home loss, Myka spent the morning busy in the kitchen, attempting to navigate the technical process that is pie preparation. *It's funny the details you remember about a day like that. I remember that I had just made a lemon meringue pie, and when I learned my house burned down, I thought, that's a shame; the pie burned down, too.* Like that pie, Myka's experience of losing her home was layered, filled with bitterly sour and beautifully sweet moments, but it also serves as a reminder that even when the ingredients are the same, a recipe for disaster can produce wildly different results.

On the day of her home loss, Myka was with her parents helping them unload from a recent trip. Although the air had an eerie feel, they were assured they were safe as messages came through the radio*: “the town is not under an evacuation alert, I repeat, the town is not under an evacuation alert at this time!”* Still, her dad decided to hose down the roof of their house if sparks started a fall, a typical fire prevention technique used in communities that regularly experience wildfires. Myka found this humorous and wandered to the front lawn to inform him that his antics were unnecessary, but as she did, the wind changed direction. *The sky turned yellow, and fireballs started falling into our yard… My dad, who is a sweet, calm guy, started yelling, “get into the garage and get the foil blankets”… my mom came out of the house in tears... I got into a vehicle with her, my dad got into a separate vehicle, and we all hopped onto the road and started following the traffic.* The neighbourhoods they were travelling through

lit up as they drove. *We basically knew our house was gone the moment we started driving.* Myka clutched the steering wheel as her mom collapsed in the back seat, frantic that her other child might be in danger and unable to reach her because the phone lines were jammed.

Upon being reunited with her sister in a parking lot, the whole family felt a momentary sense of reprieve, a pause that, for some of her loved ones, would be quickly replaced by the grief that often comes with losing a home. However, Myka doesn't relate to the devastation she acknowledges other family members seemed to experience. *I was okay. I'm not an overly emotional person to begin with, and I don't feel a huge connection towards stuff. So, I don't think I was too affected.* She offers that this could partially be the result of having a "second home" to return to, a dorm room with three of her closest friends. *It was just a constant in my life that remained. I didn't have to go back to school and check in with a bunch of random people. I just got to pick up where I left off in that part of my life. I went back to a familiar place where I was already comfortable.* In addition, many of her belongings had been packed away in a storage unit, safe from the fire, so she had some personal items to utilize when re-establishing routines. These factors seemingly made the transition back to academics, and life in general, more manageable.

Despite a lack of significant emotional consequences, Myka cites the extremely taxing nature of navigating an insurance claim and participating in school full-time. *I had to produce novels of lost items, and I would get constantly interrupted when I was studying because the insurance company would need me to redo the values of things. You also need to give proof that the monetary amount you've claimed is actually the cost of the item, so it was just never-ending research. It was my biggest source of stress. You have to deal with a constant reminder of what happened.* While these interruptions did not have any negative implications regarding her grades,

she offers that it would likely be more difficult for students to advocate for themselves and their needs in a post-secondary setting if they were experiencing hardship. *You already have to dig up so much information you probably wouldn't have the capacity to search for resources to help you… so the school reaching out to you would probably be good.*

In the decade that has passed since her home loss, Myka has had many conversations with family and friends about it, reflecting on the contrasting experiences of everyone involved. *I've learned that even though I wasn't crying like they were, I was probably going through something… maybe the whole thing was actually a lot harder than I thought it was… but never at any point have I felt like, wow, I really overcame something back then.*

Taylor: Cruel Summer

Most of us can, at least to some degree, imagine the panic and confusion that comes with living through a disaster, but have you ever thought about what the experience might be like for the people responsible for calming that chaos? The people that remain collected, answering phone calls, finding resources, and directing personnel, all while their world burns around them. We hear of the heroic efforts of firefighters, pilots, police officers, and medical staff that impede their own well-being to protect communities in crisis. But, often forgotten are the people working behind the scenes, the dispatchers, telephone operators, logistics personnel and others responsible for weeding through vast volumes of information and determining the most appropriate course of action. Taylor was one of these people, and as the fire entered her community and home, she sat fielding incoming and outgoing calls, trying to catch up because it was only her eighth day on the job. With a few precious seconds between telephone rings, she called her parents and urged them to leave town... *And Dad, could you grab my guitar?* Click.

In the days following a fire, community members usually evacuate to places far away from the ruins of their homes. However, Taylor was still in the thick of it, smoke lingering in the

air, embers glowing. *We got evacuated from our office at one point… We all drove separately to leave town, and I could see every single house up in flames… then the insanity of it all hit me.* Through panic and tears, she made it to their designated safe spot, only to be turned around to drive by it all again. Fire is cruel. That night, wrapped in a sleeping bag she'd borrowed from the warehouse at her workplace, moments of rest were sprinkled between stories from her front-line colleagues in between shifts attempting to control the blaze. The following morning, she drove through the carnage of her once vibrant neighbourhood in search of her home and the homes of loved ones. Happy news and sorrow flowed through her phone with each street travelled; the horror and even humour of it all set in. *I remember we drove by the library, which burned down. I was like, oh my god, my library book was overdue. I guess I don't have to pay for that anymore.*

While Taylor did not need to return that rogue book, a return of another kind awaited her. After a summer of compiling insurance lists and collecting her thoughts, she reentered the world of academics. *I was registered… that was always the plan… My parents are amazing in that they agreed to pay for all of my school fees and never questioned whether I would go back.* She welcomed this certainty because many other variables related to her impending post-secondary experience were up in the air. The first two years of her transitional program were completed before her home loss, meaning there were significant changes in store as she entered her fall term. *I was going to a new school, and it was in a new city... It was my first time ever using public transit, so those things would have been scary no matter what.* Paired with these adjustments were the residual consequences of enduring a home loss.

All of these little things were adding up and were annoying because of the fire… I have a very photographic memory, so it was hard not to have my old textbooks and workbooks… I wasn't able to refer back to them. I also lost my flashcards and notes… If I was returning to my

old school things might have been different. Taylor highlights that it would have been helpful if professors could have given her copies of her old assignments or course documents to ease this burden, but she recognizes that it may not be possible. Ultimately, Taylor identifies these practical challenges as minor, offering that they were overshadowed by a notable and emotionally taxing shift in family dynamics that caused a lot of strain. *The most difficult thing, honestly, was being the strong person for my parents. I think that was really hard because that was a huge transition in life. I had never had to be the strong person for them… It affected my education because I had a degree to study for, but I also had to learn to spread my emotions around in a different way.*

Taylor attributes her capacity to balance it all to a week away from everything shortly after the fire. *My friends… contacted me and said, we've got a bag of clothes for you. We've got everything you need… So I went there and stayed for a week and a half, which I think was the best thing because I didn't bring anybody from my community with me, and I just got to get away… I will never regret that decision.* The outpouring of support she received is something that still leaves her in awe. From those friends whisking her away on an extended camping trip, to old classmates and teachers gathering donations and even producing a hand-made quilt, to her parents who gave her autonomy over what items she wanted to replace, *it was all incredible.* Taylor recognizes that these are privileges that many do not have. *I think the stability I had is probably why it all went okay for me because I didn't have to question if I would get the things I needed or the support… Had I not been in that situation, I can't imagine having to go back to school that year.* Overall, navigating schooling and her disaster induced home loss allowed Taylor to learn a lot about herself. *The situation awakened my first acknowledgement of true*

emotional distress… I don't want to say I'm grateful for the experience, but …I'm proud of how I did.

Ava: Power of Perspective

You could see flames in the distance, and I was like, we need to get out of here. We were on the way out of town back to our place, heading south up a hill, and when we got to the top, all we could see was a wall of fire… I could see people fleeing for safety… people were screaming and trying to get back into their neighbourhood... They wanted their dogs, their kids, their loved ones, their lives. Moments earlier, Ava had been at a grocery store nearby stocking up on essentials; this wasn't her first experience with a disaster event. Just a few years prior, she had lost a good portion of her hometown to fire and could sense the similarities in the days leading up to the scene on the hill. *It was really hot, it was really dry, and based on my job at the time, I had a good understanding of fire activity.* Still, nothing could prepare her for the fact that despite these glaring parallels, this time would be entirely different than the one that prompted her to make a shopping pit stop to stock up on granola bars and frozen pizzas. This time, rather than supporting others with meals and a safe place to stay, she would be the one in need of that support.

Through the shock of what had unfolded, Ava made her way out of that area and travelled towards her cul-de-sac, a place she initially thought was out of the fire's path. Once there, she frantically packed up her school textbooks and left with slippers on her feet. On the long drive to safety, she thought about how the day's events might implicate her schooling. *When we were leaving, I called the partnering institution for my program and was like, what do I do? My school is probably not going to be there tomorrow. I need to be enrolled in your school… there's no way I can take a year off.* Thankfully, for Ava and the many other students that lost their homes, the post-secondary building was unharmed by the wildfire and awaited their return.

This small gift amidst devastation was initially positive, as the school provided a gathering place for Ava to connect with others that had lost so much. However, as time passed, the space became one of further hardship. While doing a round table with her peers, Ava recalls a classmate confiding in the group about a sentimental item they'd lost. *One of the girls looked them dead in the eye and said, "you need to stop talking about the fire… you just lost things"*. This climate of minimization was one reflected by the institution. *It was immediately like, get back into the swing of things, no extensions, no exemptions, no offers of mental health support. There was just none of that in the first year.* Ava acknowledges that the institutional response seemed to improve as the graver consequences of disaster and home loss, such as student suicide, became apparent. *In subsequent years there were more wellness days and more mental health campaigns.*

While a response from the post-secondary environment as a whole was more delayed than preferable, Ava does commend the efforts of her educators and one in particular that made a notable impact. *I was supposed to be at my practicum by 6:30 a.m., and it was the dead of winter, so when I woke up and it was sunny… I knew that I was late… I could have been kicked out of my program for that … but I called her, and she said, "Ava, just get here and drive safe". When I arrived, she said, "I've been watching you all year, and I want you to know you're doing a really good job"… She never mentioned it again; she just knew that I was dealing with so much.* That validation provided Ava with the grace she needed at an especially challenging time and prompted her to look inward. *I thought I was doing really well … but after that, I realized that I needed to start taking care of myself… I was using school as a distraction.*

Since then, Ava has worked diligently to maintain her mental health and recognizes how important it is to reach out when life is getting overwhelming, a skill that has served her well in

the years after the fire. When asked why she thinks she was able to complete her program, despite losing her home, dealing with insurance and a difficult builder, and attending an institution with varied supportive interventions, at best, Ava paused. *I definitely have strong values of being independent… but I also have the power of perspective. When my hometown fire happened …my house didn't burn down. I know what it's like to not fully understand the experience from the other side… so I could be empathetic… I could also help others because of that, and knowing I was helping others kept me going.*

Summary of Stories

The depictions above highlight how the participants' lives were interrupted, if not entirely changed, the day that fire entered their homes. Participants reflected on their experiences by sharing the immediate and longer-term consequences of disaster-induced home loss, personally and in terms of their educational experience. In its many forms, transition is also evident throughout many of the stories, along with the hardship of managing unanticipated transitional events. Additionally, all participants highlighted the supporting behaviours they received or suggestions of offerings they wished they had. Glimmers of hope and impressive acknowledgements of growth were also described, which adds some optimism to a topic that can often be emotionally heavy. In the next portion of this chapter, I present a meta-level analysis of these stories and the themes that bind them together.

An Analysis of Stories Shared

My grade one self was keenly aware of the things that set me apart from my peers; from my perception, all of these things were inherently negative. I had a strong accent. I came to school with packed lunches filled with delicious east coast oddities. I was at least a foot taller than every one of my peers, I had curly hair, and bottle cap glasses, and I was sure that if I could change even one of these things, my life would be immeasurably better. While self-acceptance

came a lot later, one evening, I was certain I'd come up with a solution. It came in the form of my mom's round hairbrush. If I could just straighten my curls by rolling them tightly into that brush, my days of being adorned with a frizzy ringlet crown would be gone for good. Unfortunately, I didn't know how to use the tool I had wrapped my locks securely around. In a series of swift movements, my hair and that brush became one, and my poor mother, having been notified of my plan far too late, was left to try and separate my delicate strands from the deeply interwoven knot I had created.

In the weeks since my work with the participants ended, I have wondered why my mind has been called to the memory above so frequently. I've come to realize that while very little of this process has been as impulsive as that "quick" fix hairbrush incident, the similarity lies in the interwoven strands and the tedious attention required to separate them. Admittedly, I thought this would be a more straightforward process. After all, the participants and I had already identified themes that seemed most significant to their stories (Appendix D). The only task left was to determine the overarching themes, consolidate any overlap, and convey their importance. However, as I have learned multiple times in my life, a plan in thought and a plan in action are often two different things.

While constructing my design for data analysis, I allowed space for themes to emerge from the narratives told. I recognized that the participants would not necessarily connect their themes to the conceptual framework selected to guide this study; after all, unlike me, they had not spent the past year diving into the world of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1981). Still, I hoped that the conceptual framework would present itself in several ways throughout the data, and it did. The 4 S's provided the foundational basis for our interview questions (Appendix C). As a result, the data collected and the stories developed include

pertinent details about each participant's situation, support, self, and the strategies utilized while undergoing a disaster-induced home loss as a student. I am very pleased with this outcome. The framework was crucial in gathering data aligned with the study's purpose and the commonplaces required of my selected methodology. However, allowing the framework to guide the interviews and individual stories produced was only the first part of my plan.

As an additional measure, I also intended to utilize the conceptual framework during my meta-analysis portion of this project. As the researcher, I considered it my task to take the themes identified by the participants and determine where each should be “held” within the 4 S Framework (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). As I attempted to enact this plan, the impossibility of the endeavour became clear. Due to the nature of the multi-layered transitional experience being told by the participants, all of the themes identified fit into more than one of the categories outlined by the 4 S’s (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). To determine which of the four overarching factors depicted each theme “most” felt like a missed opportunity to comprehensively explore the themes and their significance to post-secondary student experiences with a disaster-induced home loss. I was left with a decision. I could force each theme into a single “box”, potentially minimizing their interconnectedness and complexity. Alternatively, I could identify the overarching themes in the same manner the participants had, allowing the stories told to guide the themes identified. I have chosen to do the latter and will present more of my thoughts on the use of Schlossberg’s 4 S’s in Chapter 5.

Emergent Collective Themes

The data collected has been organized into four overarching thematic categories presented roughly in the same order as the information was gathered. The first two identified themes, overwhelm and hindrances to healing, convey the multiple logistical and emotional challenges a student navigates during a disaster and in the time after their home loss, some of

which they would have experienced regardless of their student status. The third theme, relational transitions, outlines the shifts that occurred in the participant's relationship to home and, for some of those interviewed, their familial role. To conclude, the final theme, helpful engagement, views the stories from an appreciative and proactive lens and recounts the actions that the participants felt were essential in their ability to recover from a disaster-induced home loss. The participants also graciously provide some perspective about the strategies and supports that might help students in similar situations.

Theme 1: Overwhelm

The whole thing just came with a lot of unnecessary stress. I can deal with stress unless it's coming at me from three different directions, and that's what dealing with a home loss and going to school is like. When I'm in school, I ideally want to limit my stress from anywhere else (Taylor).

When we began our story-sharing, the first research questions focused solely on the situation resulting in home loss. Universally, as noted previously, all the participants experienced wildfire events that implicated portions of their communities, including the physical space they most considered "home". This experience brought about a significant degree of disturbance, confusion, and uncertainty for the majority of participants, and all of the participants cited increased stress levels, as Taylor noted in the quote above. Interestingly, the term "overwhelm" was utilized by all participants in different contexts, but most commonly as a "catch-all" term for feelings of shock and stress and the volume of change they were attempting to sort through. This whirlwind of emotions seems to be of particular relevance to the participants interviewed, as they all lived in fire-prone areas and had all experienced a wildfire within close proximity to their community prior to the one resulting in their loss, some of them several times throughout their

lives. Jane outlines the kind of apathy that can result from increased exposure to weather-related events and the feelings that occur when it makes contact for the first time:

> At that point, it was on the other side of the river, and I thought, there's no way it's going to jump. It's a mile wide. Of course, I was worried because I hate fire, but I thought it would be like every other time. We used to pack a bag, you know, in case we had to evacuate, but we never had to. So, this time I didn't pack anything because I was like, Jane, you're an adult now… My husband and his mom were packing up, but not really packing up because you think you're going to come back…When I realized [everything was gone] and I didn't even have a toothbrush … it was so overwhelming.

All of the participants in their home communities at the time of the event cite similar behaviours, haphazardly packing, frantically grabbing anything in sight at the last second, or entirely disregarding any mention that they may be in danger. Even the participants living away from their homes, such as Mack and Addi, did not initially believe the fire near their community presented any tangible threat. Only one participant noted that they felt a distinct urge to prepare adequately, likely because she had previously experienced a disaster-related community loss. Still, Ava initially assumed that her home would be safe, prioritizing the needs of others over packing for herself. However, she acted when she saw that the fire was closer to her home than she initially anticipated. "I realized we needed to pack because the fire would probably come this way. The area I lived in was literally all swamp spruce, little tiny match-stick trees. I knew it was going to be bad." The previous experience seemed to prepare her, at least to some degree, for what was to come.

Communicative Chaos

The degradation of clear and concise communication adds significantly to the tumultuousness of disaster, as experienced by the participants of this study. The participants

didn’t know how to respond appropriately to the impending destructive force because they were not given clear instructions or had no access to their usual means of acquiring information. As mentioned in some of the stories shared previously, internet coverage, cellular calling services, and even radio communication all experienced disruptions to varying degrees depending on the location and widespread impact of the wildfire being discussed.

The disruption of radio services prompted hugely conflicting responses among participants. Both Myka and Diane, for example, stated that the radio repeatedly played a message reminding listeners that the community was not under evacuation alert, even as homes started to catch fire. Initially, this message reduced feelings of urgency and delayed or entirely prevented them from taking proactive measures to leave. On the other hand, Jane felt unnerved and in danger when she heard the message passed through her radio channel. "This station is now unmanned! Everybody get out and be safe! Alberta Alert sirens followed it; I still get cold shivers when I hear them."

For participants that experienced the disaster from “the outside”, this meant hearing information from sources such as media outlets that often sensationalized or exaggerated the catastrophe. Addi notes:

> At one point, I heard that the whole town was gone … I remember feeling so overwhelmed by the news coverage and the rumours. I was getting lots of 'are you okay' and 'is your family okay' texts from people I hadn't heard from in a long time, and I was like I don't know. I don't know what's happening. I don't know where my friends and family are or what's left of the community. I don't know if people are okay.

For participants “on the ground” trying to find information became an activity taken up in large parking lots where confused and often distraught people gathered to find out what was

going on or to determine their next required steps. Mack mentions calling from college and getting through to her mom, only to realize she was talking to what felt like the entirety of her hometown. She would watch the news for updates, relaying any information she thought might be valuable. Her mom would then pass the information on to the crowds of people, friends and strangers, assembled in a large community parking lot. "They were all just waiting for direction, and no one was providing it. It was such a big responsibility… It was like a bad game of telephone."

Seemingly, even being a part of the small group of people 'in the know' doesn't help as much as one might think. If you'll remember, Taylor was responsible for responding to the disaster event in her hometown. While she preferred her position at the fire center fielding calls, getting reputable information from her knowledgeable co-workers "compared to a bunch of hysterical people from the general public … in a Walmart parking lot." Still, she found navigating the chaotic and ever-changing information stream challenging.

> I remember calling my relatives [when I heard the fire had entered my street] because I just needed somebody who wasn't part of it. That's when I broke down. I just started bawling because I did not know what was going on. I remember my Uncle saying, 'it's just a house', but I wasn't even sad about the house at that moment. I just wanted to know what was going on.

Based on the participants of this study, some degree of communicative chaos was present regardless of the specifics of their particular situation.

Competing Practicalities

Another common occurrence that caused disruption and increased the uncertainty surrounding a disaster-induced home loss were the practical and logistical difficulties that flooded the participants lives after they found out their home was gone. Mundane, daily routines

they took for granted, like getting dressed and ready for their day, became difficult. For example, in her family, Myka was the only one that fled with clothing and glasses. So, in the day following their loss, instead of notifying vital personnel, they had to spend a significant portion of their morning trying to locate and purchase contact lenses, among other essentials. While Myka was the only participant to provide a specific scenario, all participants cited the taxing and time-consuming endeavour of either purchasing essential items or travelling to be close to loved ones immediately after their event. Additionally, related specifically to the experience of being a student, participants noted that losing their textbooks, documentation, supplies, and computers, among other things made their transition back into the school environment after their loss particularly arduous.

Their practical difficulties extended long into the months after a loss, and while this may have happened regardless of their academic status, it resulted in substantial strain when paired with post-secondary obligations. Diane speaks to this tension:

> Trying to recoup your losses, trying to replace things is so stressful. For the first few months we were literally writing down every single item trying to please [the insurance company]… I had to do that alongside of doing schoolwork and I never felt like I had enough time.

For Myka, this lack of time resulted in her eliminating necessary self-care activities. “I had to deal with developing a stupid insurance list... I didn’t let it get in the way of studying, but it took away my ability to socialize and relax”. When consultation with insurance companies is paired with rebuilding a home, as in Ava’s case, the difficulty continued to compound. “The builder we chose ended up being extremely difficult to deal with so, that was just another headache.” Like others, she recognized the negative impact this had on her schoolwork:

> I wasn’t completing assignments to the best of my ability because I just had too many other things to take care of. It is very difficult to focus when there are so many decisions and so much stress that goes into a home rebuild. None of it is fun when you are so stressed out either.

The general feeling of overwhelm experienced by the participants, the disruptions of communication pathways, and the increase in practical obligations made life after a disaster-induced home loss more complicated. So, how did participants deal with that increased complication? Strategies that the participants identified as helpful are addressed in a subsequent portion of this analysis. But first, let's examine some factors that impaired their ability to manage many competing obligations.

Theme 2: Hindrances to Healing

This has really made me think about how a student or anyone should be treated if they've dealt with such loss. I just trucked through and didn't realize fully that maybe there should have been some lenience; students shouldn't have to go through that alone. I've never thought about it, to be honest, so it's nice to have that realization and hopefully help support other people down the line because we live in a world where there will be more destruction (Ava).

Something very interesting that came up repeatedly during data collection was a general sense that the participants felt, in the months after their loss, that they should not ask for support or that they initially thought they did not need it. This perspective seemed to stem from a lack of understanding about their loss, both externally and internally. Additionally, in some participants, this ignorance was fueled by a notable aversion to therapy or other professional services. These factors seemed to culminate in the varied utilization of unhealthy coping mechanisms.

External Lack of Awareness

As presented within the stories of disaster-induced home loss, all participants mentioned feeling a need to share physical space with loved ones and initially feeling supported academically or by family, friends, and strangers. However, these supportive behaviors quickly ceased and were replaced by distinct shift in the actions of others. Apathy, aggression, and avoidance were especially present when examining the behaviours exhibited by academic institutions, classmates, coworkers, and other peripheral relationships. For example, Mack discussed feeling initially supported by her college educators, but that support very quickly dissipated during the week she spent with friends and family after receiving confirmation that her home had been lost.

> They did the whole, 'oh, we can't imagine. What do you need?' thing… when tragedy happens, people go, 'oh wow, I would be so destroyed if I didn't have a home to go to', but then they get to go home, and [for them] the shock of it wears off quickly. So that initial empathy, maybe it turns into pity, maybe it turns into this sense of 'I'd be over it by now'… But, they've been sleeping in their beds every day I've been gone. I still don't have a home; they've been home every night.

This quickly fading care was also expressed by Taylor and Ava, as they note specific instances when colleagues and classmates (respectively), responded to the events and conversations transpiring after their home losses with very little compassion, and at times, with malicious comments.

Responses more commonly mentioned were not necessarily as harsh but were often entirely lacklustre, prompting participants to refrain from attempting to re-access supports. Diane wondered if the initial response from her first point of contact hindered her ability to reach out further. "Why would I keep telling people what I went through when I'm not getting much out of

it? I felt like I was just telling them my sad story. Does it seem like I'm just looking for sympathy if there's nothing they can do?" Jane had a similar experience when a professor asked her to paint a memorable moment. When she produced a picture of what she saw from the Walmart parking lot, fire all around her, and people screaming, her professor did not say anything about it or even comment when allocating a grade. "I'm an educator, and if a child drew something like that because I asked them to, I think I would at least acknowledge it, you know?"

This lack of acknowledgement was common, with all but one participant stating that no one from their institution initiated contact after their fire. Although even in Taylor's situation, it was the institution that she attended previously, a smaller community college, that extended help, not the university she was enrolled in the fall following her disaster. "Nobody knew me, faculty-wise at the university, so there was nothing. No one ever asked the question ‘who lost their home’" despite frequent international media acknowledgements of the event.

Internal Lack of Awareness

The general lack of acknowledgement and awareness about how people “should” or do respond after a home loss ultimately extended into the participants. For Myka, this meant feeling exhausted by the emotional outpourings of others. "The rest of [my family was] frequently crying about it. They'd talk about it, they'd cry, and I'm like, would you just stop talking about this? It's over. It's done with; calm down." For others, this suppression was self-inflicted to some extent. For example, Addi confessed, “what was not helpful [to my recovery] was my attitude towards my own feelings and grief'. Others, including Jane, echoed this.

> I was always in the mindset of 'it could have been worse'. It could have been a house I owned, or it could have been my childhood home. I just lost my stuff. I always found a reason why I shouldn't need support. I minimized it by always thinking that people had been through a lot worse things than me.

Minimization left participants uncertain about how they should act around others and what they should expect from their post-secondary institutions. Diane stated, "I don't know why I didn't ask for more support…I think, like the social pressure of just keeping going, it was very unique. I was the only one, at least in my class, that this had happened to". Many of the participants acknowledged being cautious and uncertain in this same way, wanting to reach out but unsure if it would be acceptable or if there would be resources for them to access:

> You know, if I had been a part of a [learning] community where I wasn't the only one going through that, or I didn't feel like I was the only one going through that, I think I would have been more willing to ask for help. But, from my perception [at the time], I figured no one else was experiencing the same problem, so there weren't going to be resources for me. Why would there be? (Addi).

Perhaps the rationale behind this perception is the social awkwardness that comes with being expected to ask for support. Taylor referred to this tension when she discussed how it felt to have to reach out and why she avoided it. "Haven't you heard of me? I'm the kid from the town that burned. Can you imagine? I would have felt like such an idiot if I had done that." For her, being vocal about her circumstance felt like a means to get unwanted attention rather than assistance.

Unhealthy Coping

Except for Jane, whose mother encouraged her to seek professional support, all participants were left to independently sort through the uncertainty surrounding their feelings and the feelings of others. Although all of the participants expressed immense gratitude for the help they did receive, as outlined in a subsequent section of this analysis, the majority did not seek professional guidance despite noting in their interviews that, in hindsight, they should have. The reasons given for this seem consistent, and the following quote from Addi sums it up. "I think everyone could use some kind of counselling now at this point in my life, but back then, I

wouldn't have said that". Taylor expands on this by articulating that she never really even knew the difference between, or the benefit of, various kinds of mental health practitioners. When she was offered therapy through a program for first responders at her workplace, she didn't see the value:

> We had to go to a mandatory group session, and I remember hating it. Why? Because I cried and I didn't like crying. So, I went that one time and probably should have kept going, but I viewed it as something that wasn't fun, and I didn't want to do it again... I thought I was totally fine.

This resistance to professional measures might be a sign of the time, as all participants lost their homes over five years ago and, as noted, are now all in their thirties. Still, the perception that everything was okay or their mental health wasn't important was resoundingly common. Mack notes feeling a delusional sense of wellness after her loss. "I was like, I'm happy, I'm great. I'm surprised I'm doing so well for someone who's been through so much… and finally, my best friend said, 'actually, I don't think you're doing that well'". Mack couldn't recognize that she was utilizing less than favourable coping mechanisms. "I had very few skills, and anything I was learning that seemed to work was unhealthy, like emotional eating and visceral reactions, among other stuff. I am sometimes shocked I ended up so okay." Mack certainly was not the only participant to recall unhelpful behaviours. From excessive eating and drinking, fits of emotional overwhelm, irritation and rage, to complete suppression and avoidance, all participants found a means to attempt to suppress the anguish they felt, even when they did not recognize that is what they were doing. As Myka shared, "I just learned the other day, apparently I was a raging cow after the fire. My sister said that I was totally shut off, but I thought I was unaffected… Maybe I was just affected differently".

A lack of awareness and understanding about disaster-induced home loss meant that participants often felt unheard and misjudged. The group also frequently displayed a lack of understanding towards their own emotions as they suppressed and minimized their feelings based on a false assumption that they should be able to carry on as "normal". The partnership of these factors forced participants to cope by any means available, and the outlets chosen often did not support their overall wellness. Paired with significant ongoing life transitions, which are outlined below, it is not surprising that the majority of participants identify so much strain during the aftermath of their losses.

Theme 3: Relational Transitions

I can't go back to what feels familiar, because it no longer exists. All of a sudden I was feeling like where's my identity? Where's my safety? Where's my home? Where do I go from here? Why would I feel motivated to carry on? Where do I even belong? (Mack).

So many elements of the participants' lives were left entirely unrecognizable after their disaster-induced home loss, and these changes extend far beyond being surrounded by new material possessions. The participants, to varying degrees, all noted that their relationship with their parents, community, or home changed after their loss.

Role of "Child"

The most emotionally difficult transition outlined by participants is something I had not considered when reviewing literature or drafting research questions because it is disconnected from my own personal experiences that helped frame this research. For the participants that lost their childhood homes, Taylor, Addi, Mack, Myka, and Diane, the circumstance was made more complex as a result of witnessing their most loved people lose their homes, too. All participants who cited that it was formally their parents' house that had been lost stressed a distinct shift in their familial role after that home burned. Specifically, they assumed some degree of

responsibility for their parent's emotional well-being and also felt that they lost the ability to seek support from their parents. Compared to participants Ava and Jane, who recognized their parents as vital members of their recovery and support networks, the same is not said by participants whose parents were largely unavailable because of their own transitional challenges and grief. Mack framed it in this manner, "if you lost your home and you're sharing that tragedy with your family, who is telling you that it's going to be okay? Nobody because they don't know how to get through it either."

With the loss or impairment of a previously integral support system, participants noted that they had to quickly become the ones to provide care at a time when they also needed it. "The biggest challenge was supporting my parents through… and doing that was hard when I had other things going on" (Addi). Compounding this issue was the weight of navigating emotions rooted in entirely different places than their own. Taylor talks of a specific instance with her mom:

> We were at Canadian Tire, and it was something so simple. She saw a vase that we had outside our house, and she just started crying. I remember thinking if I saw a sweater that I owned [and lost], I wouldn't have the same reaction, so I didn't get it. I didn't understand why she was so upset.

Hindsight allowed her to form a more empathic understanding of this, "that's where they brought us up, but for us, we were kind of transitioning away from that place anyway." That parental emotional attachment was something discussed by Myka, as well:

> I have never once thought, “oh, I wish I had that thing I had when I was an infant,” but my mom does wish for those things. For example, all of the Christmas decorations we had growing up were lost, we've bought tons of nice new ones, but she doesn't care about

> those the same way. She has all this beautiful stuff, but there is no emotional attachment to it, which is hard for her.

For Addi, these differences make sense. "I lost this chapter of who I was and these bits of my childhood, but my parents, they lost everything. Anything they had ever worked for was lost in that house."

Feeling thrust into a caretaking role that they were not ready for, at a time earlier than expected, resulted in an influx of uncertainty and stress; at a time already riddled with those emotions.

Iterations of "Home"

All participants lost their most sentimental and grounding physical dwelling because of fire, but due to the nature of disaster, they often lost larger community-based conceptions of home, too. One participant, Myka, felt that there was no enduring difference in her understanding or feelings about "home" after her loss. However, other participants described significant changes. Jane still feels resistance when she thinks about the community where she previously lived. "After the fire, I really, really did not want to go back. I would have been okay never returning, but I just had to at that time." She has since moved, a change prompted mainly by the fire and her home loss. Addi felt this same tension after her fire, and it remains today. She feels differently about the place she once called her "hometown":

> There was so much about the town itself that changed during that period [after the fire]. The few people I was really close with within the community left, and it felt like someplace new... I feel so uncomfortable there now that I won't even reach out to people I know. I feel like an alien. What home is now has nothing to do with that town. I've become a city person, and I know I will never go back.

Other participants acknowledged that shifts did occur within their communities, but their individual perception of home was most impacted. Diane, Ava, Taylor, and Mack all spoke to specifics regarding this, recounting changes in both their attachment to home as a physical space and the aspects of home deemed most important. Ava explained:

> Home is definitely somewhere I'm comfortable, whereas, before the fire, I would say I was probably pretty materialistic. I had a lot of things that I didn't necessarily use or see much, but after [I lost my home], I realized what was most important. So, I am more of a minimalist now, I like less clutter, but my main goal is just to feel comfortable where I'm living.

Interestingly, all the participants viewed these changes to the way they define home as important to their overall growth and ultimately, consider the differences positive.

Whether positive, negative or somewhere in between, the revisal of relationships to home and essential family members is significant to the overall experience of disaster-induced home loss. At worst, these changes added another heavy layer to the burdens being carried by participants. At best, they provided participants with a new way to view life and move forward.

Theme 4: Helpful Engagement

I was a university student. How was I going to do all of that without that support? I didn't have a ton of money or other resources to rebuild my life, you know (Jane).

As demonstrated in the sections above, many negatives come with experiencing a disaster-induced home loss, but it is essential to recognize that there can be positives found in the chaos, too. Fortunately, the participants were quick to outline the helpful measures taken by others and by themselves that eased the transitions resulting from their losses so that, hopefully, one day, we might be better able to respond to the needs of students in similar situations.

The Gift of Time

One of the most significant moments recognized by all participants was the short period immediately after their loss. Fully immersing themselves in that time to reconnect with loved ones, debrief, rest, and recover was hugely helpful in understanding what happened and starting the journey forward. While all those interviewed participated in this time differently, they all stated that it was important to them in some way. Mack revealed that, since she was away from home when the wildfire made contact, travelling to see family and friends immediately after learning of the situation helped her feel a part of it. “I met up with people who were there at the time so we could bond over the experience, and in some ways, I feel it was really healing to have gone there because I got to share with people who understood.

On the other hand, Ava chose to spend her time after being evacuated by the ocean with her parents. “I was standing on the beach when I got the video [of the charred remains of my home]. It was comforting and therapeutic”. Jane, Addi, Myka, and Diane, reflected on how they shared precious moments with the people closest to them, and Taylor told of the impact spending a week camping with her friends and being cared for had on her experience overall. The gift of time was incredibly beneficial, and all of the participants used it in a manner that reduced tension and fear.

Supportive Action

"What am I looking for? At that point, I didn't even know what I needed. You're just in shock still; it can be overwhelming to be asked constantly, 'what do you need?'" As demonstrated in this quote from Diane's interview, many participants couldn't articulate the kinds of support they needed. Expecting those recovering from losses of this magnitude to reach out adds another practical burden to their plate. Universally, the participants were all very open to receiving support, regardless of its form. These actions did not need to be complicated, and Myka

explained that some of the simplest interactions meant the most. "People I didn't even really know would have any sort of care at all about what's going on in my life kept on reaching out, just checking in making sure I was okay, and I always appreciated that." Ava echoed this as she gushed about her friend, "we went shopping one day, and in every place we went, she told them I lost my house so that I didn't have to [so that I could get a discount]. It was nice." People in their lives taking the reins and extending assistance in any manner they could was welcomed and appreciated.

In addition to simple gestures of support, practical supports were also very needed and valued by the participants, especially concerning recouping losses. Through tears, Jane recalled, “a little boy and his mom [from my hometown] got me a gift card, and he drew a picture with hearts on it. That one gets me every time I think about it. It was really special.” Diane, Myka, and Taylor also noted that financial support was hugely significant in their ability to regain a sense of normalcy. For Jane and Ava, family and friends provided a safe place to stay while they waited for permanent accommodation to be built or become available. These offerings were very significant in their emotional and financial ability to regain some semblance of stability. On the exclusively educational front, Taylor commended the efforts of a classmate and former teachers who ensured that she had copies of the notes they had and provided textbooks that they no longer needed.

Post-Secondary As Protection

Curiously, although being engaged in post-secondary programming while recovering from a disaster-induced home loss comes with an extra layer of challenges, it also seems to provide an additional protective mechanism for some. The transitional space “between two worlds” affords students that lost a home an opportunity to maintain some sense of normalcy in

other areas of their life. For Myka, having “two homes” meant that much of her stuff was in storage; it also meant that she had a familiar place to return to when she lost her primary home:

> I was really looking forward to going back [to university] because I was going back to something normal, and it meant I didn't have to live in temporary housing with my parents, which I hated. Residence was more of a 'home' for me at that point. I moved back in with the same people that I was living with the year prior… I had a constant. I didn't just get checked in with this random group of people… I picked up where I had left off and returned to a familiar place where I was already comfortable.

Taylor reiterated these feelings by stating that because her academic world and her hometown world were a good distance apart, they felt like separate places without much overlap. Meaning the “sting” of her loss was less tangible when she returned to the city where her post-secondary institution was.

Practically, academic institutions provided the participants with a place to go when other spaces of solace were lost. Emotionally, education offered a sometimes-needed distraction from the mayhem of home loss and disaster recovery. Diane confessed that having an external outlet unrelated to her fire gave her something else to think about that felt important, a way of coping that others in her life could not access. Jane recognized that perhaps her mental health would have deteriorated more rapidly if it were not for school. "Taking time off would have been worse than just going. I can't know for sure, but not having school would have probably resulted in me wallowing a bit and not looking for a way to move forward." When finding a path forward is the goal, school helped provide direction for several of the participants.

School-Implemented Strategies

So, the question becomes, how do academic institutions provide students who have lost their homes with the support they need to continue their studies when they wish to? Fortunately,

the participants had a plethora of suggestions to offer, and they all agreed that academic institutions should take some responsibility for assisting students after a disaster-induced home loss. Mack put it like this:

> When you were saying “yes” to hundreds of thousands of students, you're also saying that we can leave our parents and our loved ones and that you will take on some of that responsibility of supporting us. Teach us the skills we may need, and be there for us during times of crisis.

The supporting strategies offered predominately called for institutions to engage with students proactively so that they feel confident that, should the time come, their educational space will support them. Addi offered that schools need to "take some of the fear and self-minimization away. Unfortunately, a lot of professors do the exact opposite of that. They'll draw a hard line and say, “don't ask me for an extension unless your [explicit] life depends on it.” She goes on to emphasize how damaging this is. "It creates an environment where you don't feel like you will be heard no matter what, and that's especially true when we're talking about “only” material possessions."

As mentioned in Theme 2, the participants also emphasized the need for educational institutions to do the work. Actions like acknowledging the event in institutional and class spaces and extending offers of specific support like extensions, exemptions, and assignment amalgamation without the student needing to ask were all noted by every person interviewed. Offloading this responsibility onto the school can ease ever-present feelings of vulnerability. As Jane mentioned, "I can be a bit of a perfectionist, so I don't always want to be the one to say that I need help, you know? Even when I really do." In addition, Mack and Diane specifically noted the importance of policy. After her disaster, Diane sought information about the kind of support

she should reasonably expect to receive, only to find that there was nothing in writing. She and the instructor she primarily contacted were at a loss about what to do, and as a result, unfortunately, no support was given. Mack stressed the importance of policy creation but also highlighted that it should reflect the problems most commonly faced, "we have to rely on people who have been through it to inform it."

Self-Implemented Strategies

In this sub-section, I outline how the participants in this study engaged with themselves in a supportive and helpful manner. Surprisingly, when I asked the question, *what were some of the strategies you utilized that were helpful when navigating school and disaster-induced home loss?* No two participants answered in the same way, and this is telling. Every journey of disaster-induced home loss is unique. As outlined in Schlossberg's 4 S's, every individual has resources and deficits that aid or hinder their ability to respond to transitional events (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). For this reason, it makes perfect sense that their self-implemented actions would be as diverse as their skill sets and personalities. Although there is no consensus beyond that individuals need to find a path forward that suits their needs, these morsels of wisdom have the potential to help guide others. They are included as guiding statements below:

- Mack: *Do what works for you.* “There are very few things in life that you completely control. Education is one area where you can at least be in the driver’s seat and use it to change your life positively. Do whatever it takes to achieve your academic goals, even if that means taking a break and returning when the dust (or smoke) settles.”
- Jane: *Share your story, and show yourself some compassion.* "I needed to talk about it. I needed to get it out… Each time you share it, it all gets a little less heavy. It just comes

down to a compassion thing, have compassion for yourself. I think that's the big one and something that really helped me move forward, having compassion for myself."

- Addi: *Know your boundaries and preserve them.* "Self-awareness was definitely a strength that helped me not drown. Having good boundaries was essential."
- Diane: *Organization is key.* "Organization in post-secondary is significant, but when you're also dealing with all of this, staying on task and organized is hugely important."
- Myka: *Prioritize your time.* "One of the things I would have done differently would be to set aside time for specific things. For example, dealing with insurance stuff, not just reacting. My mom would call and say I needed to deal with something, and I would drop whatever I was doing. Instead, I'd specifically set aside time for those practical things or rearrange my time a bit differently."
- Taylor: *Back up everything.* "I lost my house before the days of Google Docs, where you just saved everything to a cloud in the air. So there were many papers that I wish I could have referred to and notes that I didn't have because I only had them in paper format and not in an electronic format."
- Ava: *Help others.* "In the very initial phase of the fire, I could recognize what was happening and help people through it. I called them and told them, 'you need to start doing X, Y, and Z. They all said thank you later, which meant a lot to me. It is what I am most proud of."

The helpful actions outlined by the participants above demonstrate that although an event can be tumultuous, heart-breaking, and filled with difficulty, there is hope that when individuals engage with the tools they have available to them and accept any extended support, they can get

through it. Navigating disaster-induced home loss as a student is not something that should be taken lightly or minimized, but it is possible to do successfully.

Chapter Summary

Man, I'm having so many revelations right now. (Myka)

At some point in my life, I was conned into believing that profound meaning only comes from the most intricately laid stories, works of poets and authors with best-selling pieces. While this notion is one that I have challenged in my mind for some time now, my belief that even the simplest things shared can hold significant value has been confirmed through this process. In this chapter, I have outlined the demographics of the participants that so graciously joined me on this journey. Their individual stories have been shared, along with the themes that bind their unique life experiences together, providing a rich understanding of disaster-induced home loss from the perspective of post-secondary students who lived through it.

Chapter 5: Charred Remnants and Beautiful Blossoms

I trek through a beaten path carved by those that came before me and followed by my dutiful research companion who, despite being four-legged, needed the break from office work just as much as I did. Although these walks are for my physical health, they are essential for my mind, too. Time is spent mentally sorting through ideas that seem too large to get down on paper or too unclear to articulate out loud as Dexter happily explores the world around us. Today, as we waltzed down a trail, I looked around at the trees scorched by wildfire over ten years ago. I can see myself and the participants of this study in the charred remnants, pieces memorialized after disaster, after home loss, and after hardship. Yet, for the first time, I notice all the growth, too. Changes that would not have been possible without destruction and present only because of environments that supported, sustained, and made space for beautiful newness to exist.

It would not be genuine to convey the participants' narratives in as sequential a manner as nature tells the story of destruction. However, throughout this chapter, the messages within it hopefully provide a fragment of the optimism I felt during that walk in the woods. The experience of disaster-induced home loss is a complicated one, with layers of transition and mixed emotions. Still, by reflecting on the experience candidly and thoughtfully as the participants of this study have, there is much to offer in the form of new learning; new growth on this research pathway.

I began this journey to explore the narratives of adults who experienced disaster-induced home loss in Alberta while simultaneously navigating a full-time post-secondary program. In addition, this study aimed to intentionally add student voice to the scholarly conversations happening within academia about disaster-induced home loss. Indeed, this project reflects this goal by responding to the following questions:

- How do adult learners, who have lost their home to a disaster, experience navigating home loss and their full-time post-secondary education simultaneously?
- What transitions occur in the lives of adult learners after a disaster-induced home loss? and;
- How does the post-secondary experience influence the transitions experienced after a disaster-induced home loss?

The purpose of this chapter is to answer these questions by integrating and interpreting the narratives shared by the participants, "thinking carefully about what meaning may lie [within them]" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 183). The first section is dedicated to understandings that I have formulated about the multitude of transitions being navigated by the participants, grief as an often-unacknowledged feeling, and the multiple ways in which the participants personal lives and academic experiences shaped their responses regarding disaster-induced home loss. In section two, the messages conveyed by the participants are formed into actionable suggestions for future practice and research.

Charred Remnants: Consistencies, Contradictions, and Challenges

At first glance, the remnants of trees after a fire seem to only serve as a reminder of devastation. However, a charred tree has a second life after it has been killed. “Dead trees, known as “snags”, are some of the most valuable … structures in the forest” (Lohan, 2022, n.p.). They provide a haven for life seeking shelter, they jumpstart an intricate rejuvenation process by supplying nutrients, and they offer a stabilizing structure for new growth (Lohan, 2022, n.p.). Like those trees, the stories from survivors of disaster-induced home loss can initially feel grim and heavy, but they too can be given a second life of sorts, one that has the potential to provide safety, rejuvenation, and stability as the adult learning and disaster-induced home loss landscape

continues to develop. As I examined the participant narratives holistically, and compare the data collected to reviewed literature, several significant, new, and thought-provoking ideas were illuminated. These valuable lessons are outlined in the upcoming sub-sections.

Adult Learners Navigating Layered Transitions

The participants of this study reflect research that identifies adult learners as having a variety of essential obligations in addition to their formal studies (Iloh, 2018; Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Soares, 2013). Partnered with these responsibilities was an overwhelming number of co-occurring transitions. Like Carales and López (2021) indicated in their study's findings, this research demonstrates that students became overwhelmed by the simultaneous navigation of disaster-induced home loss recovery and their post-secondary educational pursuit. Admittedly, as a researcher and educator who experienced this kind of event, even I underestimated the volume of transitions occurring within students' lives after such a loss. Based on Schlossberg's Transition Model (2011), three types of transitions can occur in our lives as human beings: anticipated, non-event, and unanticipated. I predicted that both anticipated and unanticipated transitions would be present in students' lives after a disaster-induced home loss. However, for some participants, all three transition types were present in their narratives. These transitions are outlined below, followed by a key finding related to family change experienced by a sub-group of participants.

Anticipated Transitions

Anticipated transitions include all changes we expect to occur and can plan for (Anderson et al., 2021). According to Gale and Parker (2014), adult learners experience the anticipated transition of becoming a post-secondary student along with others as they work through their educational programming. The participants noted a diverse range of exciting and sometimes stressful changes that they expected to occur. Mack was getting ready to graduate and enter the

workforce at the time of her home loss. Jane was preparing to return to her summer job after finishing her semester. Taylor was moving cities to start the next phase of her degree program after completing a diploma-laddering partnership at a smaller institution. As a group, they all managed the expectations of their institutions and educators while maintaining existing relationships and starting new ones. They completed practicums, moved in and out of new dwellings, planned their course schedules and public-transit routes, and engaged in paid and volunteer work. These examples provide only a tiny sample of the many new but expected paths the participants travelled before, during, and after their homes were lost.

Non-Event Transitions

Unexpectedly, some participants also cited non-event transitions, which is not reflected in any existing disaster transition literature I reviewed. “Nonevent transitions are the ones an individual had expected but which did not occur, thereby altering [their] life” (Goodman et al., 2006). Specifically, Addi had been busy working to gain the credentials required to return to her hometown to teach at her former high school. However, when a large section of the town and her home were destroyed, so too was much of the nostalgia calling her back. This shift prompted her to reconsider her goal. The realization that she may not want to return resulted in a significant reconsideration of “who” and “what” she wanted to be. A similar occurrence was noted by Mack, who expected that she would complete her provincial accreditation exam and become employed shortly after receiving her credential. However, the financial and location-based ramifications of her home loss meant that she could not write the test, resulting in delayed career entry, and ultimately a change in vocation entirely. These non-event transitions, while not reflected in the stories of every participant and ultimately regarded as positive by the participants mentioned, signal the capacity for a disaster-induced home loss to derail anticipated life transitions.

Unanticipated Transitions

Unanticipated transitions are the ones we cannot plan for because we do not know when or how they will occur (Anderson et al., 2021). Disaster-induced home loss is an example of an unanticipated transition in itself as people go from suddenly having a home to not. Still, there are many other significant changes, as told by the participants, that resulted from their loss. As Patton and Davis (2014) found, these transitions were indeed perceived as harmful, disruptive, crisis-like, and even traumatic for the participants. First, they were thrust into intensive awareness from a previous position of apathy. The participants were aware that disasters occurred but primarily engaged with the time leading up to their event from a place of presumed safety. After experiencing the chaos of evacuating, attempting to connect with loved ones through communication system failure, seeking temporary shelter, and trying to gather pertinent information, their perspectives about disaster events fundamentally changed. This shift is similarly reflected in the work of Agrawal (2018), where individuals had a low-risk perception of disasters until they understood their vulnerability, often because of personal experience. For the participants, this awareness extended beyond their personal relationship to disaster events and into a desire to help others, as demonstrated by their enrollment in this study.

In addition to a gained awareness about disaster, participants unexpectedly transitioned from a state of normalcy to a state of newness in almost every area of their lives. They were thrust into an existence of new possessions, new surroundings, new roles, and a new relationship with their educational endeavour. As stated by Ecclestone et al. (2010), these types of changes tend to be unsettling and challenging, but can also be an impetus for learning, and learn they did! The participants navigated a variety of new behaviours and tasks as a result of the forced change. Insurance lists, home rebuilding, possession acquirement, supporting loved ones, and caring for themselves in new ways were all added to an often already packed list of required academic and

life tasks. Like the participants in Carales and López's (2021) study, these transitions and the obligations that came with them resulted in stress, anxiety, and self-doubt, but also in a rejuvenated commitment to their education. Many participants perceived their post-secondary obligations as a needed, albeit stressful, distraction or as valuable space away from the reality of the destruction and devastation they and their loved ones were experiencing. Several participants also identified wanting to complete their credential because it was a remaining piece of their pre-loss life; something they felt they "could do", and a necessary step towards perceived normalcy. The feeling that school provided a degree of consistency at a time of upheaval was prevalent and significant, especially for the participants that lost their family home and much of the familial consistency that existed in their lives prior to their fires.

Unanticipated Transition: Family Support

As noted in Chapter 4, some of the most challenging shifts in participants' lives centred on changing family roles. Specifically, the participants whose parental homes were lost emphasized the taxing adjustment that came with needing to suddenly support one or more of their parents emotionally at a time when they anticipated that they would still be primarily receiving that support. For two participants, one who had recently lost a parent and another whose parent was battling an active addiction, the home loss further perpetuated their caretaking responsibilities and lessened the support their other parent could provide them in return. While all the participants that lost their family dwelling identified being willing to care for their loved ones in a new way, they felt entirely ill-equipped to navigate the needs of their parents while simultaneously having to tend to their own.

When considering the age of participants at the time of their losses, their difficulty traversing the tension between self-focus and caretaking is understandable. Categorically, they all were in the developmental period dubbed emerging adulthood. Defined as the time frame

between 18 to 29 years of age, this phase exists for many young adults (Murray & Arnett, 2018, p. 4). Sandwiched between independent adulthood and the dependent nature of childhood, this life stage comes with many complexities and transitions, particularly regarding parent-child relationships (Mullendore et al., 2018). During emerging adulthood, individuals are said to seek parental involvement in the form of emotional support, input and advice about critical decisions and events, financial assistance, or some combination of all three, depending on the individual's particular needs (Adams & Sharkin, 2018). These parental actions assist emerging adults as they focus on themselves, their identity cultivation, and ultimately their growth (Goldsmith, 2018). However, in all cases of familial home loss, one or more of these parental care actions were impacted.

These changing care dynamics are not reflected in any research found on disaster-induced home loss. However, discussion about changing family roles after loss is present in family and psychology research (Schim & Furman, 2015; Johnson & Feeney, 2017; Mincer & Krause, 2017). Families navigating loss can respond in various ways; existing care dynamics are often impacted as members lose the capacity to care for one another while tied up in their own practical and emotional challenges (Rosenblatt, 2017). In addition, members of families respond to loss differently (Robenstien & Harris, 2001), which Myka and Taylor explicitly recalled. These variances often lead to interpersonal confusion, gaps in care, and distancing between family members (Robenstien & Harris, 2001). Because family, in its most idealized conception, is a primary means of support, offering stability and security to emerging adults, these changes can be hugely destabilizing and emotionally exhausting (Perera, 2020), which was the case for several of this study’s participants.

When supportive behaviours, especially from parents, are not or cannot be offered, a range of adverse effects for emerging adults can result, including a lack of productive coping skills and reduced emotional well-being (Stapley et al., 2021). As it relates to this project, the participants who lost their childhood home emphasized the mental health implications that arose when witnessing their parent's anguish and the disorientation they felt when thrust into a care-providing role. Additionally, while all participants identified an increase in unhealthy or unproductive coping mechanisms after their disaster-induced loss, participants whose family homes were lost seemed to identify these behaviours more so. This added difficulty is possibly due to the manner with which their parental relationships were altered as a result of their fire, and their limited capacity as emerging adults to serve others at a time they anticipated they would be able to focus on themselves and be the primary recipients of parental support.

Disaster Recovery and Grief

Layered amongst the transitions that came with their specialized circumstance as young post-secondary students navigating loss was the reality that they also needed to attend to the social and emotional recovery phases experienced in the aftermath of disaster. The tumultuous nature of this journey, as depicted by Ursano et al. (2017), highlights the critical points a person can expect to work through after a disaster event. However, based on the findings from this group of stories, further work is needed to understand all the nuance that exists between the points along the projected pathway, through all the grief, and how others might offer meaningful support. The perspectives conveyed by participants regarding these matters are described in the following subsections.

Phases of Disaster Recovery

Ursano et al. (2017) outlined that individuals typically follow a similar recovery trajectory after a disaster event. Beginning with the honeymoon phase, disaster victims first feel

intense camaraderie with those also recovering from loss, mainly because of increased collaboration and an influx of support (Ursano et al., 2017). The participants agreed that the week or two after their disaster was a time of important reconnection essential for their long-term healing; however, they did not regard collaboration and widespread community support as the most significant occurrence. Although some did mention their gratitude for things like store discounts and signs posted along travel routes, they recalled decompressing, managing urgent tasks, and accessing support from their most important people, not from the broader community, being most necessary. Reuniting with the individuals they thought they might never see again was intensely comforting and offered a sense of euphoria at a time of increasing practical and emotional difficulty. Despite the challenges that start to appear within the narratives immediately post-loss, like confirmation that their homes and belongings were destroyed, this time can still be accurately described as honeymoon-like simply because of the group's overwhelming feelings of relief that they and their loved ones were safe, and because it was the only time they were surrounded exclusively by others that understood their experience and loss.

Another phase of recovery identified in the participant narratives that aligns well with existing literature is the last stage of recovery, reconstruction (Ursano et al., 2017). All the participants were able to reflect on their disaster, identify their resultant growth, and ultimately accept how the event influenced their lives. However, the phase sandwiched between reconstruction and the subsequently discussed honeymoon period is not as well-reflected in existing research. As established in Chapter 4, the participants universally noted, to varying degrees, a general lack of awareness related to their disaster-induced home loss and simultaneous educational expectations. This minimal understanding is apparent in their interactions with others through the lack of formalized policy, lack of event acknowledgement, and, at times, overt social

displays trivializing their event. It was also clear that this lack of understanding was an internal experience too. Participants minimized their feelings and refrained from accessing support. In educational settings, they often opted to keep the details of their event private based on either a fear that it would not be received well or an assumption that their loss was not significant enough to warrant needing help.

The timing of these internal and external experiences aligns well with the disillusionment phase of disaster recovery. However, the rationale for these feelings provided within the literature is only partially reflective of the reasons participants of this study cited. Existing research attributes a variety of circumstances ranging from the need to scapegoat (Ursano et al., 2017), the reduction in publicly funded supports (Morganstein & Ursano, 2020; DeWolf, 2000), and an increase in exhaustion and competing practical demands (Morganstein & Ursano, 2020) to the emotions exhibited by individuals during this time. Based on the participants' narratives, a bigger-picture conversation seemed missing that could better explain the circumstances and responses highlighted within other works.

Disillusionment or Disenfranchisement?

During my interview with Diane, she mentioned casually that a person might not even begin processing their home loss and the grief that comes with it until after the initial shock of the disaster event has worn off. While grief is vaguely noted within the phases of disaster recovery as something individuals must “work through” (Ursano et al., 2017), this mention of grief prompted me to consider what implications a grief response might have on why and how a person experiences disillusionment in the first place.

Grief, by definition, "is the multidimensional response someone might feel as the result of losing someone or something that [they have] developed a love or an attachment to" (Thai & Moore, 2018, p. 5). While commonly utilized in relation to the loss of a person, a grief response

can occur during a variety of life transitions including, but not limited to, relocation, migration, loss of physical items, changes in career, or changes in family structure (Parkes, 1998). How we experience the resulting grief from these transitions is impacted by various factors, one of which is how our societal institutions validate the loss (Doka, 2017). Grief becomes more complicated and difficult to navigate "when others do not acknowledge that the individual has a right to grieve" (Doka, 1989, p. 4); an experience there is convincing evidence to indicate occurred after the disaster-induced home loss of this study's participants, specifically as it relates to their education.

Disenfranchised grief is "grief that [people] experience when they incur a loss that is not… openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned, or publicly mourned" (Doka, 1989, p. 4). Significant change and the loss of material possessions are both recognized as experiences that can often result in disenfranchisement (Doka, 2017). When I first came across Doka's (1989) theorization of disenfranchised grief, I had some apprehensions regarding its applicability in this work. For one, the term "disenfranchised" is politically weighted, often referring to marginalized groups and the binary conception of rights they do or do not have (Robson & Walter, 2013). The wording made me initially assume that the grief being discussed was either entirely accepted and acknowledged by society's institutions or not at all. In the case of my findings, neither of these options was accurate. All the participants noted news organizations, government agencies, family, friends, stores, and even strangers offering support, encouragement, and condolences after their disaster-induced home loss. They experienced acknowledgement of their event initially. However, by the time they had returned to their educational settings there was no mention of their loss from their institutions.

As reflected in both Doka's (2003) and Morganstein and Ursano's (2020) work, after a disaster event, there is often an increase in support during the immediate aftermath of disaster-induced losses. However, these supportive behaviours dissipate quickly, especially when no human lives are lost (Doka, 2017). As a result, it is helpful to picture disenfranchised grief as a continuum rather than a binary experience (Robson & Walter, 2013). The difficulty the participants faced was initially resoundingly acknowledged, but that validation was withdrawn quickly. This retraction or complete omission of acknowledgment was especially evident in the context of their post-secondary environments. Seemingly, this absence of consistent acknowledgment is one of the most significant influences of the post-secondary experience on their disaster-induced home loss navigation.

Post-Secondary and Self-Disenfranchisement

You may be thinking, okay, but is it an institution's responsibility to reach out to students after a disaster-induced home loss? The participant narratives suggest, yes, and for an important reason. When a loss is not publicly acknowledged, individuals are left to assume the reactions of their environments. This void often results in a fear that one's grief will not be accepted as “real”, that their grief will be perceived as weakness, or that some unintended consequence will result from their sharing (Cesur-Soysal & Arı, 2022). These feelings were reflected pervasively in the educational recollections of participants after they lost their homes. Uncertainty about expectations, feelings of isolation, repression, and an ongoing perception that they would be looked upon negatively for sharing were exposed in all of the narratives collected. A lack of acknowledgement from their educators and institutions resulted in the participants suppressing their experiences with hardship and grief, a process referred to as self-disenfranchisement (Cesur-Soysal & Arı, 2022).

Self-disenfranchisement results from individuals internalizing grieving rules (Kauffman, 2022), meaning the social norms that determine when we should feel grief, whose grief is considered valid, and what grieving behaviours are deemed appropriate (Kalich & Brabant, 2007). These rules, when internalized, result in individuals believing that what they are experiencing is inappropriate or unusual based on the response of their environments. Most participants displayed these feelings. For example, Jane pointed to the shame resulting from her assumption that everyone in her institution had “moved on” but her. Myka, in comparison, initially expressed that she was unfazed by her losses, even noting that she did not understand her family's reactions. However, upon reflection, she reconsidered this stance slightly, saying that perhaps she was affected differently than others she was observing. Both of these experiences could result from self-disenfranchisement, as the ability to express and process emotions was stifled (Albuquerque et al., 2021).

Regarding the educational experience of participants, self-disenfranchisement resulting from a lack of institutional acknowledgement created a volatile cycle. Academic institutions did not acknowledge losses incurred; therefore, participants did not feel their losses were valid within the educational setting. Consequently, as students, they did not reach out for needed support, while the academic institution likely assumed that if they needed support, they would ask for it. "The very nature of disenfranchised grief creates additional problems for grief while removing or minimizing sources of support" (Doka, 2017, p. 383), and these added complexities are evident in this cycle. However, within the data collected, there was a moment that could provide insight into how we might stop this pattern. After Ava's educator gave her grace and specifically pointed to the challenges she recognized Ava was facing, Ava gave herself permission to take care of her emotional health rather than continuing to avoid it. This action

demonstrates just how powerful a “small” acknowledgement of disaster-induced home loss, and its consequences, needs to be to have a potentially positive impact.

Fortunately, the participants all had support to call upon outside of their academic institutions to validate and acknowledge the difficulty they were experiencing and to provide tangible resources when needed. Throughout the data analysis, I have wondered if that external support could be the factor that enabled the participants to continue and complete their studies as planned. All participants noted at least one solid social bond they utilized post-loss. Ava and Jane, whose parents did not lose their homes, recalled specific moments of parental support as being significant in their loss recovery, as well as their relationships with friends and loved ones. However, for all the other participants whose childhood homes were lost, an existing significant other or a peer group provided most of the needed support. These bonds contradict findings from Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) about the instability of peer support during post-secondary programming. While there certainly was a change in support after disaster-induced home loss, as outlined previously, close peer support seemed to remain stable or even strengthen through loss and simultaneous educational transition for this group of participants.

Conceptualizations of Home

Like their peer relationships, the participant's relationship to home, as a concept and place, adapted in response to their losses. Before their fires, participants recalled very place-based notions of home; a specific house in a particular neighbourhood. These conceptualizations were intertwined with various sensory experiences related to the dwelling and often extended beyond the house and into community spaces, such as the general neighborhood and its landmarks. However, when questioned further, the physicality of these spaces and even the items within them, were identified as less important than the feelings that the places represented for the participants. In alignment with Wise (2021), those that shared their story universally reflected

upon home primarily as a space of comfort and discussed the sense of uneasiness that came with the destruction of the solace the physical spaces provided.

Today, the prioritization of home as a space of comfort is one reflected by all the participants, although they have broadened and personalized the factors most attributable to this comfort, moving away from a place-based notion entirely. Instead, participants mentioned routines, family, friends, and community as being most responsible for their version of "home" as it is currently conceived, emphasizing a significant decrease in care for material possessions and spaces. The meaning of home is not shown to significantly change with age, but is impacted by life experience (Peace, 2015). So, we can safely assume this metamorphosis of home and its meaning is in response to their losses.

Ontological Security and Secondary Spaces of Comfort

While the participants all attributed meaningful growth to their expanded understanding of home, the initial loss of home was hugely jarring for two prevailing reasons. Not only was the home loss itself responsible for many of the transitions previously outlined, the loss of home thieved participants from having a constant and predictable place from which to navigate those transitions, otherwise known as their ontological security (Giddens, 1991). Certainly, this resulted in changes to overall health and well-being, as noted by Padgett (2007), and increases in uncertainty and instability, as found by Hawkins and Maurer (2011), but an interesting protective variable was present in the participants narratives and not found in existing research.

Because the participants were also students at the time of their loss, they were able to access familiar places that were not destroyed; their educational campuses and secondary housing, in the form of dorm rooms and off-campus accommodation. The act of being engaged in education meant that six of the seven participants interviewed had routines, living spaces, and peer groups in a place not consumed by fire. A home, of sorts, away from the home that had been

lost. This secondary space not only provided the participants with something familiar at a time of upheaval, but it also meant that some degree of ontological security remained after their home losses. Participants Myka, Diane, Taylor, and Addi really emphasized this, acknowledging that they were able to return to partial normality, because the spaces inhabited due to their education remained intact. Unlike the participants in Carales and López (2021) study, they had safe accommodation from which to plan the next steps of their lives and could return to some degree of external consistency, at a time when many other areas of their lives were unrecognizable.

The Blossoms and Moving Forward

"And only where the forest fires have sped… a sweet wildflower lifts its purple head… And only to the heart that knows of grief … there comes some purifying sweet belief… [that] life revives, and blossoms once again" (Johnson, 2016, p. 23).

As I consider fireweed and all it symbolizes, I cannot help but draw parallels between it and the upcoming section of this study. The sight of fireweed and its vibrant purple flowers is one of the first indications of progression on fire-scorched land (Mancini, 2018), a tangible signal that the barren landscape is ready to progress, despite all odds and assumptions. Like viewing the blackened scene after a wildfire, examining the interpretations of this study can compel us to consider negative implications and hardship above all else. However, just as the blossoms of fireweed shatter the misconception that progress is not possible, so too do the following sub-sections. Below, I discuss the blossoms that have come from this study, pieces of hope brought forth through the charred remnants. The ways in which we can assist those navigating disaster-induced home loss and full-time post-secondary programming are explored, new limitations expanded, and exciting and necessary research to maintain the growth of this research landscape recommended.

Supportive Recommendations and Schlossberg's 4 S's

If you will recall in Chapter 4, the layered entanglement of transitional experiences and emerging concepts found in the participant's stories made the work of separating the data collected into four categories, as required by my conceptual framework, impossible. Certainly, I understand the level of difficulty I had with this. The requirement of "sorting" experiences categorically goes against the very nature of my values as an educator and researcher, but also against the tenants of my methodology. Narrative inquiry requires that lived experience be communicated in a manner that preserves its authenticity and uniqueness, doing so requires "a particular combination of time and space manifested in [the stories retold]" (Kim, 2016, n.p.). The experiences shared cannot be reduced to fragments that reflect the categories where they are best "held". However, upon much reflection, there is still a way in which Schlossberg's 4 S's can be used during data analysis. The framework focuses on "the potential resources someone possesses to cope with transition" (Anderson et al., 2021, p. 28). When utilized within the counselling setting for which it was designed, counselors and their clients determine resources and potential limitations to plan a path forward together (Anderson et al., 2021). In this way, the framework is not used to compartmentalize experience, but instead, to guide future action. It is with this intention that I frame the following section.

Whether you are a student navigating disaster, an educator, or a leader writing policy, the following recommendations are meant to provide you with a starting place. While it would be insincere to make any grandeur promises about their application in every case, my belief, as supported by the findings of this work, is that we must acknowledge that navigating disaster-induced home loss as a student is a special and difficult circumstance deserving of our care. I have outlined some measures, categorized in alignment with Schlossberg's 4 S's, that may help

inform your actions when navigating disaster-induced home loss alongside post-secondary studies as either a victim or supporter.

Situation

The first series of practical considerations requiring action that one must be aware of, whether offering or accessing measures to assist with the difficulty of disaster-induced home loss, relate to the initial disaster situation itself. As evidenced in the participant's recollections, the days during and immediately after a disaster event comes with a specific kind of overwhelm, and the expectations of educational institutions and educators may need adjustment in recognition of this. For example, "traditional course deadline policies uphold the myth of the "normal" student, assuming students face few and equal barriers to completing work on time" (Hills & Peacock, 2022, p. 1). These policies often require students to give notice of their absence or ask for extensions before the deadline is missed. However, due to the communication system failures outlined universally in the participant's narratives and commonly experienced during disaster events (EL Khaled & Mcheick, 2019), this kind of proactive student behaviour is often impossible and should not be expected.

Even for students with communication system access and capability, it is likely that they will not have any concrete information to give during this time. Accurate information during and post-disaster is challenging to come by, as people rely heavily on word of mouth or speculation from media outlets (Kawasaki et al., 2012). The difficulty of needing to convey information to others while not having access to “good” information themselves was frequently shared by the participants. This reality made the constant queries being directed at them difficult to manage, resulting in further overwhelm. To avoid this additional layer of hardship, students, educators, and institutions should prioritize safety and basic needs during disaster-induced home loss events over communication obligations and assessment requirements; these matters can be attended to

when the student has clear and concise information regarding their loss and has had time to consider their academic plan.

As an educator, I understand the practical implications of open-ended deadlines and minimal expectations of communication, but the participant narratives can direct us toward an alternative. The participants all noted the one to two weeks after their loss as significant for various reasons. They cited using this time to attend to pressing practicalities and their initial emotional responses and ultimately used it to establish how to navigate their transitions moving forward. Additionally, some participants noted how frustrating it was not to have written policy to turn to, to determine the kind of treatment they could reasonably expect from their educators and institutions. For these reasons, to address the situationally imposed limitations in the immediate aftermath of disaster and loss, I recommend that institutions grant students the gift of time and develop a clear policy outlining the allocation of an automatic leave, subject to a student losing their home in a disaster event. Additionally, this policy should clearly outline who the student, when they can reasonably do so, should contact and notify of their loss. Ideally, this would be limited to a single person or role to reduce the amount of communication required by the student.

Support and Strategies

"Having accessible, reliable, and adequate mechanisms in place can help buffer the negative risks associated with losses by compensating for …disruptions" (Weaver et al., 2021, p. 62). So, in addition to allocating time to victims of disaster-induced home loss and streamlining their process of initial communication with their educational institution, there is a need for interactions that "promote coping with transitions… and [are] tailored to the needs of [each] individual" (Anderson et al., 2021, p. 17). These specific supportive behaviours and strategies will extend beyond the initial disaster event and perhaps beyond actions that can be neatly

included within formalized policy. Due to their unique position as both a protective and risk factor for students navigating the transitions that come after a disaster-induced home loss, educational institutions and educators must be intentional about the kinds of support they offer and the strategies they utilize to help students.

Overwhelmingly, the participants mentioned that, above all else, they needed to be reminded that the experience they were navigating would be challenging to anyone and that they were allowed to feel something in response to that difficulty. The disenfranchisement of their transitions, and subsequently grief, was a significant factor that impeded their ability to cope. Therefore, acknowledgement and validation are essential supportive behaviours that students must continuously be offered after a disaster-induced home loss. Fortunately, these actions do not need to be complicated. Educators can acknowledge student experience by consistently reiterating affirmative statements in person or via email, meeting informally with the student to discuss course plans or details of the event the student may wish to share, and encouraging the student to access supports offered by the institution (Munoz & Rendon, 2011).

Institutions can amplify this acknowledgement by providing targeted messaging and support to victims of disaster events, especially when those events occur within the same geographic region as the educational space. These actions can be formal, such as specific offerings from student psychological services, or informal, such as creating a place for students navigating disaster-induced home loss to connect. Specifically, support groups can help members reframe perspectives, reduce feelings of isolation, learn from others, and have their experiences and emotions validated and accepted (Pan et al., 2005). Based on the preferences indicated by the participants, their success with peer support, and their reluctance as emerging adults to seek professional help, peer-based support groups have the potential to be especially effective.

The burden of needing to seek information and advocate for themselves in addition to navigating their immense volume of transition was also a significant stressor indicated by the participants. This stress, partnered with common post-secondary barriers to self-advocacy such as fear of stigma, lack of knowledge of supports and how to access them, type of course and instructor, and personal coping styles (Lindsay et al., 2018), meant that they often attempted to cope independently out of fear of unintended consequences or judgment from others, primarily their educators. To combat these issues, I recommend that those offering support reduce barriers by assuming some of the responsibility of implementing strategies and bringing resources and guidance directly to students without needing the students to ask. For example, once notified of a student's disaster-induced home loss, educators and institutions should respond with compassion by "adjusting assignments, extending deadlines, and offering credit/no credit options—thus helping students make it through an incredibly challenging period" (Glazier, 2022, p. 157). Additionally, access to technology and resources such as textbooks and class notes were all losses incurred by the participants. They recommended that institutions and educators grant access to previously covered class materials where possible to help ease their transition back into academics post-loss.

Self

Self refers to one's internal resources that foster coping during transition and hardship (Anderson et al., 2021). For this reason, this final recommendations sub-section is directed towards students navigating disaster-induced home loss and written in a manner reflective of that intention.

Before outlining some specific things that may help you, it is essential to mention that just as the study participants had varied experiences and individualized coping preferences, you will too. Your journey will be unique, and there is no right or wrong way to manage your

academics and your disaster-induced home loss. You may leave your program, take a break, or continue as planned; all of these possibilities are valid. However, should you decide to move forward with your studies, here are some thoughts based on ideas that emerged from the participant's stories and are supported by other existing works that you may benefit from. At the very least, I hope you read this and feel less alone.

As indicated in Chapter 4 and subsequent sections of this chapter, the volume of transition you may encounter due to your home loss is more than often acknowledged or understood. Because of this general lack of awareness, your experiences and the emotions that will come with them may not be fully recognized by others. While this is an unfortunate reality, you should work diligently to recognize the changes that are occurring in your life along with the potentially resultant grief and find ways to support yourself through these events and feelings. Attig (2004) calls the behaviours we can utilize to carry ourselves through grief and prevent self-disenfranchisement "enfranchised hope" (p. 210). Separated into two fundamental actions, "soul work" and "spirit work", Attig (2004) emphasized the need for individuals to engage in meaning-finding and meaning-making within their lives while they mourn a loss.

> To make themselves at home again, including at home with reminders not only of absence but of [the] abiding presence [of their losses]… meaning-finding is a central, albeit often overlooked and misunderstood, aspect of the constructive work of grieving. Mourners are daunted by challenges to give their daily lives inevitably new shape and substance… but mourners can also hope to reach through the pain of these struggles and stretch into inevitably new contexts and ways of living that allow them to thrive again, find and make new meanings. (Attig, 2004, p. 211)

This endeavour, like all experiences with grief, is highly individualized. However, constructive efforts to find and make meaning, such as discussing your experience with others, reflecting independently, practicing gratitude, and critically examining how you view your transitions and losses, are all potentially helpful behaviours to engage in (Bierema, 2019).

While the emotional toll of disaster-induced home loss is heavy, the practical implications that come with it add further emotional complexity. The participants stated that the layering of so many transitions resulted in intense feelings of overwhelm from the moment of their disaster's impact and into their various stages of recovery. With a broad definition that includes everything from "feelings of slipping into impersonality, dissolution of the personality, nonexistence, being smothered, engulfed, flooded, drowned, fragmented, entrapped, devoured, of being unreal, or unable to cope" (Hurvich, 2000, p. 618), overwhelm is different for everyone. However, most participants attempted to cope with overwhelm in similarly unproductive ways. Avoidance, suppression of feelings, refraining from connecting with others, and increased alcohol consumption were all identified by the participants and are common unhealthy coping mechanisms utilized by post-secondary students during times of duress (Salimzadeh et al., 2021). Although it is essential to recognize that these mechanisms are a means of survival and should not be subjected to judgment, there are more helpful ways to combat overwhelm. Maslach and Leiter (2016) outlined evidence-based behaviours to help individuals engage with their overwhelm productively:

- change work patterns (e.g., working less, taking more breaks, balancing work with the rest of one's life);
- develop coping skills (e.g., cognitive restructuring, conflict resolution, time management);

- obtain social support (from family, friends, and others);
- utilize relaxation strategies;
- promote good health and fitness; and
- develop a better self-understanding (via various self-analytic techniques, counselling, or therapy). (p. 109)

Ultimately, if you experience being overwhelmed, you will need to try various strategies to find the ones that work best for you, and I recommend that you try behaviours or supportive measures that you may not have otherwise considered. For example, all but one participant stated that they were reluctant to engage in formal therapy after their disaster-induced home loss and refrained from seeking professional support. However, the majority wished, in hindsight, that they had sought the help of a psychologist or a similarly qualified individual. These reflections demonstrate that sometimes the behaviours we have never previously engaged in can be the most helpful when navigating unexpected change.

Revisiting Limitations from Chapter 3

"Limitations are normal and a part of all social science research" (Flamez et at., 2017). While these limitations should be addressed before conducting research, they should also be revisited if unanticipated limitations appear throughout participant recruitment, data collection, or data analysis (Greener, 2018). As discussed in Chapter 3, the anticipated limitations for this study included varying levels of participant interest and involvement, personal bias, the time-based and ever-changing nature of personal narratives, and the prioritization of fire and flood events in the research sampled in the literature review. When I reconsider these limitations, they all remain pertinent to the findings and conclusions offered by this study. Additionally, new limitations have presented themselves as a result of the participant group that volunteered to take part in this research.

First, all the participants experienced disaster-induced home loss due to a wildfire, as mentioned in Chapter 4. While I assume that the complexities regarding home loss and subsequent school navigation would be similar had other disasters been included, the situational aspects of the disaster's impact would likely be very different. Second, all the individuals that responded to my recruitment survey and the people who were selected self-identify as women, were between the ages of 30-40 when interviewed, and enrolled in undergraduate programming at the time of their event. Results from other studies demonstrate that our responses to grief (Ase et al., 2019), support-seeking behaviours (Brown et al., 2021), and the manner with which we respond to disaster events (Enarson et al., 2018) are all highly gendered. Factors such as age and stage of life also matter a great deal in terms of how a transition is managed (Anderson et al., 2021), and would therefore likely implicate the responses offered by participants to the questions posed by this study. These differences indicate that the experiences captured reflect a valuable but restricted perspective on disaster-induced home loss and simultaneous post-secondary navigation.

Lastly, all of the participants had insurance at the time of their disaster-induced home loss. Two participants explicitly stated that they would not have been able to continue their studies if it were not for the guaranteed financial support of their insurance policy. Unfortunately, there are limited studies about insurance status and disaster or home loss recovery. However, one can safely assume that navigating disaster-induced home loss as a student without the financial support offered by insurance would be a different experience than that of one with that protective resource. These unanticipated limitations present exciting opportunities for future study. In the following section of this chapter, they are addressed as I make recommendations for future inquiries into disaster-induced home loss.

Recommendations for Future Research

I wish I could confidently say that research such as this is unnecessary. However, based exclusively on the severity and frequency of disaster events resulting in wide-scale home loss since I began this project, my hope is not our reality. The truth is, as disaster becomes more pervasive, its consequences will impact an increasing number of individuals in many settings. As an educator and researcher, my primary interest pertains to students, their well-being, and disaster. Consequently, my recommendations align with that interest.

My initial series of suggestions seek to fill gaps still present due to the limitations of this study. First, I recommend that further research be done to explore expanded demographics. Participants of various genders, age groupings, ethnicities, and levels of education can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experience of disaster-induced home loss as a student. In addition, individuals that did not complete their program due to reasons related to their disaster-induced home loss, or took a leave of absence from their program, should be studied. These students could provide comparative data that would give insight into the varying circumstances that support or hinder student success after a disaster-induced home loss. For the same reasons, students that were not insured at the time of their loss should also be included in future work. My final recommendation based on the limitations present in this study would be to broaden the research scope to locations across Canada. Including participants from different places increases the likelihood for other socio-natural disaster events to be discussed and potential distinctions highlighted.

The following recommendations relate to questions that presented themselves as a result of the data collected in this study. Most significantly, the role of institutions as both a protective and risk factor during student transition and grief is an interesting and vital pathway to travel if we wish to better understand the experiences of adult learners in formal settings. Questions

regarding student support mechanisms, especially related to family systems after a disaster, also need answers. How familial dynamics change after the loss of a family home and parental responses to the loss of the house where they raised their children were significant topics the participants raised. Specific studies on these areas would provide further insight into the holistic experience of disaster-induced home loss and expanded understanding. Also associated with the support students receive is the need to examine post-secondary educator narratives. Identifying how educators experience offering support to a student after a disaster-induced home loss and the barriers that may exist could help address the gaps between students and their educational spaces.

Post-Secondary Student Stories of Disaster-Induced Home Loss: A Closing Reflection

"Your life is a story of transition. You are always leaving one chapter behind while moving on to the next" (Anonymous, n.d).

The writing of these final paragraphs marks a bittersweet moment for me. So much of this work has been about transition. In closing this final chapter, I have realized that I am once again being thrust into the disorienting, exciting, terrifying, and magical world of change. For the past three years, I have been a doctoral student, a collector of stories, a curious researcher, and a writer. Now, at least one of those roles is coming to an end. While I am not sure what the future has in store, hearing about transitional experiences from others and reflecting throughout these pages about some pivotal transitions of my own has provided me with comfort and an overwhelming sense that all will be okay. In both its production and findings, this research has demonstrated that we can learn and grow even while navigating our most difficult life circumstances.

Throughout this project's completion, so many beautiful lessons were shared. The adult learners that participated in this study navigated transitions at a frequency higher than currently

discussed within literature due to their disaster-induced home losses. These changes often extended beyond the individual learner and into their family and support systems, causing widespread disruption and emotional difficulty. Regarding their post-secondary experience, the unexpected influx of transition caused hardship and enhanced stress and overwhelm. Largely, these feelings were suppressed as the participants did not feel that their educational institutions acknowledged their experiences, leading to unhealthy coping mechanisms and self-disenfranchisement of their grief.

However, the findings also suggest that although educational institutions can improve how they support students after disaster-induced home loss, they can also serve an important protective role for adult learners. Consistency in a time of chaos and a home away from home to securely work through many challenges were the most notable positive qualities that participants associated with their post-secondary enrollment. These new understandings can possibly be used to facilitate healthier and more meaningful navigation of disaster-induced home loss, but more importantly, highlight that there is still much to learn about this unique experience. Therefore, we must continue to better understand disaster-induced home loss and its implications for post-secondary education. As an educator, I look forward to continuing to engage in this work and invite anyone that may feel compelled to join me.

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Appendix A: Facebook Recruitment Post

Participants Needed.

Did you lose your home in an Albertan disaster event while completing a full-time post-secondary program? If so, I hope to hear from you!

I am a University of Calgary doctoral student conducting a study to better understand the transitions experienced by adult learners that have simultaneously navigated a disaster-induced home loss and their full-time studies. This study is open to anyone who:
Lived in Alberta at the time of their disaster event, and subsequent home loss (physical dwelling)
Was enrolled in a full-time post-secondary program (polytechnic, college, or university certificate, diploma, degree, master's, or doctorate) at the time of their home loss
Completed their post-secondary program

If this sounds like something that you might be interested in, please fill out the preliminary survey linked below:

Survey: << URL >>

Questions/Concerns
If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Alisha David
EdD Candidate, Werklund School of Education,
<<email>>

Dr. Janet Groen
Principal Investigator, Werklund School of Education,
<<email>>

[The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this study (REB22-0719)]

Appendix B: Eligibility Survey: Student Stories of Disaster Induced Home-Loss

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:
Alisha David, EdD Candidate, Werklund School of Education, <<email>>

Supervisor: Dr. Janet Groen, Werklund School of Education, <<email>>

Title of Project: There's No Place Like Home: Post-Secondary Student Stories of Disaster-Induced Home Loss

This consent form is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Participation is completely voluntary, and confidential.

Purpose of the Study:
The purpose of this study is to explore the narratives of adults who have experienced disaster-induced home loss in Alberta while simultaneously navigating a full-time post-secondary program. This research is being carried out as a part of the researcher's doctoral dissertation.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?
The following survey will determine your eligibility as a study participant and will take less than 10 minutes to complete.

Data collected will be utilized to determine eligibility for participation in the study, and all data collected will be stored in a password-protected server, and deleted within two weeks of participant selection. Information collected will not be shared for purposes other than participant recruitment and selection.

As a participant, you are free to withdraw from the survey at any time by simply closing the internet window.

By choosing YES, you indicate that you:
1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and
2) you agree to proceed

- Yes
- No

Questions/Concerns:
If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Alisha David
EdD Candidate, Werklund School of Education,
<<email>>

Dr. Janet Groen
Principal Investigator, Werklund School of Education,
<<email>>

Q1: Did you lose your home in a disaster event?
- Yes
- No

Q2: Approximate date of home loss (Month and Year)
[Fill In]

Q3: Please select the type of disaster that resulted in your home loss:
- Wildfire
- Flood
- Tornado
- Earthquake
- Mudslide
- Other:
[Fill In]

Q4: Were you enrolled in a full-time post-secondary program at the time of your home loss?
- Yes
- No

Q5: If yes, please describe the program that you were enrolled in [example: Bachelor of Education Degree]:
[Fill In]

Q6: Approximate date of program start (Month and Year)
[Fill In]

Q7: Approximate date of program completion (Month and Year)
[Fill In]

Q8: Did you complete your program as planned? (Without needing to take a term or year off, without reducing your course load, etc.)
- Yes
- No

If you are willing to be interviewed about your experience via Zoom at a mutually determined time, please fill in the following:

- Name [Fill In]
- Gender/Preferred Pronouns [Fill In]
- Telephone [Fill In]
- The best time to call [Fill In]
- Email [Fill In]

Any Additional Comments: [Fill In]

Appendix C: Interview Guide

General:

1. Introductions (participant/researcher)
2. What does home mean to you?
    - Has that definition changed in the time since you lost your home?

Situation:

3. Please tell me about your disaster experience. What was losing your home in a disaster event like for you?
    - How did your educational experience change after your home loss event?
    - What do you consider to be the contributing factors that resulted in these changes?
    - What aspects of this situation were most difficult for you? What aspects were most helpful?

Supports:

4. Can you describe any of the supports you utilized as you navigated school and your loss?
    - Did you inform your post-secondary institution (educators, support staff, management) of your home loss? Why or why not?
        - What were your experiences with these individuals? What supports did they offer, if any?
    - Did you have any support outside of the school environment (family, friends, professionals, etc.)?

Self:

5. What personal characteristics helped or hindered your ability to navigate your post-secondary programming after a disaster-induced home loss? Why?

- What motivated you to continue your studies despite losing your home?
- Do you think you viewed yourself differently after your home loss event (capability, wellbeing, etc.)? If so, how? If not, why do you think that is?

Strategies:

6. What were some of the strategies you utilized that you feel were helpful when navigating school and disaster-induced home loss?
    - Can you think of any strategies not offered that might have made a difference for you during that time?
        - Self-implemented strategies?
        - Strategies utilized by those in your educational institution?
        - Strategies used by others?

Appendix D: Mock Stage 4 Collaborative Retelling

Participant Zero

00:01:49
Interviewer: Okay. Let's begin. Please tell me about your disaster experience.

00:02:01
Mock Participant: Yeah. So. My home loss was very strange, [redacted]. It was just this really kind of chaotic weekend, much like many weekends we've had like here in years past where there was lots of smoke, the sky was orange, there was a fire really close. I can remember feeling really uneasy, like the days leading up to my boyfriend at the time had some sort of a work party or something like that. I can't remember the detail of it, but I can remember being there and not wanting to be there, wanting to leave because I was anxious about being away from our home - but wildfires are really common in our area so everybody was sort of like, don't worry about it, don't freak out about it. The next morning the fire entered town. I was out in the front lawn and one of my neighbors was also out on her lawn, and she kind of looked across the street and we hadn't really talked before. She looked across the street and she said, I'm really scared. And I just had this sick, sick feeling in my stomach. So, I went inside and I said, we need to go and we need to pack a bag and I think that we should leave town - this is just getting really scary, and it was sort of met with like, you're kind of being crazy. You don't need to worry like this has happened before – but I knew something just felt different. We went to try to call people, but the phone lines were dead, so we got into our vehicle and started driving to his parents' house – but on the radio, there was just this repeating message that we were safe and that we didn't need to evacuate. By the time we were like halfway across town, a phone call finally came through from his sister and she told us that her house was on fire and that they had barely escaped. It was so weird because we got that information, and the phone line went dead again – but still, the radio was saying not to panic. At that point though, I was having a full panic attack. We decided to go to my parent's house on the other side of town and it was just chaos when we were driving – people were running, it was bumper to bumper traffic. I thought we were all going to get stuck and burn alive, but we made it to my parent's house. I bolted through the door and I'm like, pack a bag. Let's go. The town's on fire. And my mom was making spaghetti, and I'll never forget it because she was like, maybe you should just sit down and have a have a bowl of spaghetti, like before we hit the road. My mom was just so certain that we would hear from someone in a formal capacity if the town was, in fact, on fire. And it wasn't until we started hearing explosions that my mom started taking it seriously, but at that point we were trapped in town. The highways on both sides of town were closed because there was a fire on both sides and we were just told to go to an open parking spot.

00:03:28
Interviewer: Wow. That sounds really difficult.

00:03:33
Mock Participant: Yeah, I would consider it probably traumatic in terms of it being a formative memory. But oddly there's like, this weird sense of calm also, in all of the chaos. I can just remember the town being, like, eerily quiet and everybody being eerily quiet. As I remember it, it was all just so slow.

Commented [AD1]: Identifying detail removed

Commented [AD2]: Disaster as a common experience

Commented [AD3]: Participant note, Interview 2: Never did pack a bag

Commented [AD4]: External minimization was an important/common factor in lack of reaction/apathy

Commented [AD5]: Communication difficulty

Commented [AD6]: Mixed messages

Commented [AD7]: Panic, fear of imminent death

Commented [AD8]: Pervasive apathy

Commented [AD9]: Quote re: juxtaposition of experience/insider perspective