

Gun Thy Neighbor:
Individualism and Disaster Preparedness

Kay Bloom Real
Lewis & Clark College
Portland, Oregon

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Abstract

During the Cold War, people sought comfort from the fear of nuclear fallout within the walls of the single-family home. Individual preparedness was not only advocated by government officials, but perpetuated by fear of societal collapse in the aftermath of an atomic war. “Gun Thy Neighbor” attitudes, or a rejection community needs in favor of protection of the nuclear family, dominated popular culture beliefs. Individualistic behavior was touted as a prominent trait of American civic life. However, in response to fears of panic, research in the disaster field has shown how vital community connections are during and after disaster. Today, few people worry about nuclear fallout, but other threats take its place, such as the impending Cascadia earthquake. In my analysis of ten websites giving disaster preparedness advice regarding the Cascadia earthquake, I ask the question of whether individualistic narratives that predominated during the Cold War still exist today. Some of the websites reference the importance of community in successful preparedness suggesting a broader view of preparedness. Still, a majority of the websites showed an individualistic narrative. This is possibly due to media reports that falsely suggest that social panic will cause looting and other crimes. These falsified reports foster perceptions of social disintegration that likely lead to more individualistic approaches to disaster preparedness, which ignores the benefits that community connections serve in successful disaster preparedness and recovery.

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Introduction

“Can we know the risks we face, now or in the future? No, we cannot; but yes, we must act as if we do.”

~ Mary Douglas, *Risk and Culture*.¹

We face risk on a day-to-day basis. Most risks are on the individual level, voluntary, and for the most part inconsequential, like the act of crossing the road. Yet, some risks are much bigger, and affect entire communities, regions, or even entire countries. These are risks we have no control over and sometimes we are completely unaware of their threat until disaster strikes. This paper will focus on these large and uncontrollable risks and how people prepare for them.

The media has done an excellent job of making people fearful of societal and environmental risks. Fifty years ago, when the United States entered directly into the Cold War after the tumultuous years of World War II, Americans were told to fear nuclear fallout. The fear of a nuclear holocaust may have been exaggerated, but it was widespread among the general public.² In response to both these fears, and with urging from the government, the public retreated into their families and their homes, forming a barrier between them and the chaotic outside world.³ This movement inward is a representation of the trend of individualization in the American consciousness, as was

¹ Mary Douglas and Aaron B Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technical and Environmental Dangers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 1.

² Kenneth D. Rose, *One nation underground: the fallout shelter in American culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

³ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward bound: American families in the Cold War era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

highlighted by Alexis de Tocqueville's work "Democracy in America,"⁴ This trend of individualization was also manifested in disaster preparedness during the Cold War era.

Today the fear of nuclear fallout has subsided, but other fears have taken its place, such as the Cascadia earthquake that is anticipated to hit the northern California, Oregon, and Washington coasts in the next fifty years. It is expected to cause widespread destruction, not only along the subduction zone, but in tsunami danger zones as well. If you were worried about the impending Cascadia earthquake, do not fret; there is a plethora of literature advising the public on how to prepare for the upcoming doomsday.

My analysis will take the various types of disaster planning literature available today and examine if the present narrative is oriented towards the individual, or the community. Ultimately, I will be able to see if the same individualistic narrative of protecting one's home and one's family that was present during the Cold War era, still exists today and is being applied to other disasters, such as the Cascadia earthquake.

What the public is told to do in regards to disasters may not correspond to the realities of how the public actually behaves during times of disaster. In this regard, it is necessary to put disaster preparedness instructions into context with disaster research, a field pioneered by sociologist Charles Fritz that began during the Cold War years. Disaster research came as a result of worries of how society would function if a bomb were to strike.⁵ Fritz's early research concluded that the perception of social panic during times of disaster is in fact, false, and that community has actually been proven

⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey Claflin Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

⁵ Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster* (New York: Viking, 2009).

to be very important during times of disaster. Therefore, it is likely the fear of panic that has driven much of disaster planning to be individually focused.

My analysis indicates that while the narratives of disaster preparedness literature today have incorporated aspects of community involvement, they still reflect individualistic values that were present during the cold war, suggesting that there is a disconnect between the perceptions and realities of societal behavior during times of disaster. This disconnect may hinder effective preparedness and response.

This paper will first discuss how individualism has played a role in the American culture. I will then delve into how individualism was amplified through fear of nuclear fallout during the Cold War era and reflected in disaster preparedness. A narrative analysis of online preparedness literature surrounding the impending Cascadia earthquake will answer the question of whether these individualistic tendencies that existed during Cold War preparedness have been projected in modern day disaster preparedness. I will then discuss whether my findings coincide with the conclusions of disaster research that show the importance of community during disasters, and address the effectiveness of current methods of disaster preparedness.

American Individualism

In my analysis I focus on the presence of individualism. I first need to define how I will be using the term individualism, as it can have many connotations. Political thinker, Alexis de Tocqueville's definition of individualism in his iconic account on American life, *Democracy in America*, will serve as the foundation for my analysis. Individualism according to Tocqueville is,

A reflective and peaceable sentiment that disposed each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of those like him and to withdraw to one side with his family and his friends, so that after having thus created a little society for his own use, he willingly abandons society at large to itself.⁶

Individualism, as claimed by Tocqueville, is inherently American, and a power, he argues, that men aspire to have. Tocqueville wrote this influential work in the 1830's, proving that the idea of American individualism is nothing new.

Others have since written about American individualism. Geert Hofstede, a Dutch cultural researcher, uses a spectrum to determine the level of individualistic values of a country's citizenry.⁷ On one side of the spectrum is individualism, which refers to "cultures that emphasize the autonomy of the person" and on the other side is collectivism, which refers to "cultures whose most important values place emphasis on the dependency of individual with respect to in-groups."⁸ According to Hofstede's individualism/collectivism index, the United States ranks as the most individualistic nation out of 40 countries.

Mary Douglas puts individualism into context of other societal cultures through grid group theory. She argues that relationships between the values of individuals and social organization can be defined by this theory. Group refers to the relative strength of intimate connections, such as family, and grid refers to the level of rules and regulations within society.⁹ Below shows the classification of these relationships and the resulting social perceptions and world views:

⁶ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 482.

⁷ Valdiney V. Gouveia, and Maria Ros. "Hofstede and Schwartz's Models for Classifying Individualism at the Cultural Level: Their Relation to Macro-social and Macro-economic Variables." *Psicothema* 12 (2000)

⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹ Douglas and Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture*.

High Grid, low group	High grid, high group
Fatalism	Hierarchy
Individualism	Enclavism
Low grid, low group	Low grid, high group

Figure 1: Grid-Group Classification Scheme¹⁰

In placing America along this classification system, Douglas refers to American’s propensity to reject a central authoritative body. She argues that the United States was founded on basis that there should be little-to-no central authority in American politics. Even though she acknowledges America’s central authority has increased in power, “it is low on the scale of other large, industrial economies.”¹¹ At the same time, she writes that America is also “a border country,” in that there are “strong barriers identifying and separating the community from its nonmembers.”¹² In reality, it is difficult to place the United States in one single classification, but Douglas does argue that American society is made up of small, personal units that have an aversion towards outsiders.¹³ In this respect, Douglas description of American culture echoes Tocqueville’s idea of individualism.

The individualistic nature of the United States can be found in various aspects of American life. The phenomenon of the single-family house, and separation of the family from the rest of society serves as an illustration for this individualism. This culture of individualism, while it didn’t originate during the Cold War, was certainly amplified by it. Individualism is often linked to modernization, and as the U.S. emerged from WWII and entered into the Cold War, modernization

¹⁰ Barry Vaughan, “Cultured Punishments: The Promise of Grid-group Theory,” *Theoretical Criminology* 6, no. 4 (2002): 411–431.

¹¹ Douglas and Wildavsky. *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technical and Environmental Dangers*, 154.

¹² *Ibid.*, 139

¹³ *Ibid.*, 152

became a crucial factor in winning the war against the Soviets.¹⁴¹⁵ Tocqueville's definition of individualism will serve as the foundation for my understanding of Cold War narratives, as well as the basis for my narrative analysis of the Cascadia earthquake preparedness literature.

Cold War Tensions Portrayed in the Media

The cultural context of the Cold War is very important in understanding how Americans function during times of crisis. The Cold War is a useful lens to understand disaster planning for the impending Cascadia earthquake.

Tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States, and the increasing amount of nuclear armament in both countries in the years following Second World War had a profound impact on American culture. Nuclear weapons presented society with the most destructive thing they had ever witnessed. Fears of the nuclear bomb as an "apocalyptic terror weapon" began to increase following the Nagasaki and Hiroshima bombings. After it became known what these bombs were capable of, people began to fear the possibility of the end of mankind as a species.¹⁶ The development of nuclear weapons required a dramatic psychological shift. In her book, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War era*, historian Elaine Tyler May notes that, "the fear of nuclear annihilation had a powerful psychic hold on the nations subconscious."¹⁷ The ocean no longer served as a protective barrier between war and the United States. This was a significant change

¹⁴ Takeshi, Hamamura, "Are Cultures Becoming Individualistic? A Cross-Temporal Comparison of Individualism–Collectivism in the United States and Japan," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 16, no. 1 (2012): 3–24, doi:10.1177/1088868311411587.

¹⁵ David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Rose, *One nation underground*, 19.

¹⁷ May, *Homeward bound*, 23

in wartime landscape. Unlike in previous wars, "the American home had been put on the front lines of the Cold War."¹⁸ Kennedy's Berlin Crisis speech was the first warning that the war was being brought into the home, "the need for this kind of protection is new to our shores. But the time to start is now. In the coming months, I hope to let every citizen know what steps he can take without delay to protect his family in case of attack."¹⁹ It was now the responsibility of individual citizens to worry about preparing for war in their own backyards.

The Federal Civil Defense Administration and the media were successful in bringing attention to the threat of nuclear warfare. Safety drills, urban evacuation practices, and public service announcements telling Americans, "make no mistake... Civilians can be bombed," (see Fig. 2) assured that the threat would be at the forefront of everybody's attention.²⁰ Civil Defense worked hard to deliver the message that ordinary citizens were prone to attack. The nuclear age brought fears of the apocalypse into television, film, literature, and other forms of entertainment as a genre called "Nuclear apocalyptic."²¹ The message was even delivered to children in the form of "Bert the Turtle Says Duck and Cover."²² Rather than tell communities to come together, Kennedy urged individuals and families to take on preparing for fallout themselves. Federal Civil Defense literature and posters included statements such as "Your Family's Tomorrow may depend on how well you

¹⁸ Ibid., 4.

¹⁹ John F. Kennedy, "Report to the American People on the Berlin Crisis" (speech, The White House, July 25, 1961), University Honors, <http://universityhonors.umd.edu>.

²⁰ Rose, *One nation underground*, 7

²¹ Ibid., 38.

²² Ibid., 129.

prepare Today.”²³ The government believed that was that it was “the responsibility of each individual to prepare himself and his family for nuclear war.”²⁴ This perspective spurred a great deal of literature advertising individualized preparedness. Disaster preparedness continues to be a very large field today.



Fig. 2: Civil Defense Poster²⁵

Nixon’s Suburban Solution

Federal civil defense took on a new form during the early years of the Cold War. The new foreign policy was known as “containment culture,” or an American narrative during the Cold war that focused on attaining normalcy in everyday life.²⁶

²³ Susan Roy, “Better Homes & Bunkers: The Fallout Shelter for the Nuclear Family,” The Design Observer Group, accessed March, 2013, <http://observatory.designobserver.com/feature/better-homes--bunkers-the-fallout-shelter-for-the-nuclear-family/26858/>.

²⁴ Ibid., 18

²⁵ “Early FCDA Poster Series”, Civil Defense Museum, accessed April 28, 2013, <http://www.civildefensemuseum.com/artgal/trumanlib/index.html>

In order to deal with the threats of communism, it was thought that following the norms of American culture would provide security. In the famous “Kitchen Debate,” Vice-President Nixon and Soviet leader Khrushchev exchanged cultural perspectives in a full-scale model of the typical American home at the American Exhibition in Moscow. Appropriately, while in the kitchen of this model home, the conversation revolved around home appliances and the roles of women. Nixon asked, “Would it not be better to compete in the relative merits of washing machines than in the strength of rockets?”²⁷ The emphasis on washing machines and the ideal housewife was Nixon’s way of assuring the public that the key to winning the cold war was in America’s superior culture and the “secure, abundant family life of modern suburban homes.”²⁸ Weapons were scary, but people could find comfort and peace within the perfect home, the perfect family, and the perfect washing machine. In order to maintain this perfect lifestyle, even during times of disaster, many took steps such as building a family fallout shelter with all possible amenities.

During this time the ideal suburban home became the face of American freedom and security. The outside environment was charged with fear and threat, and the home acted as haven from the world. May describes how Americans embraced the ideal home and family life,

A home filled with children would create a feeling of warmth and security against the cold forces of disruption and alienation. Children would also be a connection to the future and a means of replenishing a world depleted by war deaths.²⁹

²⁶ Alan Nadel, *Containment culture: American narrative, postmodernism, and the atomic age*. (United States, Duke University Press, 1995).

²⁷ “The Kitchen Debate,” TeachingAmericanHistory.org, accessed Feb 24, 2013, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=176>

²⁸ May, *Homeward bound*, 18.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

At the time, America was emerging from WWII, one of the deadliest wars in human history, and jumping straight into a period of life or death tension. The suburban house and the nuclear family with distinct gender roles created meaning and security in “a world run amok.”³⁰ The focus of the post-war American family was pointed inwards. People focused on finding solace within the walls of their own home, and finding meaning within their own nuclear family. In dealing with the psychological effects of the Cold War, there was in internalization, and individualization of American values. The single-family house kept the family in and the world out.

The growing emphasis of the single-family home during the early Cold War years interestingly coincided with the rise of the suburbs themselves in the years following the Second World War. The Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans Administration provided home loans and mortgages for the development and purchase of new affordable homes. For example, the iconic Levittown—the first mass-produced suburb and prototype for all post war suburbs—was a result of these policies. It became cheaper to buy than to rent.³¹ This made it much more feasible for the middle class to achieve their dream of owning their own home.

The weight that was placed on the home and the family during the Cold War was not new to the atomic age, but an intensification of what had been occurring over the last century. Before the 18th century, “much of life was inescapably public” and as a result “community was more important

³⁰ Ibid., 64.

³¹ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 205.

in determining an individual's fate than was his family."³² In the mid-eighteenth century, as a result of industrial capitalism and the increase of manufacturing, men began to leave the home for work, and "the family became isolated."³³ Private life expanded and home and family "came to be a personal bastion against society."³⁴ The isolation of the nuclear family within the home arose out of industrialization, but has persisted through time and began to function as something to aspire to. This aspiration to own a home of one's own as well as the endeavor to be self-reliant is commonly referred to as "The American Dream."

The single-family home soon "became the paragon of middle-class housing, the most visible symbol of having arrived at a fixed place in society, the goal to which every decent family aspired."³⁵ The American dream manifested itself as owning a home in the middle of a large expanse of lawn, separated from neighbors. In his historical account of suburbia in the United States, Jackson describes how this middle-class American aspiration for privatization turned into a concrete symbol of suburbia,

By 1870 separateness had become essential to the identity of the suburban house. The yard was expected to be large and private and designed for both active and passive recreation, in direct antithesis to the dense lifestyle from which many families had recently moved. The new ideal was no longer to be part of a close community, but to have a self-contained unit, a private wonderland walled off from the rest of the world.³⁶

The desire for independence through the single-family home was not simply an attempt at having security from the dangerous public realm, but a desired status symbol that dates back to a

³² Ibid., 47.

³³ Ibid., 48.

³⁴ Ibid., 47.

³⁵ Ibid., 50.

³⁶ Ibid., 58.

century before. With people owning their own houses, lawns, cars, and appliances, individualization and containment of the family became the staple of suburbia and the American Dream. The idea of maintaining a certain lifestyle during times of disaster is the foundation for much of disaster preparedness, even today.

Containing the Family: The Fallout Shelter

The most exemplary representation of individualized disaster preparedness during the Cold War was the fallout shelter. This was a space where the nuclear family could be contained and protected from the outside world. The fallout shelter represents an iconic piece of architecture of the atomic age. In a 1961 September issue of Life magazine, president Kennedy urged citizens to follow advice and devise their own home fallout shelters.³⁷ The Berlin Crisis sparked people's interest in bomb shelters, and soon businesses started capitalizing on people's fears. Businesses attempted to revamp the widely held image of underground shelters as damp, dark cellars that smelled of mildew.³⁸ Shelters were stylized and incorporated in the home living space. As one advertisement exclaimed, "Why be drab about your shelter, when it's more fun, and costs no more to survive in style?"³⁹ A new consumer accessory was created for the modern home. Advertisements showed families gathered in their bomb shelter, smiling and playing with toys (see Fig. 2). Spaces for survival

³⁷ David Monteyne, *Fallout Shelter: Designing for Civil Defense in the Cold War*, (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2011), 35.

³⁸ Tom Vanderbilt, *Survival City: Adventures Among the Ruins of Atomic America*, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2010).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

became the new type of family room for the affluent. In his work on atomic architecture, Tom Vanderbilt illustrates the importance of the fallout shelter in suburban America,

The home fallout shelter was a new kind of space, one that tied the home to a hypothetical global confrontation—and to a new way of life, where the suburban nuclear family, relying on the ingenuity of industry, the doctrines of “preparedness,” and their own strength as a social unit, could wait out Armageddon in stylish, if spartan, comfort.



Fig 3.: Image of a family relaxing in a fallout shelter among supplies⁴⁰

Interestingly, the construction of shelters in people’s homes fostered a heated debate, known as “shelter morality.” One of the aspects of fallout shelters was the disturbing relationship between fallout shelter owners and their neighbors who were without shelters. It was argued that it was difficult to know the exact number of fallout shelters built, because those building them did not want others to know of its existence. People admitted that not only would he turn away an injured neighbor, but would not hesitate to kill them if need be. This has come to be known as “Gun Thy Neighbor” ethics.⁴¹ This moral dilemma is illustrated in many pieces of fiction. One great example is

⁴⁰ Walter Sanders, “Interior view of 4,500 lb. steel underground radia,” photograph, May, 1955, *Time & Life Pictures*, http://www.timelifepictures.com/source/search/details_pop.aspx?iid=53369088&cdi=0 (accessed April 28, 2013).

⁴¹ Charles Davis, “Gun Thy Neighbor?” *Time*, August 18, 1961.

an episode of the *The Twilight Zone* entitled “The Shelter,” which aired in 1961.⁴² It begins one evening in a typical American suburban community. A dinner party is interrupted by an announcement that there are unidentified objects heading for the US. In the 1960’s, this meant only one thing: nuclear attack. As panic sets in, it is discovered that only one family on the street has a bomb shelter. Their frantic neighbors ask to be let in, but are denied over and over again. The shelter was only built for 3 people, the husband, his wife and son. Things escalate quickly, and the neighbors who were affable dinner guests only 30 minutes before, break down the door of the shelter. They soon learn it was a false alarm, but the show successfully shows the commonly held fears of “shelter morality.”

Gun Thy Neighbor attitudes are a clear representation of individualistic perspectives that were present in disaster preparedness culture. Though they may be extreme, scenes like the one shown *The Twilight Zone* indicate the perceived absence of community values in times of disaster. The fallout shelter was effective in creating a space that was physically and socially separate from the outside world. In essence, it was amplified version of the single-family home.

Much of disaster planning today has shifted from the use of bomb shelters, but the question of “will I help my neighbor?” remains. The answer to this moral question serves foundation to analyzing the narratives of disaster preparedness literature for the Cascadia earthquake.

⁴² Rod Serling, “The Shelter” in *The Twilight Zone*, Television, directed by Lamont Johnson (1961; United States: CBS).

Disaster Planning Today

Today, the emphasis on nuclear disaster has subsided, but other disaster threats have pushed into the public eye. What constitutes a disaster is debated, but one definition of disaster is:

An event, concentrated in time and space, in which a society, or a relatively self-sufficient subdivision of a society, undergoes severe danger and incurs such losses to its members and physical appurtenances that the social structure is disrupted and the fulfillment of all or some of the essential functions of the society is prevented.⁴³

Regardless, disasters succeed at exposing society's physical and social vulnerabilities. Disasters are often referred to as agents of chaos, and widely held conventional wisdom believes that people will act irrationally during times of disaster.⁴⁴ Much like how fears of the cold war were spread through sensationalist media coverage, fear of social disintegration has also been influenced through media capitalizing on shocking rumors during disaster reporting. This fear was especially present during the Cold War era when it spawned a new field of research known as disaster research. This field originated during the early Cold War period in the 1940s and 50s and arose after the development of nuclear weapons fostered concern in the U.S. government "about how its own population would react in a nuclear war with the Soviet Union."⁴⁵ Officials were unsure of how the general public would behave after a nuclear attack. Fear of panic and "mass demoralization" contributed to

⁴³ Tierney, Kathleen J, Michael K Lindell, and Ronald W Perry. *Facing the Unexpected Disaster Preparedness and Response in the United States*, (Washington, D.C.: Joseph Henry Press, 2001).

⁴⁴ Russell Rowe Dynes, and Kathleen J Tierney, *Disasters, Collective Behavior, and Social Organization* (Newark; London; Cranbury, NJ: University of Delaware Press: Associated University Presses, 1994), 23.

⁴⁵ Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, 105.

systematic studies that were designed to answer the question of “group behavior following disasters.”⁴⁶ The sociologist Charles E. Fritz became one of the original pioneers of this field.

Since Fritz, disaster research has not only included societal behaviors following disasters, but also how individuals and communities prepare for them. Forewarning is necessary for individuals, families, and communities to adequately prepare for an impending disaster. Preparedness includes any activity that allows social units to respond effectively. Preparedness tactics vary between regions and differs from disaster to disaster. Reducing the impact of any disaster must include “reducing physiological vulnerability to hazards,” such as moving to an area with less risk, as well as cultural adjustments, or “reducing vulnerability through behavioral adaptation.”⁴⁷

This study will focus on disaster preparedness specific to the Pacific Northwest. Many of the disasters that affect the United States as a whole also affect the Pacific Northwest, such as flooding, fire, and terrorism. However, the region is prone to unique disasters resulting from its location on a subduction zone, such as earthquakes, volcanic activity, and tsunamis.

The Cascadia Subduction Zone runs from northern Vancouver Island to northern California. It is where the Juan de Fuca and Gorda plates subduct underneath the North America plate. The recurrence interval for the fault line varies along the four different segments, but the southern segment is estimated to have has a large earthquake about every 240 years. The last large earthquake

⁴⁶ Kathleen Tierney, Christine Bevc, and Erica Kuligowski, “Metaphors Matter: Disaster Myths, Media Frames, and Their Consequences in Hurricane Katrina” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 604 (March 1, 2006): 57–81. doi:10.2307/25097781.

⁴⁷ Tierney, Lindell, and Perry. *Facing the unexpected*, 12.

was in 1700, suggesting a large earthquake is now overdue.⁴⁸ There is a 37% chance that a mega earthquake of a magnitude 9 or greater will happen in the next fifty years.⁴⁹ These odds are similar to the odds America faced with nuclear fallout fifty years ago. The effects of this earthquake would be devastating, and very similar to what we saw after the Sumatra earthquake in 2004. Destruction will not only hit the Pacific Northwest, but tsunamis are expected to ripple across the Pacific. Despite the known dangers of this impending mega earthquake, it is surprisingly absent from the attentions of people who live in the area. Nonetheless, experts are warning people that preparation is necessary. My research will center on disaster preparedness literature associated with the Cascadia earthquake and the surrounding region. I will examine whether the individualistic focus that was evident in disaster preparedness during the Cold War is still evident today in Cascadia earthquake disaster preparedness literature.

Why the Cascadia earthquake

In order to answer my question of whether individualistic narratives of disaster planning during the Cold War have perpetuated through time, I needed to situate my analysis, not only in place, but also in time. Although there is concern today over nuclear proliferation, nuclear fallout has substantially subsided in the minds of many Americans since the Cold War. Today, there are more pertinent disaster threats, such as the looming Cascadia earthquake in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. I chose to look at this particular disaster because it is a tangible and predicted

⁴⁸ Jerry Thompson and Simon Winchester. *Cascadia's Fault the Earthquake and Tsunami That Could Devastate North America*. (New York: Counterpoint, 2011), xviii

⁴⁹ Ibid.

disaster that will likely have wide spread effects. The Cold War will serve as a framework to analyze modern-day narratives of Cascadia earthquake preparedness, and this will allow to me to form a more comprehensive view of the culture of disaster preparedness in America through time.

I realize the problems in juxtaposing nuclear fallout during the Cold War and the current Cascadia earthquake. First, one is classified as a geophysical natural hazard, while the other is a technological, or terrorist hazard. Secondly, one is a very real threat that scientists have agreed will happen at some point in the near future, while the other was only a perceived threat reinforced by media interpretations and the political climate at the time. With the help of government public service announcements and presence in the media, the fear of nuclear fallout was at the forefront of people's minds during the Cold War. While, on the other hand, the threat of the Cascadia earthquake is still surprisingly unknown, and one must go searching for it. Interestingly, while the Cascadia earthquake has not made mainstream headlines as the atomic bomb had, it poses a much larger and concrete threat.

Despite these differences, both hazards have preparedness literature urging the public to take actions to prepare in advance. While these actions may differ from disaster to disaster, I believe that by analyzing the Cascadia earthquake in relation to the Cold War will give me a broad perspective of the narratives of disaster planning in general. These narratives will hopefully give me insight to how Americans are thought to function during times of disaster throughout time.

Why did I choose this type of literature

Given the time limitations of this thesis, it is not possible to find out what people are actually doing to prepare, but it is possible to find out what they are advised to do. There is an abundance of

disaster planning literature available to the public. In the Cold War it was very out in the open, through public service announcements and advertisements. Today, the information may be there for only those who choose to look for it, but it is very easy to find. One of the most accessible forms of literature is the Internet. As a result, this is the type of literature that I chose to focus my analysis on. I decided on five different groups of websites: federal government departments focused on disaster planning; local governmental emergency management agencies; local nonprofit organizations devoted to disaster information and planning; individually run blogs that specialize in giving disaster planning information; and, commercial websites that offer products related to disaster preparedness. I chose two examples from each of these different groups to achieve a broad understanding of what was out there in terms of disaster planning advice and who was giving it. This would also allow me to see if there are patterns between the different groups.

Methodology:

Content Analysis

In order to systematically analyze narratives of each website and determine if there is a pattern between the groups, I chose to develop a content analysis for each website. I organized my analysis into a chart that displayed each website, and the answers to the following questions: “Is there emphasis on the community or the individual;” “Does it have a community preparedness section;” “Does it have a family/home preparedness section;” “Which section has more information, family/home, or community;” “Which types of hazards are discussed;” and, “What is the focus of

their preparedness.” Most of these questions have a simplified, or binary answer, which allows for a systematic analysis. Below I go into detail of how I answered each question.

To answer the first question of whether the emphasis is on the individual or the community, I created a coding system to determine a website’s narrative. I created a list of keywords that I thought conveyed a trend in the website’s narrative and demonstrated a targeted audience. By looking for these keywords in context, including their relative synonyms, I assumed they reflected the general narrative of each website. The keywords that I chose that I thought represented a community-oriented narrative are: engage, communities, connecting, partnerships, neighbors, together, meeting, and participate. The keywords and phrases that I chose that I thought represented an individually focused narrative are: your home, your family, immediate family, security, individual, yourself, protection, and defense. With these keywords in hand, I thoroughly went through the pages of each website and noted each time these words and their synonyms came up. Based on which group words showed up more frequently in, I concluded that this reflected the narrative of the website. This will also give me a sense of the intended audience of each piece of literature, whether for the community at large or directed towards the individual.

I also conducted a general content analysis of each website and looked for the focus of each website’s preparedness section, either community preparedness, or individual preparedness. I made the assumption that the importance each website placed on either community or individual preparedness is reflected by the amount of information each website includes in each section. I determined this by reviewing what types of preparedness each website included, and the amount included for each. Those that had more information regarding preparing the home or family

reflected an individualistic narrative, and those that had more information regarding preparing the community reflected a community oriented narrative.

The question of the focus or tagline of preparedness of each website is for the purpose of fact gathering, but also to gather a general sense of the goals of each website, and puts my narrative analysis in a big picture context. To answer this question, I looked at the mission of each organization or website, as well as the content and picked out key phrases and themes that repeated themselves.

The Literature

I chose each type of literature is by conducting a search of websites that fit into the various groups I chose to analyze: Federal government; local government; nonprofit; blogs; and, commercial websites. If the website provided enough material and was region or disaster specific to the Pacific Northwest, I chose to include it in my analysis. However, this was not possible in the case of federal agencies, as they don't specify based on region. In addition, one blog, Suburban Prepper is neither region, nor disaster specific, though I chose it because it is a high-trafficked preparedness blog that offered a perspective of some of the more extreme literature that was out there. Below I briefly describe each of my ten sources:

1. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): It falls under the Department of Homeland Security, or DHS. Its mission is, "to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards."⁵⁰ The agency acts as a liaison for

⁵⁰ "About FEMA," last modified Oct 31, 2012, <http://www.fema.gov/about-fema>.

the federal government's role in disasters and hazard threats, including preparations. FEMA handles all types of disasters, both natural hazards and man-made ones. From hurricanes to hazardous materials incidents, FEMA provides information on how to prepare for homes, businesses, and communities.

2. Ready: a campaign that was launched by FEMA and DHS in 2004. It is self-proclaimed as, “a national public service advertising (PSA) campaign designed to educate and empower Americans to prepare for and respond to emergencies” and its goal is “to get the public involved and ultimately to increase the level of basic preparedness across the nation.”⁵¹ Ready has a plethora of preparedness information specifically tailored for a wide range of disasters including fourteen types of natural disasters, four types of technological and accidental hazards, and six types of terrorist hazards.

3. Portland Bureau of Emergency Management (PBEM): The Bureau “works behind the scenes before, during and after emergencies to minimize the impacts on the community and promote a culture of resiliency.”⁵² The site includes information on hazards that are specific to the Portland region, including earthquakes, floods, volcanoes, landslides, tsunamis, and others. PBEM works to provide information to a wide range of communities in order to increase household action, as well as connect different bureaus and stakeholders in the emergency management planning process.

4. Emergency Management Division of the Washington Military Department (EMD-WA): Its purpose is to, “minimize the impact of emergencies and disasters on the people, property,

⁵¹ “About the Ready Campaign,” last modified July 30, 12, <http://www.ready.gov/about-us>

⁵² “About Us,” Portland Bureau of Emergency Management, accessed April 28, 2013, <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/pbem/53892>

environment, and economy of Washington State.”⁵³ The department is under the jurisdiction of Washington State, but manages local agencies for specific counties. The agency provides information on disasters, tips on preparedness, and resources for disaster assistance. Much of this information is oriented towards disasters specific to the Washington area, such as earthquakes.

5. Cascadia Region Earthquake Workgroup (CREW): The organization brings together a variety of actors such as businesses, scientists, and government officials to “reduce the effects of earthquakes and related hazards.”⁵⁴ CREW focuses solely on earthquake hazards, and specifically the Cascadia Earthquake. They provide comprehensive information about the earthquake and the region, and what one can do to prepare.

6. Planning for Resilience & Emergency Preparedness (PREP): PREP seeks to help “help Oregon residents get ready to come through a major disaster well and recover quickly.”⁵⁵ The focus is primarily on preparedness, and specifically on tsunamis and earthquakes, because, “if you’re ready for an earthquake, you’re pretty much ready for anything.”⁵⁶

7. Trace My Preps: This blog offers the reader extensive first hand resources about how to prepare for “SHTF” and “TEOTWAWKI” scenarios. These are acronyms for commonly referenced scenarios in the disaster preparedness genre, standing for “Shit Hits The Fan,” and “The End Of The World As We Know It,” respectively. The blog includes posts from its namesake Trace, sometimes his wife, and various guest writers, that record the steps they have taken or plan to take to

⁵³ “Our Mission,” Washington Military Department Emergency Management Division, accessed April 28, 2013, http://www.emd.wa.gov/about/about_index.shtml

⁵⁴ “About CREW,” CREW, accessed April 28, 2013, <http://crew.org/about-crew>

⁵⁵ *ibid*

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

avoid the inevitable. The blog's tagline is "Moderate Prepping (not whack-job crazy)," which is an important distinction in the world of preparedness advice, as many survivalists are viewed as eccentric and paranoid.⁵⁷ Each post reflects on what their family has accomplished, or steps one can take to be more prepared for whatever arises in the future.

8. The Suburban Prepper: While not location specific, this provides insight into some other types of disaster preparedness literature that exists. This blog highlights ways for someone who lives in suburbia to minimize impacts and increase chances for survival in the case of a SHTF and TEOTWAWKI scenarios, and provides a wide variety of information and steps for families and individuals to prepare.

9. Portland Preparedness Center (PPC): An emergency supply store that is located both physically in NE Portland, and virtually online. They offer supplies for purchase ranging from water filtration devices to medicine and emergency food. PPC offers products that offer the individual protection against the "what if" scenario.

10. Northwest Shelter Systems (NWSS): A commercial organization that sells and installs private nuclear bomb shelters. The website's offerings are limited to fallout shelters—a more modern version of what was being offered during the Cold War. They custom design all of their shelters to the liking of their clients, and they act as a construction company as well.

⁵⁷ "About Trace," TraceMyPreps, accessed April 28, 2013, <http://tracemypreps.com/>

Results:

Below I outline the results of my content and narrative analysis for each website. A breakdown of my results can be found in the tables and charts on pages 31-33.

	Individual	Community	Indeterminable
FEMA		✓	
Ready	✓		
PBEM	✓		
EMD - WA			✓
CREW	✓		
PREP		✓	
Trace my preps	✓		
Suburban Prepper	✓		
PPC	✓		
NWSS	✓		

Table 1: Results of content analysis

1. FEMA: There is a clear emphasis on the community. While the individual is addressed, the agency places a lot of weight on community resiliency and advocates reliance on local officials planning together to make a stronger nation as a whole. The keyword analysis reinforces these findings, with 58% of words reflecting a socially oriented narrative.
2. Ready: The content and narrative analysis revealed a emphasis on the individual. The website's language reflected a strong use of the word "you," as well as having family preparedness the most prominent website feature, implying that the audience of the website was directed towards the individual. The keyword analysis showed that 59% of the words could be placed in the in the individual narrative group.
3. PBEM: PBEM also revealed an individually focused narrative. The keyword analysis revealed that 80% of the words fell into the individually focused grouping, along with their synonyms. There

is a dominant usage of the pronoun “you,” addressing the individual. While PBEM only included a preparation section for individuals and families, they did include information about local community disaster response disaster teams, known as NET, or Neighborhood Emergency Teams, but this program is meant to prepare households and close-knit neighborhoods to be self-sufficient during a disaster, for it is likely people will not be able to rely on local officials.

4. EMD-WA: The keyword analysis showed little difference between the appearance of individually focused words and community oriented words. In addition, there was no apparent evidence that the content of the site placed more weight on one or the other. A content analysis revealed that EMD-WA regards preparedness as the ability to secure your family, but interestingly the website also highlights the importance of working with your neighbors during times of uncertainty. It is difficult to discern the narrative of EMD-WA through the content analysis that I preformed. Thus, I’ve determined that EMD-WA’s narrative includes the importance community as well as the individual.

5. CREW: This organization has a strong emphasis on individual preparedness. The keyword count analysis reflected this as well, which revealed that over 66% of the words fall into the individually focused group. There is also frequent use of the word “you” and its derivatives, suggesting the intended audience is the individual.

6. PREP: PREP’s narrative places a great deal of importance on the community. While there is a great deal of information on how to prepare the household for disaster, the keyword content analysis shows that PREP give a great deal of importance to community organization with over 70% of words falling into the community oriented category. In fact, even in the household preparedness

section, it states that it is easier to get prepared with the support of your neighbors.⁵⁸ They argue that in order to successfully recover after a disaster, preparations in the home need to be paired with making connections in the community.

7. Trace My Preps: Many of the blog posts on Trace My Preps revolve around actions taken by the writer himself to prepare his home and his family. He shows by example what the reader himself can accomplish, implying the target audience is the individual or family, not the community. A keyword content analysis revealed that in general, there is an individually focused narrative, with 60% of the word falling under that category. Despite the clear individualistic narrative and the assertion that one cannot rely on the government during times of crisis, many posts highlight the importance of community and connecting with your neighbors. While the narrative of the site is individualistic, it is also reinforced that reaching out to neighbors is the key to survival.

8. Suburban Prepper: This blog is the most extreme source of individually focused preparedness literature in this study. The keyword analysis revealed a very strong emphasis on the individual, with 100% of the words reflecting individualistic narratives. This is highlighted by the fact that much of the advice centers on staying away from neighbors and the community as much as possible and building a defense system in order to guarantee security during times of crisis. The focus of this blog's preparedness is to protect your immediate family and to refrain from disclosing any information about your preparations.

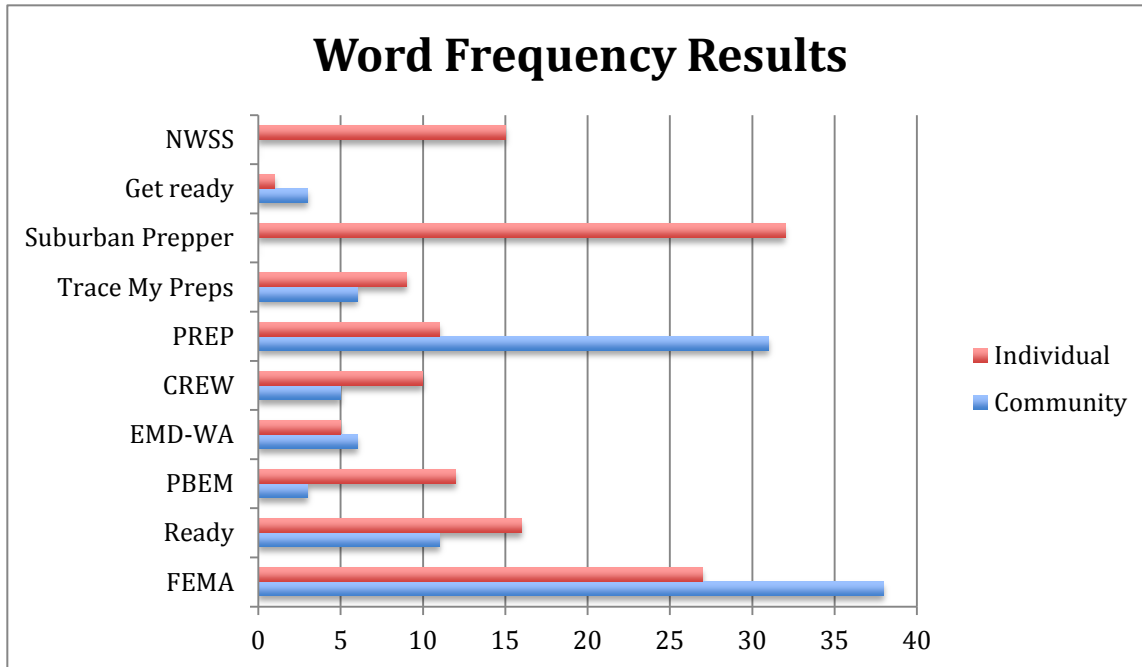
9. PPC: My analysis of the Portland Preparedness Center presented some difficulty. While the content analysis revealed an individualistic narrative, the keyword analysis showed a community

⁵⁸ "Get Prepared," PREP, accessed April 28 2013, <http://www.preporegon.org/GetPrepared>

oriented narrative. Despite the inconclusiveness of the content analysis, because PCC functions as a retail company selling products to the individual, I determined that PCC is individually focused.

10. NWSS: NWSS is decisively individualistic. NWSS's focus is on protection, within the shelter, and also of their patron's identity and information. Identity protection is a feature that is asserted repeatedly and is the first thing you see when you visit the website. The keyword analysis showed that 100% of the words reflected an individualistic narrative, which reinforces that NWSS is individualistic in nature.

In sum, out of the ten websites I coded, one was indiscernible, two emphasized the community, and seven placed an emphasis on the individual. From this sampling, we see that like in the Cold War, there is an overwhelming individualistic narrative of preparedness literature. However, of these seven individually focused websites, two of them either indirectly or directly included a section that discussed community involvement or community oriented preparedness, and three of them advocated for working with one's neighbors in addition to preparing one's family and home. Therefore, while the individualistic narratives of Cold War preparedness have persisted through time and are reflected in the Cascadia earthquake disaster preparedness literature, these modern-day narratives are not purely individualistic. They have changed somewhat to include elements of community preparedness.



Graph 1: Results of word count reflecting an individualistic narrative or a social narrative.

	Link	Emphasis on community or individual?	Does it have a “prepare the community” section?	Does it have a “prepare the home/family” section?	Which one is bigger?	Hazards discussed	What is the focus of their preparedness?
FEMA	http://fema.gov/	Community	Yes	Yes	Community	Natural disasters, pandemic, home fires, technological and accidental hazards, terrorist hazards	Community resiliency
Ready	http://www.ready.gov/make-a-plan	Individual	Yes	Yes	Individual	Natural disasters, pandemic, home fires, technological and accidental hazards, terrorist hazards.	
PBEM	http://www.portlandoregon.gov/pbem/46475	Individual	Somewhat	Yes	Individual	Earthquakes, winter weather, severe weather, floods, heat volcanoes, landslides, tsunamis, fires, health, terrorism, energy	don't rely on local officials
EMD - WA	http://emd.wa.gov/	Both	Yes	Yes	Individual	Floods, storms, wildland fires, earthquakes, volcanoes, nuclear power plant incidents, chemical weapon stockpiles, dam failures, hazardous material spills	Securing your family as well as working with your neighbors
CREW	http://crew.org/	Individual	no	Yes	Individual	Cascadia Earthquake	knowing hazards and bringing diff. groups together

PREP	http://preporegon.org/	Community	Yes	Yes	Individual	Earthquakes and tsunamis "if you're ready for an earthquake, you are ready for anything"	Prep your home, but also make connections with neighbors because it will be the key to successful recover
Trace my preps	http://tracemypreps.com/	Individual	N/A	N/A	N/A	SHTF and TEOTWAWKI scenarios - not specific	You cannot rely on the gov't, but you cannot survive without the help of your friends and neighbors - prep by yourself and then reach out
Suburban Prepper	http://suburbanprepper.com/	Individual	N/A	N/A	N/A	SHTF and TEOTWAWKI scenarios - not specific	Protect your immediate family and don't disclose information about your preparations to anyone
Get Ready Portland	http://getreadyportland.com/	Individual	N/A	N/A	N/A	What if	Buy our products to prepare yourself
NW Shelter Systems	http://www.northwestsheltersystems.com/	Individual	N/A	N/A	N/A	Nuclear Bomb	Design underground shelters and protect confidentiality

Table 3: Results of content analysis

Discussion and Implications

Disaster preparedness during the early Cold War era urged the individual to prepare for his family. Representations in the media of these individualistic attitudes fostered the idea that in times of disaster it was “every-man-for-himself (or his family).”⁵⁹ As Rebecca Solnit mentions in her book entitled *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster*, this emphasis on individualistic preparedness was likely due to the political climate of the time. Being seen as a communist in any form was a cultural taboo, and, “collective solutions and solidarities smacked communism.”⁶⁰ While not everyone subscribed to this mindset, it appeared to dominate the preparedness field.

Analyzing narratives of disaster planning today for the Cascadia earthquake, I found that the vast majority of websites I examined advocating disaster preparedness displayed the same individualistic narrative. This suggests that even though the Cascadia earthquake is a different type of disaster in a different cultural context, this kind of narrative has been perpetuated through time. This trend in narratives may provide insight into the types of thought that has influenced how people view disasters in general, and how the public is expected to behave during a disaster. Interestingly, the success of individually oriented preparedness has not been validated by much of the disaster research that has been generated in the last sixty years.

⁵⁹ Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, 110

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Disaster Myths:

What started as a response to Cold War fears, the field of disaster research has led to monumental conclusions. Studies done by Charles Fritz and others have “highlighted contrasts that exist between the realities associated with disaster responses and myths concerning disaster behavior.”⁶¹ In Fritz’s essay entitled, “Disaster” in the anthology, *Contemporary Social Problems: An Introduction to the Sociology of Deviant Behavior and Social Disorganization*, he addresses the same popular assumption of complete societal collapse during times of disaster that fueled “Gun Thy Neighbor” theories. He explains that in popular culture the common misconception of disaster behavior is that society will engage in a “process of disintegration.”⁶² That is, that panic will cause “selfish, exploitative behavior” and there will be “widespread immorality.”⁶³ This notion of societal regression is represented over and over again in the media and in popular fiction, such as the episode of *The Twilight Zone* that I referred to earlier. As Fritz and others note, this stereotype is only a stereotype and these representations “convey a grossly distorted image of how human groups generally behave under disaster conditions.”⁶⁴

Kathleen Tierney, another well-respected disaster researcher, discusses the way “popular culture—specifically the disaster film genre—both reflects and perpetuates erroneous beliefs about

⁶¹ Kathleen Tierney, Christine Bevc, and Erica Kuligowski. “Metaphors Matter: Disaster Myths, Media Frames, and Their Consequences in Hurricane Katrina.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 604 (March 1, 2006): 57–81., 58

⁶² Charles Fritz, “Disaster,” in *Contemporary Social Problems: An Introduction to the Sociology of Deviant Behavior and Social Disorganization*, ed. Robert K. Merton and Robert A. Nisbet (New York: Harcourt, 1961), 656.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 657.

disaster related behavior.”⁶⁵ She argues the media’s portrayal of public behavior after disaster, while entertaining, is often false. Despite the strong empirical evidence of researches such as Fritz, Tierney, and others, these myths are still held to be true by much of the general public and organizational actors. As Solnit argues, and what my analysis supports, these “beliefs have yet to die.”⁶⁶

The “panic myth” was particularly evident in media accounts following Hurricane Katrina. Following the devastation caused by Katrina in 2005, news reporters portrayed victims as “opportunistic looters and violent criminals” and compared New Orleans to that of “a war zone.”⁶⁷ This “looting framework” is common in disaster-related reporting.⁶⁸ These stories are likely deemed more newsworthy than the story of victims trying to regain normalcy.

In reality, studies show that “instances of looting in the disasters examined were nonexistent or numerically very rare.”⁶⁹ While victims taking refuge in the Superdome and the Convention Center were waiting for water and other supplies to be delivered by FEMA, the media was reporting scenes of babies being raped, gang violence, and hundreds of dead bodies.⁷⁰ These rumored accounts were false, but somehow they appeared in reputable news sources like The New York Times and The Washington Post.⁷¹ Solnit provides some insight into the realities of the situation within the Superdome during the aftermath of Katrina. After four or five days stuck in the Convention Center,

⁶⁵ Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski. “Metaphors Matter,” 58.

⁶⁶ Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, 107

⁶⁷ Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski. “Metaphors Matter,” 60,61.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁶⁹ E.L. Quarantelli, “The Myth and the Realities: Keeping the “Looting” Myth in Perspective,” *Natural Hazards Observer* 31, no. 4 (March, 2007):

<http://www.colorado.edu/hazards/o/archives/2007/mar07/index.html>

⁷⁰ Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, 107

⁷¹ Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski. “Metaphors Matter.”

people were singing songs, and distributing water. In one account it was noted “these people are so tired and thirsty and hungry they couldn't flip over a lawn chair if they wanted to riot.”⁷² The civil unrest that was so widely reported is a result of what Solnit refers to as “elite panic,” or fear of poor minorities and what they could be capable of.⁷³

What government officials perceive as panic, is not in fact panic, but social disorganization, according to Fritz. Social disorganization, Fritz argues, does not imply irrational behavior, but temporary disruption. Which, in the case of Hurricane Katrina, is completely understandable given the horrific circumstances of not having adequate food and water.

Implication for Disaster Response

Elite panic and falsified media accounts can cause even more damage than one would initially imagine. Henry Fischer, another disaster researcher, describes how false perceptions of social violence can actually lead to real violence, “If you perceive that my extended hand is a threat against your person, you may decide to respond with a fist, an expletive, or turn and run away. In other words, you take action based on what you believe to be real.”⁷⁴ Fischer goes on to explain how fear of panic actually impedes disaster response because evacuation orders are delayed to a point where “successful evacuation is no longer feasible,” rumors of looting cause enforcement officials “to protect property rather than save lives,” and “precious time and resources are misdirected.”⁷⁵

⁷² Thomas Nephew, “Dumas Carter, NOPD officer” *Recording Katrina* (blog), September 18, 2005, recordingkatrina.blogspot.com/2005/09/dumas-carter-nopd-officer.html

⁷³ Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, 235

⁷⁴ Henry W. Fischer III, “Disaster Myths and Their Implications for Disaster Planning and Response,” *Natural Hazards Observer* 31, no. 1 (Sept, 2006): <http://www.colorado.edu/hazards/o/archives/2006/sept06/sept06b.html>

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

In the case of Hurricane Katrina, lack of federal aid caused many to conclude, “that they were on their own and they had best fend for themselves.”⁷⁶ In circumstances such as these, community becomes a valuable resource for many in recovery. Old communities may be disrupted, but new ones are easily formed. Solnit gives the example of the aftermath of the Great San Francisco earthquake of 1906, when multitudes of survivors merrily gathered in Golden Gate Park under communal tents and started a community kitchen.⁷⁷ She gives another account of how a couple was stranded on the highway found shelter with others in a roadside diner, and had such a good time connecting with others that they were disappointed when it was time to leave. Disasters have proven to lower social boundaries. In New Orleans, out-of-town volunteers were able to connect with locals on common ground.⁷⁸

During times of tragedy, we often forget that others around us are experiencing disaster in very much the same way. “The isolated character of much human suffering and the tendency to keep family and personal troubles “private” leads most of us to ignore the fact that millions of people in our society (and in others) are experiencing serious personal stresses.”⁷⁹ However, disasters like earthquakes are experienced by entire communities. When disaster strikes most people have the “initial tendency” to personalize the disaster and turn their attentions to their immediate family. However, Fritz argues that after attention is paid to the family, people “then turn their attention to larger and more impersonal social group loyalties.”⁸⁰ Both Fritz and Solnit argue that disasters have

⁷⁶ Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski. “Metaphors Matter,” 66

⁷⁷ Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, 295

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁷⁹ Fritz, “Disaster,” 658.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 677.

the interesting ability of bringing people together. Survivors are often united in solidarity. This sense of solidarity and unity is often missing during everyday life, but people find it during times of disaster, and even welcome it. Fritz delves into this idea in his essay:

That people respond in like manner to the fears, dangers, deprivations, and anxieties posed by the disaster, largely regardless of previous station in life is greatly reassuring [...] The ‘outsider’ becomes an ‘insider’ [...] They come to see that collective action is necessary for these values to be maintained. Individual and group goals and means become merged inextricably. This merging of individual and societal needs provides a feeling of belongingness and a sense of unity rarely achieved under normal circumstances. An act accomplished or the self can be interpreted as being done not for oneself alone but for others as well.⁸¹

Solnit also quotes this passage to assert her argument that, not only do people act rationally during times of disaster, but they also act altruistically. Most people are “urgently engaged in caring for themselves and those around them [...] The image of the selfish, panicky, or regressively savage human being in times of disaster has little truth to it.”⁸²

One would assume that Fritz’s idea of social disorganization in the aftermath of a disaster would exacerbate Mary Douglas’s theory individualist or enclavist behavior. Presumably, normalities are put on hold when the hierarchical structure that operates by providing individuals with rules to live by, are threatened during times of disaster.⁸³ However, even though there are fewer societal regulations, people are more likely to draw on the connections of those around them for resources and emotional support, such as the surrounding community. This is illustrated by the example of Katrina survivors bringing water to those who could not walk.

⁸¹ Ibid. 690.

⁸² Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, 2.

⁸³ Douglas, and Wildavsky. *Risk and Culture*.

Disaster research shows us that community can be an invaluable aspect of disaster recovery. Yet, as popular culture shows, despite over fifty years of research that proves it wrong, the public as well as governmental officials have yet to let go of preconceived notions that post-disaster areas will be rife with violence, looting, and irrational behavior. As I've shown, this is also true in disaster planning literature. Today, a majority of disaster literature still gives preparation instructions that reflect a distrust of community. Literature that emphasizes individualistic preparation instructions demonstrate the belief that the individual or the family will be on their own during times of disaster, and relying on the community may be unwise. While the majority of websites reflected this belief, not all did. This indicates that it is likely that research done over the last 60 years proving the importance of community during disaster has not completely been ignored. In fact, elements of these findings are making their way into widely viewed federal websites, such as FEMA.

Yet, if it is true that disaster creates a “kind of social utopia,” wouldn't Fritz's argument be more widely accepted?⁸⁴ And why hasn't this been the case? What these individualistic narratives reveal is not only a distrust of community during disaster, but also an American value of self-sufficiency and privacy that results in individualistic attitudes. The American dream is a national ideology that measures success in the ability to provide for one's own, which often manifests itself in the desire to own a home. In his essay “The Human-Environment Nexus,” Emilio Moran argues that the culture of the United States revolves around individualism.⁸⁵ The increased privatization of the American family that happened during the industrial age was accompanied by the “privatization

⁸⁴ Fritz, “Disaster,” 691.

⁸⁵ Emilio F. Moran, “The Human-Environment Nexus,” in *The World System and the Earth System: Global Socioenvironmental Change and Sustainability Since the Neolithic*, ed. by Alf Hornborg and Carole L. Crumley, (Walnut Creek, CA : Left Coast Press, 2007)

of desire and imagination that tells us we are not each other's keeper."⁸⁶ This was especially evident during the Cold War when the fear of communism fostered anti-social behavior. Therefore, it is not surprising that the majority of disaster planning today reinforces the ideology of every-man for himself.

Some argue that this ideology may be genetic, as we have an "evolutionary tendency to think primary of local territories."⁸⁷ Tim Jackson, an environmental researcher, addresses the theory that Darwinian selection favors "individuals who exhibit only selfish (i.e. self-preserving) behavior" on behalf of themselves and their families, or groups.⁸⁸ According to Jackson, our consumptive and often environmentally degrading behavior is based on human inclination to satisfy our own needs and to appear sexually competitive.⁸⁹ According to some like Jackson and Moran, these evolutionary tendencies of self-preservation have transcended biology and have become a part of social psychology.

Not only has the behavioral tendency of self-preservation been reflected in disaster planning, but it also has environmental implications.⁹⁰ Human's social tendencies arguably play a part in how people relate to the environment. Mary Douglas's classification of social relations can be used to explain how individuals and institutions relate to nature. She argues in a hierarchical society, the environment is viewed as controllable and "stable until pushed beyond discoverable limits;" In an egalitarian society, nature is "fragile," and humans are "caring" until corrupted by bureaucracies; In

⁸⁶ Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, 9.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁸⁸ Tim Jackson, "Evolutionary Psychology in Ecological Economics: Consilience, Consumption and Contentment," *Ecological Economics* 41, no. 2 (May 2002): 289–303, accessed April, 2013, doi:10.1016/S0921-8009(02)00040-X., 293

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

an individualistic setting man is “inherently self-seeking and atomistic” and nature “is able to recover from any exploitation;” and in a fatalistic society, man cannot find “synchrony” in nature. An individualistic society, such as in the United States, is much less likely to enforce environmental regulations. Some even argue that this type of social behavior is the root cause of environmental degradation.⁹¹⁹² Through this we see that our behavioral tendencies not only affect our ability to withstand and recover from disasters, but also affect our society and environments on a global scale.

Solutions

Community connections have been proven over and over again to be critical for successful preparation and recovery. “These relationships foster resilience and reduce the short- and long-term effects of stress on families and communities.”⁹³ The Linking Human Systems (LINC) Community Resilience model reinforces this sentiment. Disasters, whether human or natural, are a threat that is faced equally between individuals, families, and communities. The family functions “as the integral unit of the community and [...] are of vital importance in determining how communities recover in the after-math of mass trauma.”⁹⁴ This theory highlights the importance of the family, but in the

⁹¹ Marco Verweij, Mary Douglass, Richard Ellis, Christoph Engel, Frank Hendriks, Susanne Lohmann, Steven Ney, Steve Rayner, and Michael Thompson. “Clumsy Solutions For A Complex World: The Case of Climate Change.” *Public Administration* 84, no. 4 (2006): 817–843, accessed April, 2013.

⁹² Moran, “The Human-Environment Nexus.”

⁹³ Ferid Agani, Judith Landau, and Natyra Agani. “Community-Building Before, During, and After Times of Trauma: The Application of the LINC Model of Community Resilience in Kosovo.” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 80, no. 1 (2010): 143–149.

⁹⁴ J Landau, M. Mittal, and E. Wieling, “Linking Human Systems: Strengthening Individuals, Families, and Communities in the Wake of Mass Trauma,” *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 34, no. 2 (2008): 193–209.

context of community. The connections between the individual, family, and the community are vital for fostering resiliency during times of disaster. Instead of relying on preparations that solely affect the individual or the family—as was the case during the Cold War and for the most part, continues to be the case today—the Link Approach advocates for the paring of community preparedness in addition to individual preparedness. The Link approach seems to have been already adopted by some of the preparedness literature I examined, such as *Trace My Preps* and PREP. If more disaster preparedness literature embraced the Link Approach, individuals, families, and communities would likely become more resilient and adept at withstanding and overcoming disasters such as the impending Cascadia earthquake.

Conclusion

In the quest for self-sufficiency, community connections have been sacrificed. Many argue individualistic behavior is characteristic of American culture, and consider it to be the root cause of environmental degradation. The threats of the Cold War pushed people even farther away from the communal sphere. Preparations for nuclear fallout were focused inward, as a result of urging from governmental officials and a fear of societal collapse. The fear of panic during and after disaster has been perpetuated by the media through false reporting, and represented over and over again in pop culture, fostering “Gun Thy Neighbor” attitudes. However, countless empirical evidence collected by others suggests that this panic is in fact a myth. My research examining the literature surrounding the Cascadia earthquake has shown that multiple disaster preparedness resources reference the

importance of community during disaster. Not only has the idea of social panic been disproven, but community has also demonstrated to be a vital resource during times of disaster. Community connections provide resources that an individual cannot muster alone within the walls of the single-family home. Though, in spite of this, individualistic narratives still prevail in disaster preparedness today. In attempt to reconcile the majority of disaster preparedness literature's tendency towards individualistic behavior and the conclusions of disaster research, I proposed the Link Approach that promotes resilience through individual, family, and community connections. Some disaster preparedness instructions now include the importance of these relationships, suggesting a more encompassing view of preparedness, but they still have a ways to go. If individuals are able to embrace more community driven preparedness actions, the field of disaster preparedness will likely be better equipped to mitigate and recover from the effects of both man made and natural disasters. Preparing for the risks we face now and in the future is essential in creating thriving and sustainable communities.

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