

The F word: the experiential construction of flooding in England

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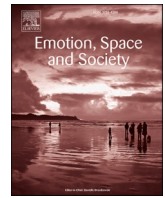
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The F word: The experiential construction of flooding in England

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ABSTRACT

In England, flood risk management policy constructs flooding through its physical impacts. Whilst research is starting to reveal the mental health impacts of flooding, it stops short of understanding the experience of being flooded and what this means in terms of understanding the F-word, flooding. Yet for flood communities, the emotional impacts of flooding can prevail for years, if not a lifetime.

For people who have been flooded, flooding seeps into every facet of life. It removes the security and safety of home creating instead places of fear, stress, and anxiety. Within this paper we lay bare the emotional impacts of flooding, demonstrating the effect that home unmaking and the cyclical need for home remaking, has on individuals, their quality of life, and revealing the long-term emotional impact of living at risk of flooding.

We finish by seeking ways to support communities living at risk of flooding, challenging current flood risk management policy, and identifying how it could be strengthened through understanding these emotional impacts. We propose supporting communities through the emotional turmoil of flooding can help provide hope and restore quality of life to those who live at risk of flooding.

1. Introduction

Flooding may be colloquially understood as the “presence of water in areas that are usually dry” (Doocy et al., 2013:1). But what happens if that ‘usually dry’ place is the lounge of someone’s home?

Over the last decade, research aimed at understanding the immediate and long-term, health and welfare effects of flooding has started to reveal the significant impacts it has on those living at risk of flooding (Waite et al., 2017; Fernandez et al., 2015; Ahern et al., 2005; Stanke et al., 2012; Carroll et al., 2009). The English National Study of Flooding and Health (Waite et al., 2017) showed that a year after flooding 20% of flooded participants suffered depression, 28% anxiety and 36% Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These health and welfare impacts can be very long lasting, including the long-term disruption to sense of place and of safety (Tapsell and Tunstall, 2008).

However, there is much less research which aims to understand the impact that flooding has on emotional wellbeing, quality of life, social and lived values, such as the constancy of home and neighbourhood (French et al., 2019). An individual’s emotional wellbeing is as much at

risk of flooding as the physical components of life (Corner et al., 2014).

In this paper we develop an understanding of what flooding means to those who suffer internal flooding and pose the question, can flooding really be understood solely as the ‘presence of water in areas that are usually dry’?

1.1. The role of emotion in flooding

News coverage of a flood event often reports bare emotions, such as anger that flooding has occurred, concern for fellow sufferers and, as seen in the European floods in 2021 (BBC, 2021), the fear of loss of life. What the media presents is only a fleeting in-the-moment snapshot (Mehring et al., 2021). The cauldron of emotions does not stop when the media leaves, with fear, anger, hopelessness, and uncertainty that can dominate the recovery process (Silver and Grek-Martin, 2015), for example, the fear of rain and further episodes of flooding, distress over blocked drains and angst about travelling and leaving the home alone. Such fear may be perceived as a severe weather phobia (Watt and DiFrancesantonio, 2012), an intense and debilitating response to rain.

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However, it has real life impacts in areas at risk of flooding; heavy rain creates places of fear, spaces where quality of life is affected by the weather.

The long-term emotional impacts of flooding often remain hidden, not fully understood by the observer or by researchers (Whittle et al., 2012). Acknowledging the emotional experience of flooding and recovery, troubles, if not directly challenges, the simple construction of flooding raising the question of ‘what is the experiential construction of flooding?’.

1.2. Aims of this paper

Within this paper we aim to challenge the basic definitions of flooding and the approach that English policy takes in managing it. We hope by laying bare the long-term emotional impacts of flooding, we can provide a more complete understanding of what flooding is to those who experience it, the emotional labour which is required in dealing with the aftermath (Head, 2015), the protracted recovery process with the impact this has on well-being (Tapsell et al., 2002; Tapsell and Tunstall, 2008; Tunstall et al., 2006) and learning how to live with the prospect of flooding again.

We start by taking several steps back, developing an understanding from the literature of home and its existence, not just as a physical entity, but as an idealised and imagined space. We then move to address homemaking and the creation of a safe haven, before tackling the impact of home-unmaking, when ‘home’ is no longer a safe and secure place, where flooding breaks down the ontological security a home should provide (Harries, 2017).

The paper seeks to understand the experiential construction of flooding and the watery unmaking of home. Our aim is to continue to fill the gap that, Morrice (Morrice, 2013:33) observed of the: “notable absence in geographic literature concerning the connection between disasters and the concept of ‘home’”.

1.3. What is home?

As Saunders and Williams (Saunders and Williams, 1988:82) put it: ‘home is much more than just bricks and mortar - it is where the heart is’. Home is an idealised place of people, experiences, relationships, memories and the emotions experienced within it (Heywood, 2005). Whilst a house may be made of bricks and mortar, it becomes a home and is given special meaning (Easthope, 2004) through the process of home-making (Baxter and Brickell, 2014). As an idealised space, home should offer security and a safe haven to return to from the chaos and anxiety in the outside world (Dupuis and Thorns, 1998).

Home making is both physical and emotional, creating memories as an affective reminder of past experiences within the home (Gorman-Murray et al., 2014). The idea of home is central to ontological security, that is, the sense of a safe place protecting you from the uncertainties and risks associated with day-to-day life and the continuity of self-identity (Haney and Gray-Scholz, 2020; Harries, 2017; Hiscock et al., 2001; Dupuis and Thorns, 1998; Enarson and Fordham, 2000; McKinnon and Eriksen, 2023). ‘Home’ often extends beyond the curtilage of the house (Gorman-Murray et al., 2014), for example, research with homeowners whose homes were impacted by bush-fires in Australia discovered that ‘home’ included the local area, leisure facilities, local walks, etc (Reid and Beilin, 2015; Haney and Gray-Scholz, 2020). Disruption to this broader sense of home will impact ontological security. Home becomes an experience that takes place as a relationship between the imaginary home and the physical house, through our interaction with the outside world, the people who we encounter (in and out of the home) and the homemaking practices of constructing and caretaking.

People work towards turning a house into a home by the organisation and furnishing of the space (Brun, 2015). Taking a space and turning it

into a place (Lekus, 2018), a place of emotion, relations and bonds of belonging (Khademi-Vidra, 2014). Hence, home is not static, it is a multidimensional concept actively made through homemaking. Home is a doing word and the process of ‘doing’ establishes identity and creates place attachment (Reid and Beilin, 2015).

Home does not always meet this ideal, it can become a place of fear and danger (Blunt, 2005) and a place of alienation (Blunt and Varley, 2004), for example, the violence in homes arising from food insecurity (Jackson et al., 2018) or intimate partner violence leading to an inter-generational transmission of violence and intergenerational fear in the home (Meyer et al., 2021). The idealised and the lived experiences of home can be disparate with the latter challenging and problematising the perception that home is always a place of security (Reid and Beilin, 2015).

The idealised perception of home is not constant across society, in particular when contextualised with environmental disasters and recovery. Within this context particular groups are disproportionately vulnerable, further challenging ontological security and the construction of home, for example, the elderly, children, women, lower income families, LGBTQ individuals (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer), etc (Tapsell and Tunstall, 2008; Gorman-Murray et al., 2014; Azad et al., 2013).

1.4. Home-unmaking

‘Home’ can also be unmade, impacting the emotional wellbeing of the occupant(s). As humans, we are happiest when life is predictable (Kearns et al., 2000). Home-unmaking (Cheshire et al., 2018) creates unpredictability and makes the occupant feel insecure, it requires a lot of emotional labour to deal with the resultant anxiety and uncertainty.

Home-unmaking can take many forms, for example, violence within the home which leads to home becoming a place of fear and danger (Blunt, 2005). Home-unmaking can occur when the physical materials and/or the imaginary components of a home are damaged or destroyed (Baxter and Brickell, 2014). The idealised construction of home as a safe and secure place and the continuity of home are disrupted, and this can result in loss of faith in one’s home (Hawkins and Maurer, 2011). The loss of personal possessions further disrupts ontological security as this erodes the homeowner’s sense of order, this disruption to ontological security can change their relationship with their home (Hawkins and Maurer, 2011; Carroll et al., 2009). Precious items which once brought joy and happy pre-flood memories now bring pain at their loss (McKinnon and Eriksen, 2023). The intangible impacts of home-unmaking are complex. Cloke and Conradson (2018) found that following the earthquakes in Christchurch, New Zealand, individuals and communities were challenged to live with ‘trouble served up by geological forces’ (p.363) and that this, along with the social and material disruption caused by the quake led to individuals having to re-evaluate their sense of place, to establish a new kind of normal in the construction of home. The emotional geographies of natural disasters (Cloke and Conradson, 2018) can create spaces of ‘home-unmaking’ where communities live in fear of environmental forces which unmake their homes.

However, the watery sense of place (Garde-Hansen et al., 2017; McEwen et al., 2017; Holmes et al., 2016) extends beyond just negative memories. Whilst the flood waters may unmake home, they can also create a sense of community as everyone ‘mucks in’ to build resilience (Garde-Hansen et al., 2017). The lead author vividly recalls the sense of community, knowing all your neighbours, which was created following the repeated flooding of their neighbourhood.

1.5. The flood

Flooding, like other environmental disasters, has the capacity to unmake homes. The impact of flooding becomes framed through the perspective of the occupants, the emotional relationship they have with

their home and the changes that flooding creates with that relationship. Each will have their own individual construction of home and what it means to them, hence the impacts that flooding has on ‘home’ are as heterogenous as the communities that flooding affects (Mehring et al., 2018; Johnston et al., 2012).

Home-unmaking by flooding can be a sudden affair, one day the home brings ontological security and the next, the floods have disrupted that security (Mcewen and Jones, 2012). The materiality of home is lost and with it goes the control over who passes in and out of the home (Wilford, 2008), for example, during recovery loss adjusters, builders, etc can all now enter at will, even into the parts of the home usually designated as private such as bedrooms or bathrooms. Flooding also deprives occupants of their beloved objects severing the emotional attachments, leaving only memories behind. In an English context this might include, precious pictures of family life, holidays, weddings, Christmas, all be destroyed by flood water. Likewise, furniture or other items handed down through the generations can all be lost to the flood waters. A place which was full of memories, moving in, the first tentative cruising steps taken by a child (around now lost furniture), the preparation for the first day of school, becomes a shell.

The research question we pose within this paper centres on the unmaking of home and the impacts this has on quality of life and in the changes in the emotional relationship that occupants have with their home. It questions whether those who live with the threat of flooding (again) construct flooding not just through the water that enters their house, as framed in the Flood and Water Management Act (Defra, 2010; Gov. UK, 2010), but more through the impact that flooding has on an individual’s construction of home, the impact flooding has on their lives and livelihoods (Crabtree, 2013), the protracted recovery process and its associated emotional labour (Head, 2015), the impact this has on well-being (Tapsell and Tunstall, 2008; Tapsell et al., 2002; Tunstall et al., 2006) and the emotional journey required in learning to live with the prospect of future flooding.

2. Methods

The data for this research was gathered through 20 semi-structured interviews with ‘floodies’ across England. A floodie, as described in section 2.2, is someone who has lived at risk of flooding and strives to reduce their risk of flooding. All participants completed ethics consent questionnaires and understood they could ask to be removed from the research at any point.

2.1. The interviewees

The floodies were recruited through the National Flood Forum (NFF), a charity which helps, supports, and represents people at risk of flooding in England and Wales, and then through word of mouth. Each had experienced flooding of their family home and for some flooding had occurred on a number of occasions. Table 1 illustrates the profile of the 20 interviewees.

This research focuses on a particular group of floodies as profiled above, whose flood experiences are particular to them. Floods impacts are not experienced evenly, gender, age, having young children,

disability, disadvantage, can all negatively exaggerate impact (Sharp, 2017; Lamond, 2014), hence the identities of the interviewees is important to understanding how they experience flooding. Over half of the interviewees were retired and some very elderly, therefore potentially disproportionately impacted by flooding (Anton and Lawrence, 2014), for example, one interviewee remembered the challenge of getting his elderly mother, who had mobility issues, out of the house during flooding, he told a tale of struggling to get her out of the window, the only safe exit from the flooded house. Disability also increase vulnerability; one interviewee has a profoundly autistic young adult at home who was very challenged by the need to move out or move upstairs every time their home flooded with sewage.

2.2. The interviews

The interviews were conducted from December 2018 to June 2019, face-to-face, via the phone or online. The use of semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions, enabled the interviewee to answer in the context of their own flood experiences, talking about the impacts of flooding on daily life and how it seeps into almost every facet of life (Ali and Bokhary, 2015). The interviews were then transcribed with the assistance of AI transcription software before the data underwent thematic analysis to understand and interpret the information. Themes were derived from the data rather than imposed upon it.

Conducting the interviews was a harrowing and emotionally charged experience for the interviewer and interviewees. Interviews were paused whilst people gathered their emotions. Those interviewed found it challenging to put into words what flooding means to them, and to express the affect that flooding had on them. They emailed the interviewer afterwards seeking the opportunity to talk again, many told the interviewer that they had never been given any opportunity to articulate what they had been through. These interviews constituted the first time that anyone had asked them to talk about flooding in this way, specifically how it impacted them personally.

2.3. Researcher positionality

Research is both constructed and conducted by people. Hence, no matter how well designed the research is, or how hard any researcher has tried to abstract their positionality, who they are, and their lived experiences will influence the research outcomes. Research is therefore never without context, nor free from the influence of experience (Rose, 1997) and there is a common understanding that a researcher’s positionality and past experience influences their research (Widdowfield, 2000).

The lead author and interviewer (Mehring) self-identifies as a floodie. The experience of living at risk of flooding will, undoubtedly, be felt within the words and analysis of this paper. The affect that living at risk of flooding has had on them will influence and direct how they understand flooding. It is our belief that if the researcher’s positionality is acknowledged and understood it can add perspectives that may not have been observed by others. Insider research can be beneficial to the research process (Ganga and Scott, 2006) and this acknowledgement is an important part of situating knowledge (Widdowfield, 2000).

As observed in section 2.2, conducting the interviews was an emotional experience for the interviewer as well as the people being interviewed. Before conducting this type of research where the interviewer themselves has experienced, in this case, being a Floodie, it is good practice to consider the impact on the interviewer and the potential risk of re-traumatising them through constant engagement with other people’s flood stories. There are risk associated with research situations where the interviewer and interviewee have shared experiences. Throughout the interviews, the interviewing author had to work hard not to step in, not complete sentences for the interviewee or truncate them by saying ‘I know, when I’ The nuance and richness of the resultant information could easily be reduced if this were to occur.

Table 1
Profile of the interviewees.

Profile	Number
Homeowner	20
Retired	11
Working	9
Living alone	4
Children in the home	2
Very elderly (80+)	2
Limited mobility/living with disability	3
Flooded on 2 or more occasions	14

2.4. Who is a floodie?

It is important that we pause to understand who a 'floodie' is. 'Floodie' is an in-group self-identity. Until now 'floodie' has not appeared in academic research, rather it has been a term used by individuals mainly in England but also in other parts of the world for example, the USA, to describe their experience and their knowledgeability around flooding (Brace and Geoghegan, 2011).

'The Insurance and insurance companies' behaviour is of great interest to those who have flooded. Post flood, the relationship between a Floodie and their insurance company can be long and protracted' (@Church-town.flood.action.group, 2021).

Humans are social beings (Haslam et al., 2009) and participation in social groups with a particular social identity will foster a perception of 'us' and helps increase feelings of self-esteem and well-being. In this context, self-identifying as a floodie helps an individual feel connected to other floodies through a group-based self-definition (Ntontis et al., 2018). A flood group whose aim is to fight for better flood risk management will also provide both physical and emotional support to one another.

The social identity of individuals from flood communities will be bound up in their experience of flooding, through the challenges of living at risk of flooding, the impact it has on their quality of life (Benjamin et al., 2010) and their emotional relationship with home. Whilst the non-flood world may look upon and term flood communities as flood victims, victim can imply being helpless in the face of adversity, whereas 'floodie' is framed around having a shared threat, a shared interest and positive interdependence (Turner and Oakes, 1986) hence cooperating and working together to better manage flooding. 'Floodie' reflects the battles that many flood communities perceive they go through in a bid to get their flood risk 'better managed.' It creates a sense of belonging. From the lead author's own experience, it can sometimes feel like the only support a floodie gets is from other floodies.

The lead authors connections to the floodie world assisted in this research. Fellow floodies identified with the researcher as being one of them, speaking the same language, talking of experiences they had themselves experienced and being conversant with the stresses and strains of living at risk of flooding. In addition, having spoken at NFF and EA conferences led to the lead author being known as a flood campaigner. This resulted in word spreading about this research and people volunteering themselves or fellow floodies to partake in the project often as the only means they had of being heard.

3. Unpacking flooding

All participants described blighted lives where flooding had a massive negative impact on their quality of life. There was very little discussion about the height of the water or the direction it came from. This was not a hydrological construction of flooding; it is an experiential one:

When people talk about personally being flooded it is a very emotional thing it's, it's something which you physically get upset by and erm, I think you can't actually impart in words what you actually suffer[Interivewee: F02]

The emotional impacts are as substantial as the physical damage to their home, as illustrated by this floodie relaying a story from another floodie:

The worst was the old boy XXX and RAF veteran and when I did (visit him) 7 months afterwards (after the flood) and social services weren't aware, the emergency resilience hadn't worked out. But I heard 7 months on through word of mouth and his boiler was broken so he was boiling a kettle and taking it up stairs to wash with. When I did go and see him, he said to me, and he cried, and he was so smart with his jacket and his

badges and he said I've been bombed out, I've been shot at, I've been starved, and nothing was this bad[Interviewee:F05].

Many of the people interviewed are living on a knife edge, in constant fear of flooding again and having to live through the emotional trauma of the recovery process. Flooding takes floodies on an emotional journey of trusting their home to provide protection, safety, consistency, to fearing the damage that flooding can wreck and the havoc that it plays on their emotional attachment to home.

As acknowledged in the introduction, a 'watery sense of place' can include more positive experiences. One interviewee spoke about the impact of the small gains that his flood groups achieved, had on his wife who was suffering from cancer.

You know, there are some, we have had some small gains and every time I come home with a small gain, she says, Oh, well that's good[Interviewee: F03]

Others spoke of how the flooding pulled the community together.

... it's always a worry leaving it (holidays). But now we've got a sort of network so when I go away for the weekend people will look after it and there is sort of, the plus side of it. The neighbourhood is really tight. It's like that good old blitz spirit[Interviewee:F05]

These flood experiences are permeating the individual's sense of self and their sense of connection to their community (Garde-Hansen et al., 2017; McEwen et al., 2017). Whilst living at risk of flooding is clearly challenging, there are silver linings to a life that can otherwise feel like living on a knives edge.

3.1. Living on a knife-edge

When asked to describe flooding, the responses were fraught with emotions: anguish, fear, stress, and uncertainty.

it's a frightening, devastating, awful stress related, uh, event, uh, doesn't get any better. It just gets worse every time[Interviewee-F08].

it's a nightmare. It, cause you know, you're on a knife edge from the time that you get the first initial contact from the EA (Environment Agency) saying something, you know, the water levels are rising and then you are constantly on alert, and you don't sleep, and you don't, you don't function properly until such time as it, it comes[Interviewee-FO3]

Nobody sleeps properly when we have a series of winter storms. Our lives are blighted. The next time will come soon, if all that weather in XXXX had been a bit further north ... We can't sell up; insurance is getting harder[Interviewee-FO19].

From these quotes how weather and flood risk are communicated to affected communities is clearly very important. Many flood communities go through an emotional rollercoaster from the moment heavy rain is forecast. Flood anxiety quickly increases to stress, terror, and fear, with fear being exacerbated by time, the watching, and the waiting to flood. There is a fine line to balance when forecasting flood risk, between initiating preparedness and creating fear. Further research is needed to help flood authorities and organisations like the Met office and the Environment Agency negotiate this balance, acknowledging the emotionality of flooding and how flood risk is communicated.

The emotions involved in living at risk of flooding can dominate lives, both daytime and night-time. Emotions centred around care and worry for family members can add to the emotional turmoil of waiting to flood.

We'll take it in turns to stand by the window and watch, watch the road at night. Erm and even if I think he's not worrying about it, I'll wake up and I'll see him at the window watching it[Interviewee-F05]

Something as simple as a weather forecast can evoke emotions of terror, fear, and concern for others.

3.2. The fear of rain

One of the prevailing themes through many of the interviews was 'the fear of rain,' technically called Ombrophobia (Jill et al., 2014). For people living at risk of flooding it can dominate life.

I don't think I'll ever be comfortable when it rains hard[Interviewee-FA07].

So, I walk the river every day, probably two or three times every single day. I'd been down again we'd had a lot of rain, the river had come up, but it just started to fall away[Interviewee-FO10].

I'm looking out the window cause it's raining. (If) it rains a lot it frightens us[Interviewee-FO13]

The minute you get a met office (<https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/>) warning in, you're on tenterhooks and we've had met office warnings every single day for like months on end at times and it gets relentless where you can't leave your house, you can't, you're frightened to go anywhere at all. You become completely agoraphobic psychologically, the sound of rain completely destroys your whole life[Interviewee-FA18].

I was a firefighter for 29 years. I've seen lots of horrible sights as you can imagine. I can handle stress reasonably well, but the flood stress is still, you know, terrible for me. I still struggle when they say it's going to rain heavily[Interviewee-FA08].

The fear of rain and the need to constantly monitor rainfall can readily start to dominate life, increasing anxiety levels in some individuals (Jill et al., 2014). Whilst monitoring rainfall could be categorised as being prepared, for some individuals the current form of the resilience/preparedness agenda can add to the burden of living at risk of flooding as it creates additional anticipatory anxiety about future flooding (French et al., 2019). The need to protect their home can morph into maladaptive behaviours which aggravate the stresses of living at risk of flooding and further unmake home. As observed by Sou and Webber (2019) flood risk management policy, in particular those focusing on recovery, must seek to address these issues and support communities in reinstating positive emotional geographies. It also challenges the current resilience/preparedness agenda itself, problematising the 'one size fits all' approach. Ideally a more subtle and adaptive approach is required to meet the needs of all flood communities.

3.3. Flood preparedness

There are other elements of 'being prepared' that can create anticipatory anxiety and result in behaviours which could readily appear to be mal-adaptive.

I suffer from flood stress regularly. Every time I'm forecasted with rain, then I feel my heartbeat going up. It's always a concern. During the flood, I'm constantly on websites and uh, checking gauges and cameras and things. But the whole thing is just devastating[Interviewee-FA08].

We've got this been XXX gauge, about a mile away and it's very good, it's very accurate. And its running currently at about half a meter, when it gets to three and a half, I'm going to flood. Now all I see is that every 15 minutes they're going to give me a reading and I see a line going up like a skyrocket and I don't know when it's going to stop and flatten out, I am sitting on a gauge, you check it every 15 minutes looking for that skyrocket to flatten out and begin to curve so it's flattening out. I don't know when that is going to stop[Interviewee-FA08].

I try not to use the phone for it because I, I'm conscious that if I did it would be worse. But I've got, I've got, I've got this little lot, a lot of various sites that I look in terms of, you know, the hourly forecasts, rain fall depths, there's a good Norwegian site, predicting rainfall depths. Um, and then when it gets nearer to the day when we're going to get excessive rain,

I will then look at all the sites as well. But I try, I try not to look at them all, all the time[Interviewee-FA19].

Before labelling these responses as mal-adaptive, we need to consider the situation that these individuals find themselves in. They are living in an environment where they have little control, with no ability to stop flooding or to prevent their homes being unmade by flooding. Watt and DiFrancesantonio (2012) found that individuals with severe weather phobia often constantly monitored the weather via television's Weather Network, the radio, and other media outlets desperately trying to anticipate the weather. The use of these apps and maps is fraught with emotion, creating a sense of having some control i.e., being able to predict whether they might flood.

The drive for preparedness needs to be managed carefully, the need to be safe and secure in your home can readily lead to an over-response which adds to stress and results in changes to life's normal patterns. Home-unmaking, or rather the avoidance of it, is central to this over-response. What may appear as a reasonable and sensible request to be prepared can readily feed into the fear of being flooded again, potentially detracting from preparedness. We observe that more research is required to understand this careful balance and to unpack the links between preparedness and changes in behaviour.

3.4. The arduous recovery process

We have uncovered that flooding for those who live at risk of flooding, starts a long time before the flood water arrives and continues long after the flood waters have receded. We now explore how the process of recovering from flooding can also feed into how flooding is constructed and the impact this has on an individual's sense of home.

The recovery process can almost be as arduous as the flood itself.

Our kitchen had to be in the living room while the kitchen was being rebuilt. We were lucky we got it done very quickly after the flood, but that affected XXXX as well because there was a constant stream of strangers in the house. Yeah. And while we were absolutely delighted for them to be there, it was silly little personal things like, you know, she didn't feel comfortable going for a wee in her own house. She didn't like the thought of these workmen hearing a tinkle in the toilet there was this personal thing about her home being invaded by a constant stream of plasterers, decorators, electricians, plumbers, you know, we had the whole kit and caboodle here[Interviewee-FA06].

The 'constant stream of strangers' has been likened to a second or third wave of flooding (O'Hare et al., 2016). Homes in the UK are generally designed to prevent intrusion and to keep strangers out (Brown and Harris, 1989) with access to a home carefully controlled (Cheshire et al., 2018) and yet the recovery process enables wholesale access to all parts of the home, including those areas deemed as the most private of spaces. If home should provide security and freedom from surveillance, then this constant stream of strangers does the opposite. Even private things like going to the toilet can feel like they have moved into the public domain.

The recovery process itself is fraught with complexity presenting the individual with more unusual threats and challenges.

It was a nightmare getting all those quotes by the way because you can imagine how busy they were with all the property that had been sort of damaged. It was, that was like pulling teeth trying to get quote out, out of them because they were busy[Interviewee-FA09].

...because the insurance takes the money and send this cowboy builder in. There are so many people making a lot of money out of flooding and then the people at the end of it, I mean, where I live, it's quite a nice area but people live at XXX they've got nothing. You know, people just come in and take advantage of you[Interviewee-FA14].

The recovery process can seemingly be so arduous that it adds to the stress of flooding. If an individual has flooded before, then the thought of

repeating the home-unmaking and remaking, adds to the stress and increases the desire not to flood again. And still further out in time, when an individual's home is repaired and fit to live in, the security of a safe haven and secure base (Hiscock et al., 2001) is altered by the constant threat of flooding with the long arduous recovery process (Stanke et al., 2012).

3.5. The fear of leaving your home alone

Many interviewees talked about the need to constantly check that their home was safe whilst it was 'home alone,' for example, when going to work, shopping or on holiday. There is something of a role reversal here where the homeowner is seeking to provide a safe haven for their home. For some, the prospect of leaving their home alone was perceived to be too risky.

We don't go away in the winter now as it is too risky. Living here is more than making sure somebody feeds the cat if you are away, they have to know how to put up the flood defences-[Interviewee-FA19].

You can't just go away and leave your property. Every day you think, 'am I going to flood tomorrow, am I going to flood tomorrow?'[Interviewee-FA14]

At face value one would reasonably assume that this is a manifestation of place attachment (Huntington et al., 2017). Whilst we concede that place attachment can have both positive and negative impacts (Scannell and Gifford, 2017), the fear expressed here is centred around avoiding the long-term impacts that flooding has, not just on their home but on their quality of life.

3.6. The F word

The interviews conducted for this research clearly show that floodies construct flooding through the long-term effects of flooding, through the daily impacts, the degradation in quality of life and changes in behaviour, all designed to protect home and retain some form of security. Flooding is ever present as are the emotions of living at risk of flooding.

Everything in this house reminds me of the F word. So even when I come home from work, and I open my new front door the first things that's there is your new front door because you were flooded. And even once I've stepped through my new front door, I step onto my new carpet, and my new hall stairs carpet and I look at my new wallpaper and then I come in and I sit on my new sofa erm and it's just everything, not just the actual work to get the authorities it's just that everything in my house reminds me of it[Interviewee-FO5]

So, your relationship with your garden changes and um, you know, having to clean brown, horrible mess from the house. Yeah. It's not a pleasant experience. And it does, you do, you do lose a bit of love for the property. Oh, you get, well, times a healer. So, you do, you know, fall back in love with it[Interviewee-FA08].

I just feel now that I'm stuck here because I've got the history of flooding now and who's gonna buy a house right next to the river?[Interviewee-FA15].

Through the words and experiences of the floodies interviewed for this research, we have seen some of the human and emotional impacts of flooding and how these impacts can be compounded by individuals' desires to gain back some control, to try and regain ontological security and the safety that their home should provide. Current flood risk management policy is too practically driven, mainly focusing on the more tangible impacts of flooding. It does not appreciate that flooding often results in home becoming a place of chaos, literally, and also emotionally, a place full of strangers during recovery, and a place which is constantly threatened with the prospect of flooding again. It fails to recognise that human impacts of home-unmaking.

3.7. Home unmade or remade?

14 of the 20 interviews had flooded on 2 or more occasions. For a few of interviewees their homes had flooded on 5+ occasions. After each flood the home-owners had to remake their homes again, in a loop of home-making, flood and then home-remaking, going through the full circle of flood impacts and recovery (Lamond, 2014) as demonstrated in Fig. 1.

For many of the Floodies interviewed in the research, living at risk of flooding, and going through a series of flood events where their homes were inundated with water, felt like being on a roller coaster. Each turn of the spiral creating emotional stresses and tensions as their homes were unmade and remade. In the early days of setting up their flood group, the lead author attended a conference where one attendee likened living at risk of flooding to being trapped in a theme park constantly going round and round the corkscrew spirals of various rides but never being able to leave the park.

This need for continuous home remaking challenges the idea of what disaster impacts are, blurring the lines between post and pre-flooding planning and mitigation. The flood authorities and flood risk management policy would do well to take note of this blurring, taking on board a wider appreciation of disaster impacts and disaster risk management and the emotional rollercoaster than runs through this for flood communities.

Home-remaking grows to include limiting the damage of the next flood, better protecting the home, and better protecting an individual's ontological security against further flooding.

I had flood gates before, but it never got to them, it was coming up through (the floor) first. So now I've sorted that problem out, I've spent even more of flood gates, so I've got two massive pumps under the floor which pump, uh, should anything else, uh, or the non-return valves fail. So, I've got all those flood gates, pumps under the floor plus we've got a series of interventions that we've done upstream[Interviewee-F08]

Well, what I've got in my living room and kitchen is like patchwork, bits of carpet. I used to have laminate wood floor. Now I've no skirting boards on. And I'm not gonna pay for a floor because it could happen again. I don't trust the doors and I sort of think 'what's the point?'. It's still worth having a nice house because I'm obviously not meant to have one[Interviewee-F09].

Home making turns into home-remaking where each loop around leads to adaptations created from the learning that the previous flood created. These adaptations can include how an individual manages and deals with flood warnings or the impact of weather forecasts and raises the question of whether 'seasoned' flood communities who have experienced many years of living through this process of home remaking, living in the shadow of flood and weather warnings, could help those communities who are facing the impacts of flooding for the first or second time. Passing on their experience and advice, potentially in a

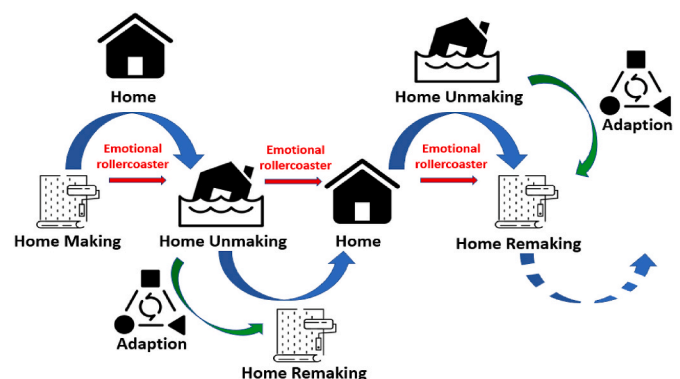


Fig. 1. The home remaking Spiral.

formalise manner, for best managing living at risk of flooding, though, for example, the National Flood Forum.

3.8. Feeling at home?

For many of the interviewees, flooding changed how they felt about their home. For some, it raised the issue of moving which was dismissed:

I think the idea of (moving), I've only been in two years, so, you know, it puts a lot of money into getting the house as you wanted. Um, that would then be all thrown away. Would I be able to sell it?...I'll see if some of the houses around about sell. Now across from me has recently just sold the price wasn't reduced particularly[Interviewee F13].

You do lose a bit of love for the property. Um, Oh you get, do you do sort of times a healer. So, you do, you know, fall back in love with it, but then, you know, the next time you think, Oh, how many more times take me, you know, and uh, when you've been flooded 6 times luckily enough, I've not been flooded for two and a half years. So, sort of times healed a little bit, but when it was almost an annual event. You're thinking how much more can you take of this, you know, it is quite awful, really not sure what the right word is[Interviewee-F08]

After we'd have these two floods we talked, as I say we only moved here about six, seven years ago. I said, do we sell up? Do we go and move somewhere a little bit better from flooding. And then we thought, no, we don't, we live in a lovely village. We have lovely neighbours, we have really good friends, et cetera[Interviewee-F10]

Others felt trapped, unable to move.

I don't feel as secure as I did because there is always that risk because it's happened once, I don't know that it's going to, whether it's going to happen again. Yeah. And um, I think probably if it had been possible, I might have moved. I just knew that it, you know, nobody's going to buy a house that had been flooded so recently but when you've got a running river through your back garden. People are gonna look at that and think, no chance. So, it's, I'm kind of here because I feel I've not much chance of selling it[Interviewee-F15].

If I could move my house anywhere else away from, uh, uh, a flooding area, I would[Interviewee-F16].

Although place attachment will play a role in the decisions to move or otherwise, there are other social and cultural dimensions at play here (Ratnam and Drozdowski, 2018). The challenges of getting flood insurance and hence of being able to sell your home can mean that people have to remain. There was a sense in some of the interviews, that having no choice in staying meant that the homeowner then manufactured a more emotional reason to stay 'a friendly village,' 'blitz camaraderie.' Thus creating a new sense of place, shaped by memories (Silver and Grek-Martin, 2015) and the homeowners now transformed beliefs. Over time this may create new place attachment and new emotional involvement with place, their home (Bonaiuto et al., 2016).

4. Conclusion: the experiential construction of flooding

At the start of this paper, we posed the question 'can flooding be understood solely as the presence of water in areas that are usually dry?' Through our research we have demonstrated that the answer to this is 'no.'

For the floodies interviewed in this research, the experiential construction of flooding often begins with the anticipatory fear of having water in your lounge. A flood brings with it a tidal wave of emotion as demonstrated in Fig. 2, the stress and anguish of water flooding your home, sadness at the loss of precious personal belongings, the fear of rain, anxiety about the return of the flood and the ongoing emotional labour that is required in learning to live at risk of flooding.

Through this research we have demonstrated how flooding not only unmakes homes but that for many floodies, flooding creates a continuous spiral of homemaking, flooding, and home-remaking with all the associated emotions.

The concept of a home-remaking spiral is reminiscent of the disaster risk management cycle (ADRC, 2005) including the challenges associated with it and the continuous return to a flood. Indeed our home re-making spiral resembles the disaster risk management spiral proposed by Boshier et al. (2021), where the flooding spiral is a complex mix

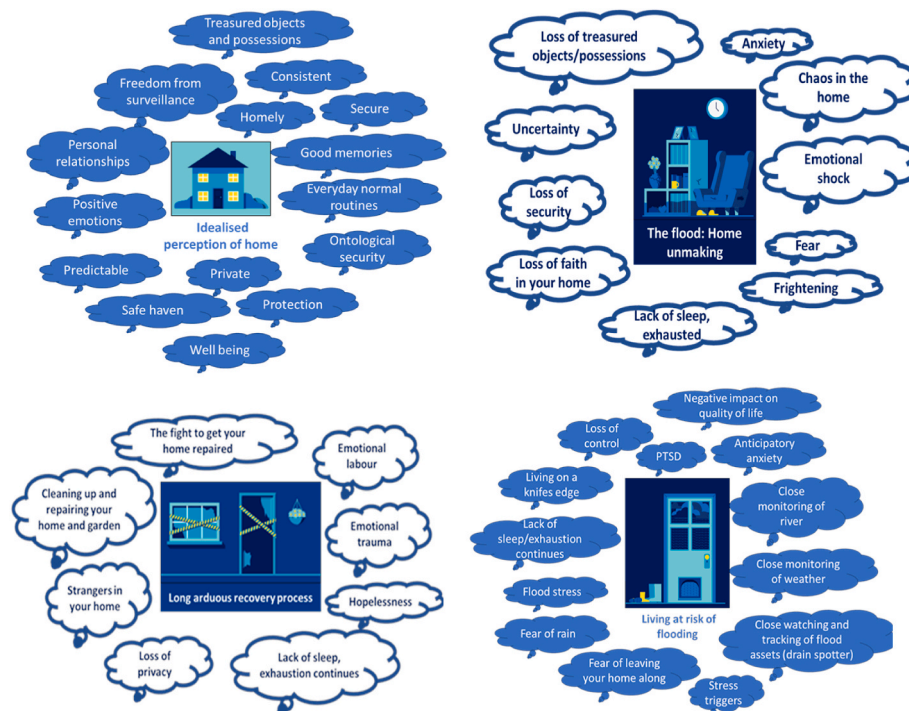


Fig. 2. The emotional journey of flooding (pictures courtesy of Luna9 - www.luna9design.com: Beneath the waterline BeneathTheWaterline-ThePersonalCostOfFlooding.pdf (reading.ac.uk)).

of flood, home-remaking, adaptation, people, and the emotional roller-coaster than flood communities go through when living at risk of flooding.

This emotional roller-coaster changes perspectives. Life folds in around not flooding again, around being prepared and being in as much control as possible. This puts forward challenges to the resilience agenda and how the concept of preparedness is presented to flood communities, namely being aware of their flood risk (Gov.uk, 2017b) and creating flood plans (Gov.uk, 2017a). Whilst flood policy and ways of working do well to direct at-risk communities to prepare for flooding, they forget that it is people who flood not just their homes.

In its current form the resilience/preparedness agenda adds to the burden of living at risk of flooding through creating additional anticipatory anxiety about future flooding. This research exposes the urgent need to address this imbalance ensuring that communicating flood risk acknowledges the impact it has on people and puts in place emotional and financial support for those communities that need to continually live in a state of preparedness for flooding.

It is not only the resilience/preparedness agenda which needs to understand the emotional impacts of flooding. Current flood risk management policy and ways of working mainly focuses on the physical components of home excluding the long-term emotional impacts and the unmaking of home. Added to this is the almost one-dimensional approach within policy which views flooding through the lens of 'pre-disaster' and 'post-disaster,' rather than the cyclical on-going disaster management process that it is for many who flood.

We acknowledge that understanding the emotional and human impacts of flooding is much harder than quantifying the physical impacts, and that currently cost benefit calculations are predicated on quantitative measurements. However, our research has clearly identified areas where flood risk management policy and ways of working should be adapted to provide support for flood communities whilst addressing what constitutes the 'pre' and 'post' disaster quandary.

- Policy must change to support communities through the home-making/unmaking spiral and the emotional challenge of learning how to live at risk of flooding, ensuring that managing the emotional impacts of flooding is deemed as important as managing the physical impacts.
- Changes in how the concept of resilience is delivered to communities are required, for example, adapting how adverse weather is communicated or helping communities access emotional support when flooding is predicted. Additional research is also required to help organisations like the Met Office and the Environment Agency negotiate the balance between the emotionality of flooding and how flood risk is communicated.
- Ensuring that one of the goals of flood risk management policy is in the provision of positive emotional geographies in flooded areas. This necessitates much more subtle and adaptive ways of working.

This research clearly shows that retaining current flood risk management policy means that many thousands of households will suffer the long-term emotional impacts of flooding, unsupported and unhelped, with no-one to provide the hope they need to regain a good quality of life. Our aspiration is that this research starts the process of ensuring that all floodies can live in hope.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2023.100966>.

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