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Article

# Entanglements of Identity and Resilience in the Camp Fire's Network of Disaster-Specific Facebook Groups

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**Abstract**
The Camp Fire in California (November 2018) was one of the most destructive wildfires in recorded history. Dozens of Facebook groups emerged to help people impacted by the Camp Fire. Its variety and prevalence throughout recovery make this network of disaster-specific, recovery-oriented social media groups a distinct context for inquiry. Reflexive thematic analysis was performed on 25 interviews with group administrators and publicly available descriptive data from 92 Facebook groups to characterize the composition of the network and explore identity in the groups. Group members' identities fell into two categories—helpers and survivors—while the groups consisted of six identities: general, specialized, survivor-only, pet-related, location-specific, and adoptive. Administrators established group identity around purpose, through membership criteria, and in similarity and opposition to other Camp Fire Facebook groups. The findings contribute to social identity theory and the communication theory of resilience at the intersection of resilience labor, identity anchors, and communication networks.

**Keywords**
disaster recovery; Facebook groups; resilience; social identity; social media; social networks

**Issue**
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## 1. Introduction

The Camp Fire started in Butte County, California, on November 8th, 2018, and became the state's most destructive fire (Sciacca & Krieger, 2018). Many of the 50,000 evacuees lost everything and became displaced (Sabalow et al., 2018). While trying to rebuild their lives after the Camp Fire, resources were often difficult to access, insufficient, and/or nonexistent. Additionally, with the loss of their physical community, residents of Camp Fire-impacted counties struggled to stay socially connected and maintain their relationships with strong and weak ties (Brown, 2022).

The disaster prompted the emergence of a network of Facebook groups intended to help people impacted by the Camp Fire (i.e., Camp Fire Facebook groups [CFFGs]). By December 2018, over 30 CFFGs were created with probably over 100 existing since evacuation. CFFGs boomed locally, nationally, and even internationally and provided extensive support to the fire-impacted communities, serving as "a sort of ad hoc social safety net in the absence of institutional support" (Hagerty, 2020, para. 16). Its magnitude and its prevalence in the resilience organizing of everyday citizens after the Camp Fire make the network of CFFGs a distinct context for inquiry.

Along with its significance to recovery, the network of CFFGs also exemplifies how group identities can vary across social media groups dedicated to organizing disaster response and recovery. Potential members could find a space, or spaces, to engage in resilience organizing that fulfilled their needs and goals. Exploring the relationship between resilience organizing and identity is important for understanding transformative processes after disasters (Agarwal & Buzzanell, 2015), and examining the network of CFFGs contributes to this knowledge.

While research commonly addresses social media use after disasters, no studies have comprehensively analyzed a network of Facebook groups devoted to a specific disaster, to my knowledge. Researchers have studied the identities of two groups after a blizzard in Denmark (Birkbak, 2012) and the functions of a few groups after flooding in Europe (Kaufhold & Reuter, 2016), Australia, and New Zealand (Bird et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2012). Most other examinations consider Facebook groups as one of many sources and channels of support for survivors (e.g., Li et al., 2019). Therefore, devoting attention to this network of Facebook groups devoted to a single disaster and its members advances understandings of how social media groups are used in resilience organizing and what the role of identity is in said groups.

This study explores how identity is entangled in a massive network of social media groups dedicated to resilience organizing after a disaster. I primarily use reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021) performed on data from interviews with CFFG administrators, as well as publicly available descriptive data about the CFFGs from the groups themselves. First, I characterize the composition of the network of CFFGs, with attention to both the groups and the people in the network. Second, I explore the anchors of group identity established by administrators in CFFGs. Characterizing the composition of the network provides a description of this practically compelling instance of online resilience organizing after a disaster, while exploring group identity anchors contributes to theorizing the relationships between networks, resilience, and identity.

## 2. Intersections of Resilience and Identity

During and after disasters, disaster-impacted individuals and volunteers engage in resilience labor. Resilience labor is "the dual-layered process of reintegrating transformative identities to sustain and construct organizational involvement and resilience" (Agarwal & Buzzanell, 2015, p. 422). Individuals engaging in resilience labor are empowered by their connections with other people, groups, and organizations and use language to highlight their familial, ideological, and destruction-renewal relationships, all while reintegrating their identities (Agarwal & Buzzanell, 2015). In the case of the Camp Fire, group members negotiated their personal identities, especially related to the Camp Fire, while navigating the network of online spaces for resilience organizing and their recovery.

Resilience labor highlights the intersection of social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and the communication theory of resilience (CTR; Buzzanell, 2010, 2019). In SIT, people's social identities are emphasized. Social identities consist of the elements of oneself that are derived from the social categories in which one believes themselves to belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The two fundamental processes of identification from the perspective of SIT are categorization and self-enhancement (Pratt, 2001). Categorizations are "cognitive tools that segment, classify, and order the social environment" (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p. 15). From social categories, social groups are established. These social groups agree on how they define and evaluate themselves, both within the group and compared to other groups; members form their individual identities around their belongingness to the groups.

Social identities and relationships are integral parts of resilience in the CTR. The CTR positions resilience as the communicative process of "reintegrating after difficult life experiences" (Buzzanell, 2010, p. 1) and seeks to understand and explain how resources are utilized discursively and materially through adaptive-transformational processes to constitute new normals after adversity (Buzzanell, 2019). The CTR posits people engage in five processes as they confront disruptions: crafting normalcy, foregrounding productive action while backgrounding negative feelings, affirming identity anchors, maintaining and using communication networks, and constructing and putting to work alternative logics (Buzzanell, 2010, 2019).

Affirming identity anchors also unifies SIT and the CTR. Identity anchors are people's strongest identities or those they choose to emphasize. After wildfires, communities work to strengthen their identities and return themselves to normal (Cox & Perry, 2011). By anchoring their identities, people explain who they are and how they relate to others (Buzzanell, 2010). Examples include Christians placing trust in God (Black & Lobo, 2008) and fathers experiencing joblessness centralizing their head of household roles (Buzzanell & Turner, 2003). Affirming identity anchors can facilitate self-enhancement and define people's relationships with each other and with events, like the Camp Fire.

Using and maintaining communication networks also connects SIT and the CTR. CFFGs offered a network of potential social relationships both within and across groups to facilitate recovery. Joining a single CFFG, fire-impacted individuals could access the resources (e.g., relationships, information, and goods) available in one social media group and could identify with members of said group or the group itself. However, group members reported participating in 15 or even 40 CFFGs (Hagerty, 2020). SIT explains how people can identify with multiple targets (Scott & Stephens, 2009), even when those identities are in contest with each other (Pratt, 2001).

The network's size likely facilitated, and necessitated, the establishment of group identities. Developing a meaningful and strong group identity through interactions is a strength of computer-mediated groups (Postmes et al., 2000). Consequently, the large number of groups probably enabled members to join or leave CFFGs based on their needs, goals, and experiences.

While networks of Facebook groups devoted to a single disaster have received minimal attention, research has examined the existence of multiple Facebook groups

for other adversities. For example, a systematic search for Facebook groups for diabetes-related foot problems identified and analyzed 57 groups (Abedin et al., 2017). Large networks of Facebook groups are common, but the large number of Facebook groups dedicated to such a small, localized population is uncommon. Membership in multiple groups in the network of CFFGs likely facilitated the exchange of depth and breadth of support that is not available in a single group.

This study examines the composition of the network of CFFGs with particular attention to the entanglements of identity. Exploring the network of CFFGs provides opportunities for building practical knowledge about the role of multiple disaster-specific, recovery-oriented social media groups in recovery from disasters and for integrating and extending SIT and the CTR. Thus, two research questions are posed:

RQ1: What is the composition of the network of CFFGs?

RQ2: What anchors of group identity were established by administrators in the CFFGs?

## 3. Method

I learned about the Camp Fire shortly after it started while listening to National Public Radio. In November 2018, I joined my first CFFG out of personal interest. I had no prior connection to the Butte County community and no intention of studying the Camp Fire. I spent days and nights scrolling through the posts, "liking" a few but never commenting or posting until much later, when I began recruitment for this research. About one year after the Camp Fire began, I decided to study recovery from the Fire in CFFGs, while being involved in only a handful of CFFGs at the time. I could not help in the most needed ways: by providing information and tangible goods (especially money). However, I could help by using the resources available to me to study the Camp Fire recovery, especially its online elements, and share the experiences of group members with their community and other disaster-impacted communities, disaster managers, and scholars.

In August 2020, 21 months after the Camp Fire started, I received Institutional Review Board's approval to recruit administrators for interviews. At this time, I began preliminary analyses. I created a repository of CFFGs, starting with a directory of social media resources for former residents on the website Butte 211 Camp Fire (n.d.). I put the 28 CFFGs listed into a spreadsheet and used relevant search terms from the groups (e.g., Camp Fire, Paradise Fire, Butte Fire) to locate additional CFFGs. I aggregated publicly available information from the CFFGs (i.e., group name, whether the group was public or private, creation date, number of members, number of administrators and/or moderators, names of administrators and/or moderators, and descriptions from the "About" tab) and performed descriptive statistics on the quantitative data. I also familiarized myself with the group names and descriptions to understand their goals.

Because they allow access to information that cannot be directly observed (Patton, 2002), I interviewed administrators to learn about CFFGs. The interview population was current administrators of one or more CFFGs. In the preliminary analyses, I identified roughly 164 administrators and 51 moderators for about 215 total leaders. Administrators were recruited using private messages on Facebook. I recruited 102 administrators in five waves from August 25th to September 14th, 2020. To start, I messaged administrators of two or more CFFGs and of the largest CFFGs. Then, I messaged the first administrator listed from the next largest groups. Around the third wave, I noticed all the administrators who were interested in and able to be interviewed were women. In reviewing the list of administrators, around 90% had traditionally feminine names. Therefore, in the later waves, I targeted administrators with feminine names for homogeneity.

The sample was 25 administrators of at least one CFFG at the time of the interviews. Interviewees, who were all women and mostly White, ranged in age from early-20s to early-70s. Five interviewees identified as survivors of the Camp Fire. The administrators represented over 30 CFFGs, leading one to several groups each. In two instances, two interviewees were administrators of the same CFFG.

Semi-structured phone interviews were conducted between August 29th and September 20th, 2020, about two months before the Camp Fire's two-year anniversary. The interviews were recorded and averaged about 89 minutes (range: 65 to 116; median = 85). Interviewees were compensated with a $15 Amazon gift card. The interviews demonstrate rigor with over 2,220 minutes (37 hours) of data coming from conversations with over 15% of the population of interest (i.e., administrators of one or more CFFG at the time of interview).

To explore the network of CFFGs, I asked administrators how they learned about CFFGs or decided to get involved with CFFGs. I also inquired about the goal(s) of their group(s), the potential the administrators saw their CFFGs as having, and the role other CFFGs played in the creation of their CFFGs. I encouraged administrators to estimate the proportion of group members who were survivors versus helpers, which led to conversations about the members of their groups. Administrators also spoke in detail about their day-to-day responsibilities and whether and how they enforced rules in their groups.

## 4. Data Analysis

I used reflexive thematic analysis to analyze the data, following the six-phase process articulated by Braun and Clarke (2021): familiarizing oneself with the data,

coding systematically, generating initial themes, developing and reviewing themes, refining themes, and reporting themes. Regarding reflexivity, assumptions from SIT and the CTR informed my engagement in reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), such as the acknowledgment that people engaging in resilience may identify with multiple identity anchors. However, the analyses were inductive, meaning theory did not provide a lens through which the data were initially coded. Both semantic and latent coding—seeking explicit or surface-level meanings and hidden or deeper meanings, respectively—were used to descriptively and interpretively analyze the data (Byrne, 2021). Various identity anchors were identified as central organizing concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2019). My experiential orientation allowed me to prioritize how identity anchoring was experienced by administrators (Byrne, 2021), rather than interrogate the constraints that may have influenced these identities and anchoring processes. During analysis, themes ideally met three criteria: recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (Owen, 1984).

Triangulation of the preliminary analyses of the repository of CFFGs and the interviews with administrators offer credibility to the findings, as does my passive participation in CFFGs over the last three years. For RQ1, I summarized the comments from administrators to characterize the composition of the network of CFFGs, including the groups themselves and the members of the groups. I also present themes representing the group identities of CFFGs in the networks, which are derived from the semantic coding of the group names and descriptions. That coding is represented in a multilevel network graph I illustrated using Ucinet (Borgatti et al., 2002) and the data from the repository to detail the composition of the network of CFFGs. RQ2 is addressed with both semantic and latent coding, where three themes illustrate the anchors of group identity established by administrators.

Their visible involvement in the Camp Fire recovery makes protecting administrators' confidentiality and anonymity essential. Only basic descriptions of the interviewees, CFFGs, and interviewees' experiences are described. {Braces} indicate details in a quotation were changed or omitted that may reveal the identity of a person or group, while staying true to the administrators' narratives. [Brackets] provide clarification, such as for pronoun use, and ellipsis (…) demarcates quotations being shortened for brevity. Interviewees' quotations are marked only with (Admin), given the chance that readers could string together the quotations to identify the interviewed administrators. This resonance and ethical consideration are criteria for qualitative quality (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017).

## 5. Results

The results illustrate CFFGs and the network of CFFGs with attention to identity. To start, I describe the composition of the network of CFFGs, with a focus on the groups in the network and the people in the network. Then, I showcase the anchors for establishing group identity.

### *5.1. Composition of the Network of Camp Fire Facebook Groups (RQ1)*

Over 100 CFFGs likely existed since the Camp Fire evacuation. In my preliminary analyses, I identified at least 92 groups. However, groups may have been deleted prior to or added since August 2020. CFFGs may also be missing if their names did not include relevant search terms or if they were "hidden" (i.e., do not appear in searches and require an invitation from a current member). The objective consistent across the network of CFFGs was "getting survivors help…that was the only goal" (Admin).

#### 5.1.1. The Groups in the Network

CFFGs had six distinct, yet overlapping, group identities: general, specialized, survivor-only, pet-related, location-specific, and adoptive. Figure 1 provides an overview of the group identities, which are discussed throughout the results.

The network of CFFGs is illustrated in Figure 2. The network graph depicts the six group identities as nodes (black circles). The squares (public groups) and triangles (private groups) represent each individual CFFG in the network. Key descriptive information including group size (node size) and creation date (node color) are also represented. A tie, illustrated as a line between nodes, indicates that an individual CFFG (triangle or square) holds the group identity represented by the adjacent black, circular node.

Each CFFG can have multiple group identities, which is what makes this network possible. For example, the green square between adoptive and pet-related represents the CFFG "Paradise Fire Adopt a Family 🐾🐾 With Fur Kids," while the yellow triangle between survivor-only and specialized represents the group "Camp Fire My Home Survived but…."

The network of CFFGs began forming during evacuation. Around four groups formed the day the Camp Fire started, with about 20 more added in the following week, and about 40 more added by the end of 2018. An administrator who survived the Camp Fire and got involved in CFFGs at least a week after the Fire explained:

> I was probably late to join the social media circus, and I call it that, but it's really very helpful. There were already a lot of groups starting that were trying to help. There [are] a lot of groups that are not even in existence anymore. (Admin)

The color of the nodes in the network graph represents when each group was created.

The CFFGs varied in their size, represented as the node size in the network graph, and number of leaders.

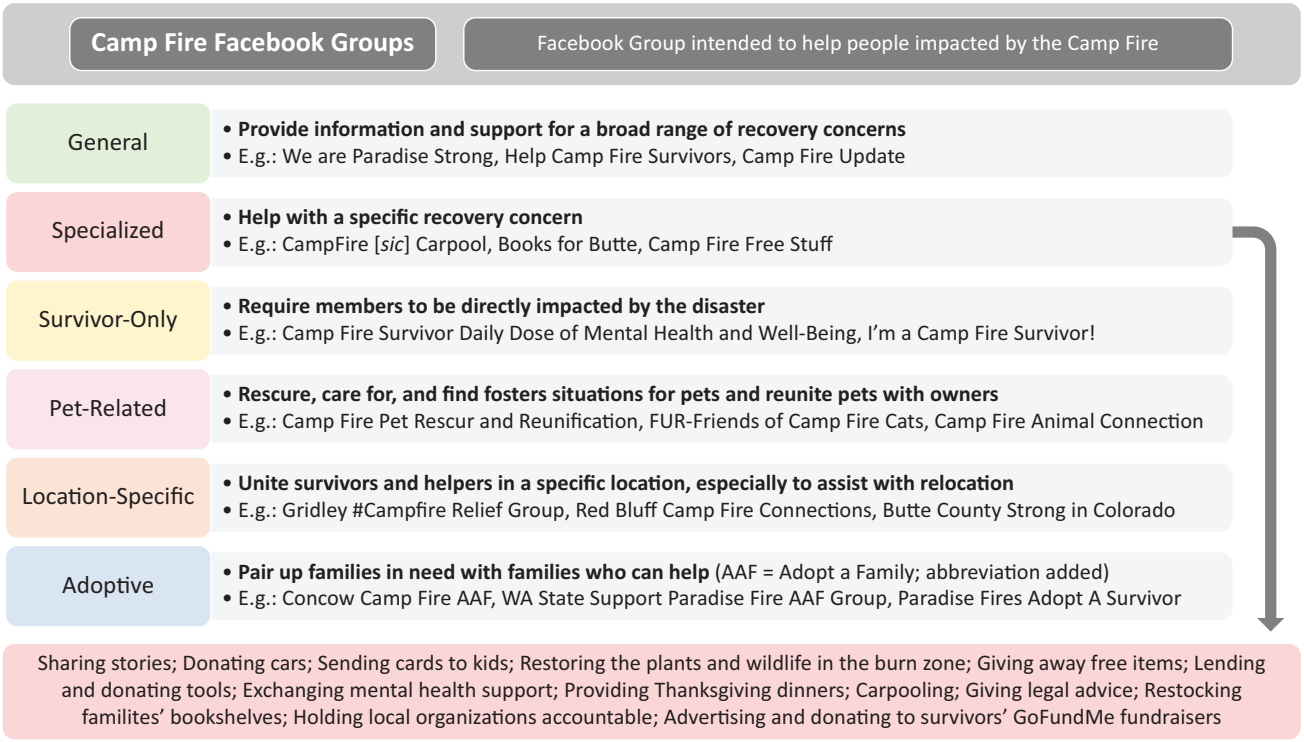


**Figure 1.** Six group identities of CFFGs with definitions and examples.

In August 2020, the average group size was about 1,150 members with a median group size of 317 members (range: 5 to 25,000 leaders). The total number of members was over 100,000 members, though users could be members of multiple groups. The mean number of administrators and moderators per group was around two leaders, with the median and mode being one leader (range: 0 to 9 leaders).

The privacy of CFFGs existed on a continuum and is indicated by node shape in the network graph. Fifty-five CFFGs were public, and 37 were private. Many administrators kept their CFFGs open to anyone who agreed to adhere to the group's rules, while others engaged in various actions to keep their groups private or more closed. For example, when asked if potential members needed to answer screening questions, an administrator stated,

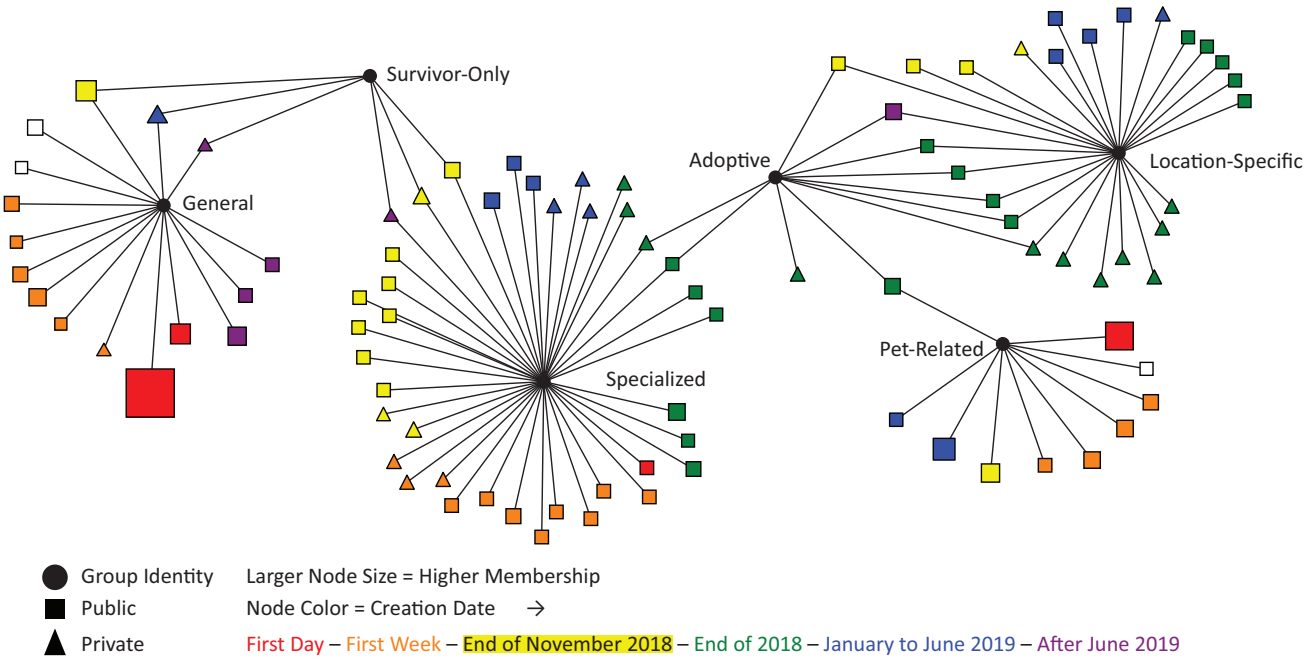


**Figure 2.** Network graph of CFFGs where ties represent holding a group identity.

"No, I just made [the group] public. I could either approve memberships or somebody that was already in the group could allow or invite somebody to join" (Admin). Having public or more open groups made it easier for helpers from around the world to get involved. However, having private or more closed groups helped administrators cultivate safe spaces for specialized assistance and specific populations of people.

Differences existed in the scope of CFFGs. Some administrators had grand intentions, while others were more modest. An administrator whose "goal was to get everybody the most important things: jobs and houses {or at least a trailer}" elaborated: "It was [about] helping fully instead of making myself sparse. I wanted to help somebody all the way through the process and getting them safe and set up before I went to the next person" (Admin). Working with impacted individuals from the start of their recovery through achieving stability and normalcy was the ideal scenario for many adoptive and location-specific CFFGs. Many adoptive CFFGs were also location-specific, as shown in Figure 2, which enabled administrators and helpers from afar to support survivors relocating to their geographical area and could produce deep, long-lasting relationships.

However, most groups assisted on smaller scales, providing bandages for literal and metaphorical wounds from the Camp Fire:

> I think the goal overall of all the groups is just to try and like give a Band-Aid of some sort and then like really lofty goals….If I could just give them back what they lost…if they could just…have something to call home again….That'd be cool but mostly we're going to give blankets and t-shirts and they're going to have a car full of new [stuff]. (Admin)

Another administrator invoked the bandage metaphor regarding the goal for her CFFG:

> [We] decided we needed to do something that was more long-term, that it wasn't just a quick fix or a band-aid. It's something where we could provide access to resources for people….Trying to really help people move towards a more permanent solution for their issues than just I need $30 for gas. (Admin)

This quotation highlights how the groups provided first-aid for impacted individuals but also sought to heal the source of their wounds and provide literal and metaphorical rehabilitation to promote their recovery.

#### 5.1.2. The People in the Network

Group members used "survivor" and "helper" to describe their relationship to the Camp Fire. The linguistic choices of these identities appeared intentional and meaningful. Only ten administrators even used the word "victim," with a maximum of three instances in one interview; "survivor" was dominant. One administrator who used "victim" even stopped to correct herself, saying a helper was "trying to deliver things to victims. Um, or, sorry, not victims. Survivors" (Admin). Administrators seemed careful to use the language of survivorship.

Survivors' membership in CFFGs was unusually high. There were 5,800 members of the private group "I'm a Camp Fire Survivor!" (n.d.) in June 2021. With membership being exclusively granted to survivors of the Camp Fire, possibly 10% of the 50,000 evacuees were still members over 3.5 years after the Fire.

CFFG members used "helper" to describe people from across the globe who provided support in the groups. An administrator described how their co-administrator would "recruit helpers," saying "that was kind of the language: helpers and survivors, as opposed to donors and the needy or victims or something—language is important" (Admin). Many administrators acknowledged that a wide range of supportive behaviors could make someone a helper. Although people from around the United States and the world led and participated in the recovery, local members were uniquely positioned to provide support, especially as "boots on the ground" (Admin).

Being a "helper" could raise dilemmas. When asked about the kind of challenges related to administrating her group, one interviewee reflected:

> [We need to] balance being on guard and protecting the helpers who are giving their money while also keeping an open heart and being so sensitive to the fact that, in vetting people and in making sure that situations are not sketchy, people are opening up their lives to us….I think that's been the biggest challenge for me over time is just planning out, how do I make sure that the situation is super legit and also make sure that this person that I'm wanting to come alongside—I try to say "come alongside" a person instead of helping them, because that's what we all want, right, when we're like down. And we all have those times in life. Some of us get hit harder than others like [the Camp Fire], but we don't want somebody coming to just help us. We want somebody to come alongside us, even if that means sitting and just being quiet when your day starts—[…is] legitimately needing help because I have absolutely run into situations where they were fake. (Admin)

This quotation describes difficulties related to the helper-survivor dynamic and the process of vetting people who wanted help to make sure they were actually survivors and not scammers.

Administrators recognized that not all helpers were actually helping. For example, "Not all [the group members] are nice. There's your basic Facebook trolls" (Admin). The groups also "started to get scammers" who tried to take advantage of the situation, which was "really hard" (Admin). Additionally, some members

observed but did not participate. Administrators mentioned inactive members who were not liking, posting, or commenting but did not speak at length about them. Several acknowledged how people may have observed for any number of reasons, like voyeurism or personal preference.

Knowing "survivors" and "helpers" were common terminology, I asked about the composition of survivors and helpers in administrators' CFFGs. The composition of the groups and administrators' certainty about the composition varied from very certain to very uncertain and from primarily survivors to primarily helpers. For example, an administrator of a generalized CFFG expressed:

> I would say maybe 5%, maybe 10%, [of members] are actually survivors or people that were directly impacted by the Fire….From what they have commented on, you know if they were ones that lost their home or if they were ones that ran out of their houses with nothing but their pajamas on. Versus like I said, the vast majority of members that don't comment and it's kind of…yeah, you're guessing. (Admin)

Another administrator described the proportion of her specialized CFFG as being "10 survivors to one helper" but admitted she was not sure "because some people weren't as active doing stuff in the group. So, they may have been helpers and just kind of in the backdrop and doing stuff without being [visible] online" (Admin). These quotations highlight different compositions in the CFFGs and group members who did not leave visible traces of participation.

Determining the groups' composition was also challenging because there were "a lot of people who were not only survivors, but helpers" (Admin). Administrators noticed some survivors started helping while the Fire burned. For example, when explaining the proportion of survivors and helpers in her pet-related group, an administrator advised:

> I think, actually, the numbers [of survivors and helpers] go hand in hand. Everybody understood the pain and the loss, so even if they lost their [pets] themselves, they were willing to help, whether it was dedicating an hour a day to matching posts of lost and found [animals] or calling around for other people. (Admin)

For some, becoming a helper took time. Regarding "there [being] an overlap," one administrator noticed how "a lot of the survivors have become active helpers, increasingly, so that's pretty cool" (Admin). It appeared that "a lot of the survivors became helpers once they were stabilized" (Admin). Helping other survivors more actively was a turning point mentioned by administrators. For this reason and others, the groups' compositions constantly evolved over time.

### *5.2. Establishing Group Identity (RQ2)*

The six identities of groups described in Figure 1 and illustrated in Figure 2 provide a starting point for understanding how group identities were established by administrators. An administrator described how networks of Facebook groups emerge to address different aspects of recovery from the wildfires in California. She said:

> There's [sic] generally groups that are created on Facebook that, for lack of a better term, maybe compartmentalize different subject matters. Usually if you look, you can find a group say that strictly kind of does GoFundMes, and then you can find another group that's like "Here adopt a fire victim family," and then there's another group that "If you've got any services that you can offer, post your message here." It's actually rare, I think, to find a group that encompasses all of that in the same group. (Admin)

In the case of CFFGs, administrators established group identity anchors around purpose, through membership criteria, and in similarity and opposition.

#### 5.2.1. Around Purpose

The primary way administrators established group identity was around the group's purpose. Some administrators were unsure *how* they wanted to help when they started their CFFG, which lent itself to general support. General CFFGs provided information and support for a broad range of recovery concerns. An administrator of a general CFFG explained how she had not considered for whom she created her group, elaborating:

> [The group] was for those of us outside the area to support those people who were suffering from the Camp Fire. It was "Whatever we can do for you guys, we're here"….I don't think there was a real plan for what [the group] was going to do other than [say] "We're here for you." (Admin)

Contrarily, other administrators had a defined purpose for their CFFG that was communicated with group members, which was often the case for pet-related and location-specific CFFGs. An administrator of a pet-related CFFG described communicating the group's identity around its purpose: "People would want to post fundraisers, stuff like that, and I would have to tell them, 'Look, you're going to have to do that in another group. We don't do that on this group.' This group is strictly for {pets}" (Admin). The groups' purposes, and subsequently their identities, could be communicated in the group description, through posts in the group, and via direct interactions with members.

The best examples of establishing group identity around purpose are specialized CFFGs. Specialized groups carved out niches in the network to address a specific recovery concern and built their identity around

that concern. Certain groups became known in the network of CFFGs for providing particular support. For example, an interviewee complimented the administrator of another group while explaining specialization:

> I think a group has to have a single focus or at least a primary focus, like [Named group]. It was only {this thing}. Some people were saying, "Well, can we do {that thing}?" and [the administrator] said, "Somebody else could create that group." It gets too big and it's hard to control. (Admin)

Despite specific foci, there were instances of flexibility, like in this case:

> Every once in a while, we'll get someone that's posting about resources for survivors, and normally we don't allow those kinds of postings because they're not strictly about {what we do} but we figure some people need to find out about these resources….But pretty much the conversation has stayed to {what we do}….We try to really just stay in our lane with {what we do}. (Admin)

Concentrating on one facet of recovery helped curate a group identity.

A key action for establishing group identity around purpose was being selective about posts allowed in the groups. An administrator explained how she curated the group's identity around providing information directly related to the Camp Fire. She recalled:

> {Early on,} I didn't approve any posts that were like, "We're praying for you," or well wishes, or anything like that….I wanted only pertinent, helpful, directly helpful information to be out there because, again, I opened my [CFFG] to be the one stop, if you will, of resources…of information….There was a lot of posts about animals for months [and even] after the first year about missing animals and where the animals are and reconnecting animals. And it was so much that I had to personally write [to] people, "This is not for animals. There is a [CFFG] for animals. Here's the link." And I even have those links within our announcements within our own [CFFG] where [people] could go, but I really wanted my CFFG to be direct information to help people survive,…find resources, clothing, food, shelter, and then how to rebuild. (Admin)

Being selective about the posts in their CFFGs often meant using post approval, like in the quote above, but could also mean deleting posts or comments that did not help accomplish the purpose of the group.

#### 5.2.2. Through Membership Criteria

Administrators also established group identity through membership criteria. Many private CFFGs aimed to serve members of specific populations, such as only Camp Fire survivors or people who lived in specific geographic locations. For survivor-only CFFGs, groups existed for all survivors and for only survivors with standing homes. For location-specific CFFGs, groups were tailored to different states (e.g., Arizona, Oregon, Idaho) and other California cities and counties (e.g., Kincade, Orland, San Jose Bay, Sacramento). The identities of the groups, thusly, centered on the population being served.

A key action related to establishing identity through membership criteria was requiring potential members to answer a couple of brief questions. Most private groups, and even some public groups, asked screening questions. Questions addressed topics like where a person lived and what they needed or could offer. For example, one administrator explained: "They need to let us know, number one, if they're a survivor or donor,…where they're located, whether they're able to {do deliveries}, and whether they agree to the rules of our [group]" (Admin). The two most common questions were if a person would follow the rules of the group and if they were a survivor or helper.

Administrators asked screening questions for three central reasons. First, wanting to get a pulse on who was looking *for* help and *to* help was a common motivation, as was wanting to ensure both survivors and helpers agreed on the terms of the help. Second, administrators sought to protect group members from people with malintent. For example, an administrator explained:

> People make [up], and I actually saw where people make up, a Facebook [profile] and they say they were in the Fire and they put up a GoFundMe and they start getting money and they weren't actually even there. So, there was fraud involved also. And so just to make it so that not anybody could join, {I added questions}. (Admin)

Protecting both survivors and helpers from scammers was a top concern for most administrators. Third, asking screening questions helped reinforce groups' identities. Screening questions addressed membership criteria linked to the explicit or implicit identities of the groups.

#### 5.2.3. In Similarity and Opposition

Administrators, lastly, established group identity in similarity with and, more often, in opposition to other CFFGs. With so many groups, administrators' strategies for organizing support differed widely, as did the interactions in the CFFGs. Therefore, along with *what* purposes a CFFG had, differences existed in *how* the groups accomplished those purposes. For example, the content posted in the groups varied, as described by this administrator:

> Some groups, it's all about the drama. It's all about, "Oh my gosh, this {really tragic thing happened}," which, I mean, we do some of that. We have to

> make some announcements like that, but that's like all they do is post and, really, we just need people to work….It's okay to celebrate and mourn. And we do a little bit of that but, I mean, if that's all you're doing, that's not {helping}. (Admin)

Administrators commonly drew distinctions related to how their CFFG operated differently than others.

The temperament of the groups was a common distinguishing factor when administrators identified their CFFG in opposition to other groups. For example, emotions could become heated online. An administrator explained:

> [People] will cuss somebody out in a heartbeat, and we don't allow that. I don't care that other groups will allow beating down other people. That's not what it's about….You're not there to tear others apart. You're there for a mutual {"I need help" or "I'm here to help you" or "I'm here to do what I can"}. (Admin)

Some differences existed because of actions taken, or not taken, by administrators to manage the groups, causing some competitiveness, conflict, and "catty crap" (Admin) to emerge occasionally.

A hub from which administrators established group identity in similarity and opposition was "Paradise Fire Adopt a Family" (PFAAF). PFAAF was one of the first, largest, and most influential CFFGs. An administrator explained: "[PFAAF] had over 30,000 members…from all over the world and literally thousands of dollars a day, like hundreds of thousands of dollars, filtered through that group to different people….Amazing things were happening" (Admin). The goal of adoption was one family helping one family, but adoptive CFFGs did not exclusively provide one-on-one support. Adoption appeared to indicate taking survivors under a metaphorical wing. PFAAF gained somewhat substantial local news coverage, and the size of PFAAF became a hindrance to its ability to share effective information and presented challenges for keeping track of posts and reaching consensus (Hagerty, 2020).

Around half the interviewees mentioned PFAAF explicitly, and their feelings about PFAAF ranged from very positive to neutral to very negative. PFAAF was described as "very successful" (Admin) by some, but others mentioned major issues, like possible fraudulence among survivors, helpers, and administrators, and comparatively minor incidences, like "trash talking" and ego-involvement. What transpired in PFAAF "could get shady" and created what some felt was "a really yucky situation" (Admin). PFAAF eventually became overrun by infighting, rumors, jealousy, and suspicion (Hagerty, 2020) and was deleted entirely by its administrators. Despite controversies surrounding PFAAF and its eventual dissolution, traces of the group remain in the network of CFFGs.

Helpers from PFAAF formed their own CFFGs, often establishing identities in similarity with and opposition to PFAAF. Many of the location-specific CFFGs established group identity in similarity to PFAAF by using the language of "adoption" in their group description or group name. The mere inclusion of adoption in the group name or description, intentionally or unintentionally, establishes similarity in the groups' identities. However, some interviewees described purposefully emulating the approach of PFAAF in their own groups.

Contrarily, other administrators drew clear distinctions between their group and PFAAF, positioning themselves in opposition to it. For example, an administrator recalled:

> What was happening for a while after the Fire was just a little bit less accountability for a long time. Like in [PFAAF], it was a little more like the wild, wild West sometimes, because there were rules but not like…there wasn't [sic] settings….So, there was a lot of like people calling each other out on post and we were like, we don't like that climate. (Admin)

Many interviewees formed relationships with other helpers through PFAAF. An interviewee explained how she didn't "really remember how the connection happened among administrators" for her CFFG but that it "must have been through [PFAAF]" (Admin). She elaborated:

> [A co-administrator] wanted [our CFFG] to run in a way that was not going to get carried away, like she felt [PFAAF] had gotten. [PFAAF] had become this unaccounted exchange of money and goods at such a large level that it was just kind of set up for bad things to happen. So, she was very protective of that and has been since the beginning….There was kind of this octopus happening with many multiples of arms and I think that [other groups] just separated from [PFAAF], even though it started kind of in [PFAAF], as far as recruiting interest. (Admin)

PFAAF contributed to the Camp Fire recovery in meaningful ways, despite and because of problems that may have existed. The above quotation emphasizes how establishing identity in similarity and opposition was possible because of the interconnectedness of the network of CFFGs.

Almost all the administrators were members of other CFFGs, as were survivors. An administrator who was also a survivor explained: "I think I joined like every [CFFG] that was going because it was just a way that I could connect with all the different parts of my community…we could get a lot of information flowing to like everybody" (Admin). Many administrators discussed the closeness of the network but did not seem entirely aware of its expansiveness. For example, after I told an administrator how many interviews I conducted, she pondered: "Maybe there are a bunch of groups I didn't know about" (Admin). Members of the network of CFFGs

almost certainly did not know of all the CFFGs supporting Camp Fire survivors.

There was consensus among administrators that all the groups, helpers, and survivors played some role in the Camp Fire recovery. Although there could be tension and conflict within and across the groups, the network of CFFGs united in its goal of helping survivors:

> This was a joint effort….In order for all of the people to get help who got help, it was a collaboration. It was definitely not one group was better than another group or one group was more helpful. It was everyone working together to make sure that things got accomplished and that no one got forgotten….There were a lot of people and I'm sure, I mean, I'm positive we didn't help everyone, but we did help a lot. (Admin)

Administrators' resilience organizing and identity work, alongside the resilience labor of survivors, helpers, and other leaders, built the network of CFFGs into an interconnected online community.

## 6. Discussion

This study presents an exposition of a network of probably over 100 social media groups devoted to a single disaster. CFFGs varied in their sizes, privacy, and scope and provided spaces for resilience labor and identity work. To my knowledge, no detailed accounts exist of the use of so many social media groups, some with very large sizes, to provide such comprehensive support to such a small population that dealt with such an extreme disaster. Describing the composition of the network of CFFGs, as well as the entanglement of identity in CFFGs, documents this theoretically and practically compelling case of online resilience organizing after a disaster.

Findings from this study extend knowledge about supporting survivors' recovery from disasters and about disaster response networks. Survivors' utilization of CFFGs was much higher than would be expected, and has been observed, for Facebook groups devoted to other adversities. For example, a systematic search of hypertension-related Facebook groups identified 16 open Facebook groups with a total of 8,966 members (Al Mamun et al., 2015), but hypertension impacted about 29% of American adults in 2015 (Fryar et al., 2017). Therefore, a very small portion of the hypertension-impacted population was using hypertension-related Facebook groups, which contrasts with the Camp Fire where possibly 10% or more of the impacted individuals were members of a CFFG. The findings here highlight the opportunities of social media groups for survivors when offline communities are destroyed.

Organizing recovery from the Camp Fire in Facebook groups also exemplifies the influence of everyday citizens, who are often overlooked, in disaster response networks. Scholars argue understanding the power dynamics involved in collaborating and coordinating in disaster response networks is vital to combining resources and accomplishing a common goal (Boersma et al., 2021). Integrating citizen-driven social media groups, such as CFFGs, into formal disaster response networks offers a more comprehensive depiction of the resilience labor occurring after a disaster. Additionally, partnering citizen-driven social media groups with more formal offline counterparts (e.g., relevant government agencies and non-profits) may provide mutually beneficial relationships. For example, if county-level animal control or local humane societies partnered with pet-related social media groups, more animals may be rescued and rehomed using fewer resources.

This study also progresses resilience theorizing, wherein resilience involves organizing relationships and material and discursive resources. Two theoretical contributions center on the recognition of "survivor" and "helper" as two primary identity anchors for members in CFFGs. The CTR (Buzzanell, 2010, 2019) holds affirming identity anchors as a crucial process of resilience and a central part of engaging in resilience labor during and after difficult life experiences. The categories of "survivors" and "helpers" seemed to invite members into active roles, where survivors were overcoming adversities, and helpers were recognizing themselves as contributors. A third theoretical contribution is related to how the affirmation of a social group's identity anchors may have implications for the resilience of members of that social group.

First, this study demonstrates how identity anchors can be affirmed on behalf of other people as a way of initiating or reinforcing their resilience. Administrators purposefully used the language of "survivorship" (e.g., highlighting someone is overcoming something bad that happened) rather than "victimhood" (e.g., acknowledging that something bad happened to someone). Along with administrators, offline helpers also recognized people whose health was not immediately compromised by the Camp Fire as survivors (Rosenthal et al., 2021). Thus, the resilience of impacted individuals was facilitated by affirming their identities as survivors, rather than victims. Even if the impacted individuals had not adopted an outlook of survivorship, this language encourages survivors to construct alternative logics whereby they have strength and agency and may enable self-enhancement.

Second, this study also reveals how identity anchors among individuals and the people in their network can be in conflict. Many members of CFFGs who did not survive the Camp Fire, and even some who did, adopted the language of "helper" to describe their role in organizing resilience. When positioning themselves as helpers and affirming that identity anchor as a way of engaging in their own resilience, members are putting into words the dynamic of their relationship with the individuals impacted by the Camp Fire. While not explicitly stated, the contrast of being a helper is being helped. Although social stratification may be

unintentional, affirming identity anchors that are in conflict with each other may produce various negative outcomes, such as feelings of shame, indebtedness, or supremacy, which could hinder resilience rather than promoting it.

Insight from SIT informs why this language for the two primary identity anchors might have arisen and how it may influence power dynamics in social media groups devoted to disaster recovery. SIT acknowledges superiority and inferiority as factors playing into relationships between groups and status as an outcome of comparisons across groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). "Helpers" were, in a sense, constructing power in survivors with identity anchors, while at the same time deconstructing it through identity anchors. Thus, affirming identity anchors, such as "survivor" and "helper," on behalf of others likely produces consequences related to how individuals perceive themselves, how they perceive members of their social network, and what their relationships look like. Continued exploration of both the benefits and drawbacks of affirming identity anchors on others' behalf will contribute to understanding the social and communicative processes of resilience.

Third, this study illustrates how establishing the identities of social media groups creates opportunities for resilience. Across probably over 100 groups, six group identities existed: general, specialized, survivor-only, pet-related, location-specific, and adoptive. Affirming the identity of social media groups may allow people to better determine whether and how to involve themselves in the groups, which facilitates the maintenance and use of their own communication networks. This may also allow administrators to make room for other social media groups in the network to contribute meaningfully to recovery, which is a way of maintaining the network for everyone involved.

Administrators established the identities of their CFFGs around purpose, through membership criteria, and in similarity and opposition, which each have implications for resilience. Discussing identity is important for organizations who need to define themselves to stakeholders (Connaughton, 2005), who could be survivors, helpers, and other community partners in this case. Using the group's purposes as identity anchors for the group allowed administrators to keep group members' energies focused on supporting particular aspects of recovery. Enforcing a group identity around the membership criteria was also a way of proactively addressing sources of conflict. Using screening questions to cultivate membership around specific identity characteristics is a method for nurturing "safe spaces" in social media groups (Clark-Parsons, 2018), which allows members to foreground productive action by reducing the chance of negative feelings. Finally, using similarity and opposition could enable members to seek CFFGs that resemble other groups they like and that oppose groups in which they may have had a negative experience, which facilitates foregrounding productive actions.

The primary limitation is this study's small population (i.e., administrators), which excluded other important helpers and leaders in the network. As a result, I take a top-down approach to understanding group identity by discussing the anchors of identity established by administrators. I do not delve into how other group members participated in building the groups' identities and whether or how members' perceived individual identities aligned with the groups' identities. Though these perspectives are valuable, I achieved depth in understanding the experiences of administrators, rather than breadth of knowledge. In the future, gaining insight from other leaders, helpers, and survivors, and considering the role of other group members in establishing group identity would provide a broader understanding of networks of social media groups devoted to specific disasters.

In conclusion, this study contributes to practical and theoretical conversations by recording and analyzing this massive and influential network of social media groups dedicated to recovery from a single disaster. Camp Fire survivors experienced major disruptions to their social networks linked to their physical community's destruction (Brown, 2022). Administrators established online spaces for resilience organizing that may not have otherwise happened offline. Analysis of the network of CFFGs also presents opportunities for thinking about how resilience can be enacted on behalf of populations facing adversity, especially through identity work.

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## Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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