

Rebel Food...Renegade Supplies:
Convergence after the World Trade Center Attack¹

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Abstract²

The World Trade Center attack, though constituting an unprecedented disaster, nevertheless generated many of the features seen in other disasters in the U.S. Such features include the convergence of volunteers and donations of supplies, which are well-documented in the literature. Their appearance typically is problematic, since they both introduce needed resources and present additional management challenges for public officials already occupied with their emergency duties. This paper builds on existing theories of disaster-related collective behavior by examining convergence following the World Trade Center attack. It focuses on the proliferation of volunteers and donated supplies, and identifies a form of convergence not discussed by other researchers: that of supporters or fans. Relying on data gathered in over 750 collective hours of field observations and on documentary sources, the paper argues that the multifaceted aspect of the event—disaster, battlefield, and crime scene—and ambiguity about the extent of any continuing threat complicated the often (but not inevitably) problematic aspects of convergence in the response milieu.

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Introduction

This paper examines convergence of personnel and material goods in New York City following the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center. By virtually any definition, the attack constituted a major disaster in terms of immediate loss of life and direct and indirect financial losses. Even though the initial estimate of some 6,000 fatalities was later reduced to around 3,000, the collapse of the Twin Towers and destruction or damage of neighboring buildings stand as the single most devastating event in the United States in nearly 100 years. Millions watched the event on television and observed the disaster almost from its onset through the (selective) eye of media cameras. As might be expected given this level of exposure and the obvious magnitude of death and damage, volunteers as well as government officials, media, researchers, and others converged in great numbers on New York, along with donated supplies and equipment of nearly every description.

Researchers have long recognized convergence as a post-disaster phenomenon; it is, for example, discussed in what is widely viewed as the first sociological study of a disaster, Samuel H. Prince's investigation of the Halifax munitions ship explosion in 1917 (See Scanlon, 1992). Fritz and Mathewson (1957) present perhaps the earliest comprehensive treatment of the subject. They define convergence as "movement or inclination and approach toward a particular point" (1957: 3), recognizing two variants of that phenomenon: "the notion of movement toward the disaster-struck area from the outside—external convergence—and movement toward specific points within a given disaster-related area or zone—internal convergence" (1957: 3. Emphasis in original).

Fritz and Mathewson also identify three “forms of convergence”: personal, informational, and materiel (1957:4). They noted that convergence could be a “major hindrance to organized relief efforts,” though later researchers have observed that volunteers can bring benefits as well as challenges. They may, for example, bring certain abilities that do not exist in sufficient quantities in the extant response organizations, they may already be close enough to damaged areas to provide immediate assistance, and they may provide for the flexibility that is needed when organizations confront rapidly-changing conditions. On the other hand, integrating volunteers into the response is a sizable management task that can strain existing resources (Barton, 1969; Wenger, 1989).

Both the severity of the attacks on September 11 and their obvious national-security implications affected the scope of the convergence. Seldom in the U.S. does a disaster seem to be of national scope. Polling data indicated that some 86% of Americans saw the attack as an act of war, while 87% of Americans thought it was the “most tragic event in their lifetime” (Saad, 2001). As a result, volunteers arrived not just from elsewhere in the city, or New York State, or the very proximate Connecticut or New Jersey, but from across the United States. A police officer from Illinois, for example, said that he and his partner put in for vacation time in order to come to New York. The owner of a search dog in Canada wrote to the Disaster Research Center asking how to volunteer. In addition, the high number of casualties among emergency response workers, rare in disasters, may have kindled a sense of professional camaraderie or affinity among emergency workers nationwide. Many other features of the World Trade Center disaster were similarly conducive to massive convergence. These features include the suddenness

of the disaster; the continuous media attention; and the number of casualties and their connection to many social groups at local, national, and international levels. The urban setting of the disaster, with its high local population density and (even during early phases of the emergency) availability of transportation, combined with the concentration of damage in a relatively small area, all set the stage for sizable external and internal convergence.

As the paper will show, the convergence processes seen following the WTC attack have much in common with those observed in many other disasters, but they also differ in important ways. This paper focuses on patterns of external and internal convergence of personnel and material to the disaster area and on the consequences of convergence. The World Trade Center attack is an important subject of research since all of the forms of convergence discussed by Fritz and Mathewson occurred after the attack.

Method

Data collection, which began within 48 hours of the attack and continued over the next two months, included over 750 collective hours of systematic observations and informal interviews at many sites significant in the emergency response. These included the city's Emergency Operations Center, which was rapidly re-established after the destruction of the primary facility; the Jacob Javits Center, a large convention facility where volunteers and donations were marshaled; the Family Assistance Center, where relatives of victims and those displaced from homes or jobs could avail themselves of a variety of services and assistance; command posts located close to Ground Zero; a

warehouse where material donations and purchased supplies were stored; supply staging areas located closer to Ground Zero where workers received materials such as protective gear, boots, warm clothing, tools, lighting, and other items instrumental to the response and recovery efforts; and respite centers also close to Ground Zero, where rescue workers and others assigned to the disaster site could sleep, eat a hot meal, access the internet or email, and receive counseling, massage, and chiropractic services. In addition to observation and interviews, data collection included taking over 500 photographs; gathering hundreds of pages of documents, maps, and images; and making sequential sketches of the EOC that document over time the evolution of the emergency response.

Types of Convergence

Fritz and Matheson (1957) identify three forms of convergence in the post-impact disaster environment. The first form, personal convergence, describes the influx of people to a disaster area. The authors list five kinds of personal convergers. The first are returnees, the people who lived in the disaster-impacted area but who were evacuated. Returnees in New York City included residents, employees, and business owners. As the secured zone became smaller – first from 14th Street, then to Canal Street, then progressively much closer to the actual disaster site – these returnees converged to the area, at first to obtain information, then to attempt to retrieve possessions, and finally to return home or to their place of employment. The second type of personal convergence is composed of the anxious, or people from outside the impacted area who are attempting to obtain information about family and friends. New York City saw a large influx of anxious convergers, both from throughout Greater New York and around the world, as

relatives came to the city to search for loved ones deemed “missing.” Helpers make up the third type listed by Fritz and Mathewson. These people come in order to help victims or responders in some way. A tremendous number of helpers came to lower Manhattan and to the support stations established throughout New York City to offer assistance. Some helpers were already part of the local response milieu, such as emergency response personnel; others were from outside the local jurisdiction but came under the auspices of existing mutual aid agreements from federal, state, or other local jurisdictions or as part of expanding organizations— organizations with new structures but whose normal tasks included disaster work (Dynes, 1970). Many ad hoc volunteers were associated with extending groups (that is, groups with static organizational structures but new to disaster tasks). The rest were individuals eager to help in any way they could. A fourth personal convergence type includes the curious, or people who are motivated to come to the impacted site primarily to view the destruction left in the wake of the disaster. For example, many onlookers gathered at checkpoints and barricades, hoping to catch a glimpse of what remained of the Twin Towers. Finally, Fritz and Mathewson name exploiters as their fifth personal convergence type. Exploiters arrive at the impacted area to use the disaster for personal gain or profit. The World Trade Center attack attracted many such exploiters. For example, vendors sold World Trade Center or September 11th merchandise claiming portions of the proceeds were going to funds for victims, when in fact no donations were made.

A sixth form of convergence not identified by Fritz and Mathewson occurred as well, which we discuss later in the paper: the fans or supporters, either individuals or in

groups, who gathered to display flags and banners encouraging and expressing gratitude to emergency workers.

Fritz and Mathewson also list two other categories of convergence in addition to personal convergence. Informational convergence is the influx of information into the disaster-impacted community, while material convergence describes the influx of physical resources—both financial and material—into the area. Both information and material convergence pose their own benefits and challenges. For example, many well-documented studies describe how excessive and inappropriate donations impeded management of other major disasters (NORC, 1954; Clifford 1955; Barton 1970; Neal, 1992; Neal, 1994 to name a few).

While each form and type of convergence outlined by Fritz and Mathewson merits discussion in the context of activities following the World Trade Center attack, this paper focuses its attention primarily on convergence of personnel, specifically the helpers, the curious, and an additional group—the fans or supporters—and material convergence as related to goods introduced to the disaster environment as a result of personal convergence. Furthermore, not all helpers are examined here. Clearly, rescue and response personnel with formal ties to the response milieu—those employed by the city, those from other jurisdictions who play a formal role through the city’s disaster plan or through mutual aid agreements—were collectively critical to practically all efforts to help after the attack. The paper, however, concentrates on volunteer helpers whose convergence was not part of the response milieu before they arrived.

Convergence and emergence, another important disaster phenomenon, are in many ways complementary. Stallings and Quarantelli (1985: 94) define emergent groups as “private citizens who work together in pursuit of collective goals relevant to actual or potential disasters but whose organization has not yet become institutionalized.”

Converging volunteers often gravitate to groups that have emerged in response to disasters, either to provide additional support or to perform tasks that complement those of emergent groups. At the same time, by providing ever-larger numbers of volunteers, convergence sets the stage for further emergence.

While emergent groups are factors at all stages of the disaster cycle—preparation, response, recovery—public officials often find their presence especially onerous during the response phases, since the appearance of these groups suggests the inadequacy of official response efforts. “Municipal law enforcement in particular, [tends] to view volunteer emergence as a crowd control problem” (Kartez and Kelley, 1988: 140). As we will discuss later, the nature of the Trade Center attack intensified this concern.

Volunteers were conspicuous at all locations of emergency response activities. It is important to clarify, though, that not all volunteers were civilians: police and firefighters from nearby localities and adjacent states and later from across the country dispatched themselves to New York. Many volunteers had demonstrably relevant skills: for example, physicians and nurses, counselors, and other health-care workers arrived as well, as did workers from the construction trades. Not all volunteers were without formal

affiliation: many worked with the Red Cross, perhaps “the best known example of institutional volunteering” (Tierney, Lindell, and Perry, 2001: 112), and other expanding (Dynes, 1970) disaster agencies with a long history of incorporating and organizing volunteers.

Having briefly reviewed the literature, the paper now turns to discussing three types of convergers and some of the associated challenges: the helpers, the curious, and the supporters.

Helpers

Though helpers of every description arrived, many volunteers were without immediately applicable skills, training, or connection to the recognized emergency management apparatus. They wanted to help, too, but it was their lack of identifiable, relevant capabilities (or capabilities not needed at the time of their arrival), lack of legitimacy or connection to an organization from which they could borrow legitimacy (some officials worried about liability issues), and probable lack of familiarity (from the perspective of public officials) with emergency operations which rendered problematic their ties to the response milieu. There is also evidence that “not being from New York” discounted to some extent the qualifications of some outside emergency professionals. Not only did these outsiders appear to lack local knowledge, but local emergency workers felt an immediate personal stake in controlling access to the site because of having family and friends among the victims.

Helpers present particular challenges because their desire to help is often not matched by their ability to be integrated into the response milieu. One of the primary requirements for an effective response to disasters and other complex crises is the ability of all the participants in the response to develop, maintain, and act upon a “shared vision” of emergency needs, goals, and available resources (See Comfort, 1999). Typically, within a single organization, the shared vision is developed both explicitly, through training, drills, and exercises, and implicitly, through steady immersion in operational activities so that the organization’s norms are imparted by exposure to them. The process is, of course, an imperfect one; dissident groups and resisters exist in any organization, and socially-negotiated subcultures exist alongside those preferred by corporate officers. While no organization functions according to the formally-delineated structure, sufficient congruence exists by consent or through enforcement to ensure that organizational goals are attained. Loss of shared vision constitutes a management crisis that demands intervention (See, for example, Brennehan, 2000).

Responding to a disaster requires coordinating the activities of many different kinds of organizations. Most of these are government agencies at different levels. Most have well-defined hierarchies, recognized officers and chains of command, and well-known missions, skills, and capabilities. Often the various officials know each other and have worked together in previous disasters or in other professional settings. Even so, coordination is a constant challenge. Comfort (1999), for example, has argued that, in order to mount an effective response, the various organizations must “self-organize” into

“adaptive systems” that can gather and comprehend data about the nature of an event and who is doing what to respond to it.

Weick (1993) and Weick et al (1999) have made similar arguments with respect to intraorganizational dynamics. The individuals within an organization that functions in a complex, rapidly-changing operational environment must orchestrate their actions toward the organization’s goals (typically safe operations, in the organizations they study—nuclear power, air traffic control, aircraft carriers), arriving at the same, accurate conclusions about operational exigencies and what must be done, and they must do all this without constant direction and supervision. Even the lowest ranking individual has an important role, responsibility for its execution, and the authority to stop operations if dangerous conditions arise. Essentially, in the work of Comfort, Weick, and others, the emphasis is on ready sharing of information among all members of an organization or system of organizations and a decentralization of decision making authority. However, Weick (1987, drawing on Perrow, 1977) envisions decentralization as taking place within a generally-shared conceptual framework for the organization’s activities. He also argues that experience with centralized direction, as in prior training or other socialization such as military service, is first required before decentralization can be effective. Yet the volunteers who appear to assist in the emergency response are, virtually by definition, strangers to the response milieu.

In the case of New York City, although some of the volunteers were emergency management professionals from other jurisdictions, they nevertheless lacked detailed

knowledge and experience with local conditions. Furthermore, in the Trade Center disaster, many volunteers came from great distances; they were outsiders not just in terms of the response organizations, but in terms of the city itself. Volunteers can also compete for the time and attention of emergency managers. One emergency manager, quoted by Kartez and Kelley (1988: 140), said:

The more volunteers, the more fractured the structure, the more other departments are involved, the more difficult the management problem. You need people you know and trust with whom you have instant communications. The next layer of people, whether the Army or the Kiwanis Club, creates as many problems as it solves.

There is yet another complication with volunteers, intensified by the nature and magnitude of the Trade Center attack. Volunteers are outsiders, yet they are outsiders with a halo of political significance, especially because of their patriotic motivation. Much of the discussion about volunteers at staff meetings reflected some fundamental tensions: recognition of the worthy intentions of volunteers, concern about extraneous people moving freely about a controlled area, and the need for “sensitivity” in getting volunteers to leave. Put bluntly, emergency managers recognized that outright rebuffs of volunteers constitute bad public relations. Some volunteers were offended that they were not allowed to assist. Yet at the same time, officials were not turning away volunteers out of disregard for the outpouring of generosity, or because they felt that the appearance of volunteers indicated some sort of failure of emergency planning. Rather, they appreciated the intentions of the volunteers and the community spirit that represented. Nevertheless, because the disaster was caused by a terrorist attack, there was great concern for identification and credentialing of all personnel working at the various locations. Although initially credentialing was quite rudimentary, it rapidly became more

sophisticated. Many people, particularly contractor and subcontractor personnel, had difficulty complying with the increasingly formalized badge system, and during the week after the event, ID requirements evolved and intensified on almost a twice-daily basis. Within this context, volunteer personnel became another group that needed to be accounted for, and therefore potentially a distraction that outweighed their utility.

Some emergent jargon developed that reflected the challenges of uncontrolled donations and that also reflected a burgeoning oppositional relationship between emergency managers and donors. For example, the terms “rebel food” and “renegade supplies” were used to refer to food and other items that were brought into the impact area on an ad hoc, uncontrolled basis, sometimes by people who were known to the recipient, but often not. Food items ranged from home-baked goods to hot meals, typically pasta. Soon after the attack, a well-known steakhouse chain set up a barbecue near the disaster site, an act which offended some of the firefighters. In particular, an Urban Search and Rescue official bitterly condemned the barbecue at a staff meeting, calling the “back-yard barbecue” atmosphere disrespectful to the gravity of the situation and to the victims. In contrast, some rescue workers appreciated the variation in diet the barbecue introduced. This episode of volunteerism heightened tensions between those who found the delivery of the food inappropriate and others who desired the continued presence of the restaurant. This steakhouse was not unique in volunteering its goods and services. Restaurants and well wishers came not only from across the city but from across the country to feed those involved in the rescue and recovery efforts. As they converged to the site, so too did issues of access, health and safety, and security.

The status of the event as simultaneously a crime scene, battlefield, and disaster site added to the complexity that typically is seen with the influx of volunteers to a disaster zone. To begin with, the attack was rapidly identified as a national-security issue. A FEMA official explicitly stated that this event was different from other disasters:

Were this a hurricane or tornado two weeks ago, I would put you in touch with a public information officer. As of Tuesday, everything has changed.

Although people wishing to assist response and recovery efforts after the attack were directed to a central site, their numbers exceeded the identified needs, and because of security concerns, their access to particular sites had to be controlled. Volunteers became more than the standard “crowd-control problem” that Kartez and Kelley noted. Instead, volunteers became a security risk, another unknown factor in a response milieu that could not be precisely delineated. Donated food, especially the home-baked goods that were available in abundance, became not only a health concern (food left lying about would be unsanitary or could become contaminated if brought to the work-site and pose a hazard to those workers consuming the food) but yet another security risk. Could there be biological warfare agents, or poison, in the food? One public official expressed concern about a basket full of carefully zip-locked bags of chocolate chip cookies with notes from children thanking those involved in the response. Although he appreciated the donation and the accompanying sentiment, he questioned how one could be sure that the cookies were not, in fact, laced with a dangerous substance. In a separate incident, the driver of a Sheriff’s vehicle used for escorting officials to and from planning meetings near Ground Zero declined donuts being passed out by well-wishers cheering at the side of the road. The driver was very pleasant to the supporters, stating he just ate breakfast, and thanking them for their encouragement. Once he continued past the well-wishers, he remarked that

eating food given out on the street by passers-by was not normally prudent, and particularly not so after September 11th. These conversations took place before Senator Daschle received an anthrax-laced envelope, listing a fourth grade class from a New Jersey school as its return address. Clearly, officials were aware that the distribution of food by the vast majority of volunteers and well wishers came with the best of intentions; however, these same officials understood they needed to balance appropriate public relations and appreciation with the persistent security threat.

Along with restaurants that set up tents and trailers near Ground Zero, other volunteers established their own niches, finding creative ways to contribute to the collective response and recovery effort. For example, bicycle couriers who were turned away from volunteering developed an impromptu coffee and snack courier operation. Using their bicycles and carriers to circle the perimeter of the secured zone, this network of colleagues and friends formed an emergent group that utilized their skills and resources to distribute coffee, sandwiches, and fruit to authorities manning checkpoints, people waiting to gain access to the zone, and, quite often, homeless citizens of the city who were passing by. Although the intentions of the emergent groups and the restaurants to help were sincere, their activities also introduced ambiguity and contention. Not only did those within the response milieu need to contend with the influx of people to the area and with the health and liability concerns associated with the distribution of food, they also had to balance public relations and appreciation of assistance with the added complexity these volunteers posed for security.

Volunteer food distribution was not the only area where community relations, concern for public health and safety, liability, and the new element of security threat came into consideration for officials. Every skill that might be required in an emergency response was available in New York City, but determining the professional qualifications of volunteers was difficult. After September 11, not only was the temporal extent of the risk uncertain (would another attack follow?), but the subsequent anthrax episodes heightened the perception of being under constant threat. Over time, as the response evolved, volunteers were less and less welcome; it may even be possible to mark the shift from response to recovery by noting when non-affiliated volunteers were asked to leave or were evicted from various sites. A week after the event, some officials stated that they didn't "want volunteers in even if they're already here" and they were citing as a problem "continual freelance medical practice."

A further complication was the persistence of considerable hazard even after the acute stage of the disaster—the attack and collapse of the towers—was over. The site remained dangerous: broken glass and debris, smoke and gases billowing out for months, structural steel precariously embedded in surrounding buildings. The kind of labor-intensive work that can be performed by relatively untrained volunteers, such as sandbagging or clearing debris, was largely impossible at Ground Zero. In addition, the relatively concentrated space of the Ground Zero area (much more concentrated than in hurricane, flooding, or even tornado events) limited the number of people who could safely work there.

Having discussed the challenges posed by converging helpers, it is important to discuss how some were successful in negotiating access. Because of their professional qualifications, a number of volunteers played vitally important roles. A military reserve officer volunteered his services (and was eventually issued official orders to do so) and became an invaluable assistant to a key response official. For example, the officer took notes at key planning meetings, coordinated transportation for operations staff, and spent time finding solutions for various operational exigencies; it was this officer who arranged for barges to be tied up alongside the pier used by the Emergency Operations Center as a temporary location (moved there when the primary facility was destroyed) to prevent unauthorized vessels from gaining close access to the site.

Other volunteers integrated into the emergency response were GIS specialists from local colleges who were instrumental in producing maps and images based on remote-sensing data. What is particularly significant about their role as volunteers is that they had a particular skill or, as in the case of the military officer, set of capabilities or attributes that were congruent with the ambient response needs, and that were simultaneously obvious to the emergency managers who were in a position to “hire” them. For example, several chiropractors talked their way into the Emergency Operations Center and performed massage and spinal adjustment. They allied themselves with the Red Cross initially in order to maintain access to the facility, but they were able to offer a specific skill, which, even if not planned for in advance, seemed useful to those who already had access. The police officer from Illinois stood guard duty: again, this was a

task he could perform with little supervision and which enhanced the existing personnel resources.

The Curious

People gathering to witness the spectacle of disaster is common after an event. Similarly, there were those who arrived just to look, to get as close to Ground Zero as they could. In the words of one high-placed public official, they wanted to “touch the dust.” One newspaper article included the following account of those who converged to Ground Zero on Christmas:

Among the spectators gathered along the perimeter of the site, Veronique Fallous said she had come from Paris to celebrate the holidays in New York. “I wanted to be here with a lot of people to feel part of the community,” Fallous said.

Miriam Neeson of Atlanta spoke through tears. She said being near the site was “a form of sharing. This is the only way we can give support.”
(Associated Press, 2001)

Onlookers generally adopted a reverent demeanor, and seemed awestruck at the damage, even though only a portion of it was visible from the perimeter. Dignitaries periodically toured the site, also wanting to witness the destruction firsthand. Inevitably, additional resources and precautions were needed as these dignitaries visited the site, but at the same time, their desire to see Ground Zero was accommodated as local officials believed that actually seeing the enormity of the destruction was instrumental to efforts to garner political and financial support. Nevertheless, celebrities, for example, were regarded by some officials as a distraction, and coordinating their arrival was a logistics problem requiring vehicles and escort personnel. Officials preferred that no celebrities visit but, recognizing that was impossible, asked “Can we limit them?” In a separate

paper (in preparation) we analyze in detail the tensions between the motivations of those who came to see the site and the motives imputed to them by government officials, in particular the mayor, who attributed “ghoulish[ness]” to those who sought photographs of the wreckage. What is significant with respect to this paper is the varied status of the site and the justifications that that status allowed in controlling or restricting people’s movements or actions. Along with “disaster tourists,” disaster entrepreneurs also converged to take advantage of tourists: photographs of the Twin Towers and T-shirts with patriotic or memorial themes were widely available in Times Square within 48 hours of the attack, and many such items bore the signs of hasty manufacture, such as misspellings or bad grammar.

Police officers forbade photography as far as two or three blocks from the perimeter, which itself was two blocks away from the disaster site, saying that it was a “crime scene.” When asked for further details, they said only that they had orders to restrict photography. In contrast, other guidelines stated that photography was forbidden within the Ground Zero barricades but, while photography could not be prevented beyond the primary secured area, it would be discouraged or censured. The mass influx of the general population near the restricted site again generated problems associated with crowd-control, health and safety, security, and emotional impact on those at the site who had lost family and friends in the attack. At the same time, the curious were often motivated by a sense of reverence for the site: many had personal memories of visiting the Towers; countless knew people who were in the WTC when it was attacked; and the

presence of some tourists was accompanied by potential financial or political dividends for a city in recovery.

The Supporters

A noteworthy manifestation of convergence that was strongly related to the national-defense and rescue-worker fatalities aspects of the disaster was the groups of well-wishers who gathered at intersections, particularly along the West Side Highway, waving flags and cheering as emergency service vehicles drove by. In some sense, these convergers could be seen as disaster volunteers, since some offered food to firefighters or police officers whose vehicles stopped at red lights; however, the presence of these well-wishers—both those who volunteered food and those who did not—also constituted a type of personal convergence not identified by Fritz and Mathewson (1957): that of fans or supporter groups. Often, these fans waved banners or displayed posters with messages of thanks or patriotic sentiments. They also converged to impromptu memorial sites, such as Union Square and firehouses that lost firefighters, with candles, flowers, notes, and banners, and gathered for significant lengths of time. Unlike Fritz and Mathewson's category of the curious converger—a group well represented at checkpoints, at the center established to receive and assist family members of victims, and around Ground Zero—members of the supporter group were not motivated primarily by curiosity to witness the disaster's destruction, but rather converged with the purpose of demonstrating thanks and moral support to those impacted by or responding to the disaster.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Disaster planning must anticipate the proliferation of volunteers and other convergers. The ideal outcome for handling volunteers, as suggested in the literature (See Stallings and Quarantelli, 1985), is that they somehow be integrated into the formal disaster planning process: that convergence and group emergence be converted from a seemingly unexpected phenomenon into an anticipated consequence that can be utilized. But where volunteers should fit in the burgeoning response, and how all involved in that response can develop and maintain a shared vision of needs and capabilities, remain difficult questions. The ad hoc volunteers, as opposed to the more formalized volunteers of organizations such as the Red Cross, can avoid bureaucratic obstacles that delay the delivery of services and they can fill in gaps left by organizations already active in the response milieu. At the same time, many of these volunteers generally lack the training and experience required to participate in the more complex aspects of emergency response, while the arrival of large numbers of lay people may not be synchronized with the manifestation of needs that they can fulfill. The concern about ongoing terrorist activity would make the presence of volunteers even more challenging since they would need to be monitored more closely than usual.

The most “successful” volunteers—those who negotiated access and got past gatekeepers—were those who were able to work with minimal supervision by official emergency workers. Far from requiring supervision, the military officer acted quite independently; the chiropractor required only space in which to work and some pallets on which to place his mattress. In other words, the incorporation of these volunteers into the response required little or no effort on the part of emergency managers, or the effort was

counterbalanced by manifest benefits. Both of these examples, and others like them, involved individuals and groups that gained access early in the disaster response and, by establishing a legitimized relationship with an insider and negotiating changes in the disaster environment without drawing attention to themselves (particularly as security restrictions changed), they were successful in obtaining and maintaining authorized volunteer status.

The paper finds the convergence after the World Trade Center attack to be generally aligned with that seen in more “typical” disasters, but also with a concern for security that is atypical, a product of the crime-scene/national defense aspect of the disaster. Over time, officials wanted to control the influx of volunteers, but some volunteers were able to work within the official system or on its periphery, either by supplying skills of manifest utility or by serving a kind of “niche market” of needs (the bicycle couriers, the chiropractors) and requiring little or no formal connection to the established system. Finally, along with discussing manifestations of convergence types identified by Fritz and Mathewson, the paper also identified an additional type: the fans/supporters that responded to the emergency worker casualties and to the sense of overall national crisis.

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