A Need to Help: Emergent Volunteer Behavior after September 11th

Seana Lowe
INVST Community Studies Program
University of Colorado

Alice Fothergill
Department of Sociology
University of Vermont

Introduction

On September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked the World Trade Center in New York City and killed thousands of people. According to disaster response officials, the attacks involved unique and compounding variables that challenged all aspects of disaster planning and management. Indeed, in the 72 hours following the disaster, official response organizations such as the Office of Emergency Management (OEM), which lost its infrastructure in the attacks, were not able to respond in typical fashion. Some have called this 72-hour period a "vacuum of authority" (Halford and Nolan, 2002). For organizations like the American Red Cross, making the transition from local operations to Disaster Relief Operations (DRO) was slowed by the inability of national disaster personnel to arrive because planes and trains were not operating. In addition, having the disaster sites be crime scenes caused significant identification and screening challenges, and the complexity of the response and recovery needs had operations increasing when they normally would have been decreasing. Finally, and most relevant to this research, service organizations were overwhelmed by volunteer demand.

Immediately after the disaster, a "mass assault" (Barton, 1969) of people wanting to be of assistance converged on the disaster scene. Consistent with socially integrative responses that typically follow natural disasters (Tierney

et al., 2001), New York City community members initiated and worked around the clock on a wide variety of protective response activities. Thousands of volunteers from around the country continued to want to help after the official agencies were up and running and the "vacuum of authority" no longer existed. Indeed, so many individuals wanted to be helpful that service organizations and official agencies had trouble sending them home when they were no longer needed (Halford and Nolan, 2002). According to one Red Cross professional, "We've never had this many volunteers at any disaster . . . This is the most volunteers we've ever had in the history of the Red Cross." By two and one-half weeks after the disaster, the Red Cross had received approximately 22,000 offers of assistance and had processed 15, 570 volunteers.

Our research focused on the emergent behavior of a subgroup of volunteers known as "spontaneous volunteers," a group considered understudied in the disaster literature (Tierney et. al., 2001). This paper uses data from our research in New York City to explore the phenomenon of spontaneous volunteerism at the site of the World Trade Center terrorist attacks. For the purposes of this inquiry, volunteerism is defined as the "contribution of time without coercion or remuneration" for public benefit (Smith, 1994, p. 244), and spontaneous volunteers are those individuals who contribute on impulse immediately after a disaster. Our goal is to analyze the motivations and experiences of approximately two dozen volunteers in order to increase knowledge about convergence and helping behaviors in a disaster and to offer suggestions for new directions in policy.

Background

Scholars have long been interested in the social behavior that immediately follows disasters. In a disaster, people converge on a disaster site; this includes both external convergence, moving to the disaster area, and internal convergence, moving to specific sites within the disaster area (Fritz and Mathewson, 1957). Fritz and Mathewson (1957), who coined the term "convergence" in the disaster field, theorized that there were five types of informal or unofficial convergence: the returnees, the anxious, the helpers, the curious, and the exploiters.[1] The "helpers" often include other survivors of the disaster. In fact, most response work is done by those community members who are present or nearby during a disaster. They often initiate and perform critical activities such as search and rescue and first aid immediately after events (Tierney et al., 2001). According to Scanlon (1992), although convergence behaviors by groups such as the helpers is widely accepted by disaster researchers, it has not been well studied.

Wenger (1991) points out that disaster researchers have observed and documented the important role of volunteer citizens and organizations in

disaster aftermaths since the early 1950s. For example, after the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, it was estimated that 2 million people volunteered in the disaster aftermath, performing tasks such as search and rescue, clearing debris, offering medical aid, providing shelter and transportation, and serving as translators (Dynes et al., 1990). As O'Brien and Mileti state, past disaster research has long shown that "community wide disasters elicit a therapeutic community response" (1992, p. 87) in which disaster victims assist other victims (see also Barton, 1969; Fritz, 1961a, 1961b; Wilmer, 1958). Mileti (1999) points out that volunteer behavior at the time of a disaster impact, as well as during the emergency period, may emerge spontaneously or be institutionalized as part of an organization such as the American Red Cross. Mileti (1999) argues that although the culture in the United States is based on individualism, the country also has an "altruistic orientation" that fosters volunteerism and involvement in community activities (p. 145). This orientation is amplified in disasters; research has shown that individuals put their self-interest aside to volunteer to help others in need (Tierney et al., 2001).

We are interested in the idea, put forth by Mileti and other researchers, that an altruistic orientation exists after a disaster and that as a result people volunteer. Thus, in our study we examine spontaneous volunteers' initial reactions and motivations to serve in an effort to understand their primary reasons for giving their time, energy, and blood—literally—to people in need after the disasters. Then, we investigate both their emergent volunteer behaviors and the consequences or impacts of those behaviors. Finally, we suggest policy implications.

Methods

We conducted a qualitative study of volunteer behavior immediately after the September 11th terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. Our sampling technique was purposive, meaning that we intentionally sought people who volunteered or tried to volunteer within days of the disaster. Using several initial New York City contacts, we employed snowball sampling that involved asking individuals from the disaster area to direct us to volunteers who fit the criteria to be solicited for interviewing. Interviews took place between 15 and 30 days after the attacks, and the majority took place in New York City. We conducted 23 in-depth interviews that ranged in length from one to two hours. All interview data were taped and then transcribed into the Non-Numerical Unstructured Data Indexing and Searching and Theorizing (NUD*IST) program designed specifically for qualitative data analysis. Once the data were input, we ran reports and reviewed them for analysis and coding.

Our final sample of 23 individuals was fairly diverse, including 11 women and 12 men, ranging in age from 23 to 66 years old. Their income

levels ranged from low to very high, and all had graduated from college. While the majority of participants were European-Americans, there were also several Asians, several Latinos, and a Native American. In terms of sexual orientation, the sample included 20 heterosexuals and three homosexuals. Interestingly, 19 participants were single while only four were married or partnered. The participants' occupations included artists, financial analysts, teachers, counselors, producers, a waiter, a publisher, a salesperson, and retired and unemployed persons. Respondents declared religious affiliations as Buddhism, Judaism, various forms of Christianity, and no organized religion. Two had served in the armed forces. Of the respondents, 20 were spontaneous volunteers and three were Red Cross professionals working with spontaneous volunteers.

Significantly, most of the participants in our study stated that they had never engaged in volunteer behavior of any kind before taking action after September 11th. Those participants in our study who successfully volunteered after the Word Trade Center attacks participated in a variety of helping behaviors within 96 hours of the disaster. Volunteer activities included translating for families, delivering and moving supplies, removing debris, cheering for rescue workers, helping with crowd control, donating blood, counseling, preparing and serving food, fundraising, and giving massages to rescue workers. Understandably, the interviews and the fieldwork were emotional undertakings; both the researchers and the participants were deeply affected by what they saw, heard, and felt. We created pseudonyms for all individuals mentioned in the study.

Findings

This section presents the findings from our qualitative research project on volunteers in the aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks. First, we discuss the initial reactions of the volunteers, including where they were and how they responded to the news of the disaster. Second, we explore the participants' motivations for volunteering after the attacks. Next, we examine the actual volunteer behaviors that participants engaged in or attempted to engage in during the emergency, as well as some of the barriers to volunteerism that they encountered. Finally, we describe how the participants were personally affected by their volunteer activities.

Initial Reactions of Spontaneous Volunteers

In our study, we asked participants to tell us about their experiences when they first saw or heard about the attacks. We thought that to understand fully their experiences in the disaster, it was important to learn about their initial reactions. We wanted to know where they were, what they saw, and how they felt when they first learned about the attacks or saw the destruction. As

members of the "community of people affected" by the terrorists (Omoto and Snyder, 2002), the study participants expressed feelings of victimization from the loss and suffering they experienced. They described themselves as shocked, sad, powerless, hopeless, helpless, fearful, and confused.

Many participants witnessed the events unfold. Catherine, a European-American businesswoman in her 30s, explained what she saw on September 11th:

> I was in a coffee shop and saw a whole bunch of sirens going by, undercover police cars. I said to the girl in the coffee shop, "Wow, there must be an undercover drug bust." . . . I started driving and there were all these people staring up at the sky so I turned and looked and I saw the first tower billowing with smoke. I rolled down my window and yelled to a guy on the corner, "What's going on?" He said a plane had just hit, they think maybe it's a terrorist attack . . . I started shaking so I turned my car back towards home and found myself right in front of one of my best friend's building. . . . They were on the roof which has a clear view of the twin towers. We watched everything. We saw a lot of people jumping out, saw the first tower come down, watched the fire spread through the second one, and saw that come down. Right away I was in shock. . . . I watched the whole thing through binoculars. Looking back I think I just wasn't really reacting. . . . The first thing I felt was, I felt really helpless.

Lucy, a single unemployed European-American in her 30s, also witnessed people jumping to their deaths:

> [After watching the first tower fall], I came back inside in tears and thinking "Oh my God, I'm so sorry," and not really being clear who exactly I was sorry to, or what I was sorry for. That seemed to be the refrain in my mind. . . . Then I went back outside and had the unfortunate experience of watching people jump out of the building at which point I think I said, "I think I've seen enough." [My feelings were] mostly it was horror and disbelief. How can this be happening here, I can't believe this actually happened. I can't believe I witnessed people making the decision between what way they were going to die. And shock and sadness. Everything all at once. It was completely overwhelming.

Witnessing the event greatly affected Catherine, Lucy, and the other volunteers who actually saw the harm inflicted on those in the World Trade Center buildings. Some participants feared for their own family members. Roger, a Jewish therapist in his 50s, explained his reaction to the news of the attacks:

> We were sort of in shock. . . . [I felt] mostly disbelief and incomprehension . . . fear, terror, panic a little bit. My younger boy had just started school

> in Manhattan and we hadn't heard from him. As it turns out, we didn't hear from him until 4:00 or 5:00 p.m. that day. . . . Personally it was a worrisome day because we didn't hear from him . . . so I have to say that put a personal spin on everything. Then I was wondering who I knew in those buildings, which of my patients might be down there, or patients' families, or friends, or neighbors.

Other volunteers described what they witnessed at Ground Zero in the aftermath of the disaster. Mermaid, a 30-year-old Korean writer, explained the confusion she experienced:

> There's 168 hospitals or something and all of the families were going to every one of them, so there were these crazed people crying on the streets. The family center is, really to me, the Ground Zero. Ground Zero is happening over there, but this is in a way bigger. You're seeing women and kids. It's insane. Because each missing person comes with two to seven people roaming for them. So that number becomes . . . you could easily have 50,000 people, 40,000 people, families in devastation.

All of these accounts illustrate the enormity of the crisis for the volunteers. These findings indicate that the volunteers were emotionally impacted by the disaster and personalized the attacks as members of the community affected, which appeared to have contributed to their heightened feelings of victimization. Many of them explained that when they saw the destruction they knew that they had to do something—they *needed* to help. Indeed, Sandy, a Red Cross Local Disaster Volunteer Officer, observed:

> In my history with Red Cross (11 years), this is the first time that every single person that I have dealt with has been personally affected. The fact that they are Americans and concerned and confused. In this particular situation, the entire country wants to help. . . . They were coming from all over the world spontaneously.

Motivations of Spontaneous Volunteers

In this study we are concerned with many aspects of convergent volunteer behavior, including what motivates an individual to help in a disaster. The participants were asked to explain why they volunteered in the aftermath of September 11th. We found from the interviews that the primary motivation for volunteering was a compelling need to help in some way, particularly a need to assist victims, and a desire—even obsession—to "do *something*" in order to contribute something positive and find something meaningful in the midst of a disaster characterized by cruelty and terror.

Most expressed that the need to volunteer was overpowering. For Catherine and the other spontaneous volunteers, it was not a question of

whether or not to volunteer, it was only a matter of finding ways to volunteer. Catherine, who watched the World Trade Center collapse from a rooftop, explained her motivations for deciding to volunteer with her friend:

> I just felt really helpless, and before the television started saying it, we said, "Let's go give blood. They're going to need blood. That's what we can do." Jane's husband and brother really just wanted to watch TV. It was interesting that we felt that we needed to, we both felt that we needed to get outside and do something and contribute. And they both felt that they needed to know what was going on, they needed the information. My mother is really altruistic, volunteers a lot, or maybe it's a nurturing instinct that I felt.

Lucy, who had "seen enough" when she witnessed people jumping to their deaths, explained her feelings about wanting to pursue some type of action:

> I called a friend who was up the street in the West Village. So I walked up to his house and grabbed him to go give blood. At that point we really thought that a lot of people were going to need blood. We were right near a hospital and it was just anything to keep you moving and you were feeling like you were potentially helping. There was definitely a feeling of desperation to do something no matter what.

As Lucy explained, there was a "feeling of desperation" to help others, a sentiment expressed by many of the volunteers in our study. Joy, a 23-year-old counselor and writer who saw the second plane hit the World Trade Center, expressed her motivation to do something to alter the negativity:

> I think wanting to be connected to the hope that's come out of this. Wanting to walk away with some positive life teaching realization. I don't want to walk away from this thinking there was nothing I could do and it's just horrible, horrible, horrible. There needs to be some positive that comes out of it and the only way it's positive is if I and other people make it positive. Knowing that there are so many people out there that just have no one they can call when they are at the end of their rope or they're just freaked out completely and they're just paralyzed. It's a need. I want to do it and I need to do it.

Joy's quote illustrates the dynamic of both self-oriented and other-oriented motives to serve. Charlie, a single paramedic in his 20s, had been a volunteer with Red Cross for eight years. In his experience, people volunteered because it was "their form of therapy—we're allowing them that therapy to help." It appears that if the volunteers could do something altruistic, then as Joy described, they could transform the negative into something positive. They were compelled by a need to take some action for change that could create hopeful outcomes from disastrous circumstances.

Behaviors of Spontaneous Volunteers

As described in the previous section, volunteers primarily were motivated by a compelling *need* to do something. In this section we briefly discuss some of the activities and behaviors of the volunteers. We found that those who were successful at volunteering demonstrated a tireless resolve to "either act or be paralyze(d)." As mentioned before, they did a wide variety of tasks: they cheered on the Ground Zero workers[2], gave massages, prepared food, made beds, gave blood, worked as translators, vacuumed rooms, fed workers, counseled, did research, and helped with supplies for the Red Cross. For example, Joy was a 23-year-old European-American woman who decided to use her life and professional experience to serve as a crisis counselor:

> They were a little worried about me coming (to the counseling center) because I've been diagnosed with a terminal illness and I just said, "You know, I think I'm the best person to come down there because I have been thinking about death for the last couple of weeks. No one went to that building thinking about death that morning. None of their families were thinking about it. I was thinking about it, so I've had time to process it. . . . I'm going to use my experience." There were so many people coming over because it was so close to the hospital. People just sitting there needing to talk to somebody, needing to sit silently with someone. At that point I just had to give hope even though I knew that logically not everyone would survive . . . and it was long, beginning about 7:00 pm on September 11 . . . for about 40 hours.

Jack was a 32-year-old financial analyst who was not permitted give blood because he was gay. Out of his resolve to volunteer, he explained:

> I said, "I am not leaving, there has to be something that I can do." So they got me out on a truck, an emergency rescue vehicle, and we took some supplies over to the pier where they had the manpower set up. We came back and some company had donated like 50 roll-away beds . . . and we loaded the truck and we were distributing them to some of the first stations up town . . . and they were so thankful to us for doing this little thing of bringing them a bed, whereas they are out there putting their life on the line.

Like Jack, many of the spontaneous volunteers faced barriers to serving, and some of them demonstrated opportunistic and sometimes deviant behaviors in order to overcome those barriers. Participants described difficulties in having useful skills to offer, in finding needs to fulfill, and in dealing with overwhelmed response systems. The spontaneous volunteers in this study described frustrations of long lines, uncoordinated leadership, disorganized lists, and unclear information about what to do immediately after the attacks. In addition, there was such significant response by people wanting

to help that needs like blood donations were saturated very quickly. Most volunteers spoke of the difficulties that they had finding volunteer work. In one instance, Taylor, a graphic designer in her 20s from Hong Kong, volunteered at a triage center, but because there were so few injured survivors there was nothing for her and the other volunteers to do. Taylor explained what happened:

> We were like one of the first volunteers at Chelsea Piers. . . . that is where the triage was set up. The bodies would be marked with black, which means they expired, or red, almost dead, or green or yellow . . . I think yellow was you could walk. . . . The one guy who was training us kept repeating the information over and over what we had to do when a black came in. . . . We would sit down and relax for a while and then he would say 50 police officers are going to come in and then no one would come. I probably saw five people come in, tops. . . . There were no survivors. Everyone was disintegrated. There was no survivors. The triage was pointless but no one knew that because everyone kept thinking that there were going to be survivors . . . we were just standing there with nothing to do.

Taylor, like many of the participants of this study, wanted to be able to do more for the victims of this disaster.

Participants had other troubles accessing volunteer work. Some had to find ways to gain entry into areas where people were needing help. For example, Mermaid, a 30-year-old Korean writer, shared her experience on September 12:

> There was no organization, we were all waiting. I kept going up to the policeman and I was like, “Listen, you need my skill, you need somebody that speaks Korean.” We just realized we just have to go ourselves to the family center. We just walked to the armory on the other side of town. I just lied at the gate, I said, “Listen, Jacob Javitz sent me. You guys need Korean translator and somebody is waiting for me inside.” So I just went in. It was so unorganized.

Mermaid thought that her lying was necessary because she felt certain that her skills could be of use. Josh, a 31-year-old European-American actor who had worked on a bucket brigade September 12, explained how he pursued volunteering on September 13:

> So I went up to the Javitz Center and filled out paperwork to register there and when I got there, you are talking thousands and thousands of people. I actually cut the line, which is probably an immoral thing to do, but I had already seen the location and knew that I was capable of doing work there. I lived with the guilt of cutting the line.

Josh, like Mermaid, thought that his skills were needed, and thus felt it was necessary to cut into line. However, unlike Mermaid, Josh expressed feeling badly about his "immoral" behavior when reflecting on it. Sung, a Korean-American non-profit associate in her 20s, also broke some rules in order to help victims. Sung was a volunteer translator at a crime victims' advocacy organization, and she had been instructed simply to translate various forms for aid for grieving families. She and another volunteer translator quickly realized that the families were not aware of all the benefits that they deserved. On their own, they drafted a document listing all the different services that were available to families of victims and made sure it got printed in Korean newspapers, on the radio, and on websites. They felt, however, that they might get in trouble for overstepping their role as volunteer translators.

Some of the volunteers also found it difficult to have anything to offer in the unusual circumstances. Catherine felt she was on a "quest" to find volunteer work. Although she had gone to Harvard Business School, she discovered that her assets were not useful after a disaster:

> For the first time I really feel like my accomplishments don't mean anything. Sure, I went to the best business school in the world, but what does that do in a crisis? It was really sad, I spent all this money and all this time and all I really want to do is be a firefighter, or be a doctor. Not having something practical to do was really difficult. . . . Literally I was running around: we went to the Javitz Center, went to the Salvation Army, we put our name on lists everywhere but it wasn't enough. We did the candlelight vigils but it wasn't enough. . . . It was very strange to feel like, you're in demand for every job in management, and yet you can't even volunteer. It was difficult. That's still something I think about, I really question what I've chosen to do.

Catherine eventually found volunteer work helping with a cruise ship that served food. Like Catherine, other volunteers also felt inadequate about their skills and backgrounds during the response and recovery. Lucy, the single unemployed European-American in her 30s, explained her frustration with not having the right skills:

> I rode around trying to find places to volunteer and I realized I had no skills, which was totally disappointing because they had forms to fill out for things that they needed and everybody in all of New York was trying to volunteer and they were just completely overwhelmed with everything. So I filled out this form but they ask, "Can you weld?" No. "Can you drive a semi?" No. Basically I had no talents that were relevant.

Despite having some trouble finding volunteer work, all but two of our study participants ultimately were able to volunteer in New York City after

the attacks. As the next section will outline, these volunteer activities were significant and meaningful experiences.

Impacts of Spontaneous Volunteerism

The efforts of the spontaneous volunteers had positive impacts both for the local community and for the volunteers themselves. Sandy, a Local Disaster Volunteer Officer, discussed how the activities of over 15,000 volunteers enhanced the effectiveness of meeting emergency response and recovery needs:

> They are feeding people, they are cooking food, they are moving food, they are moving the products in and out of warehouses. . . . They work with the emergency workers, they provide massage therapy, mental health counseling. . . . They come in, they work their time, and they go home. Health services are out providing emergency first aid, anything that the Red Cross does takes volunteers because that is *how* we help with catastrophic events. The successes are for me that . . . we are honoring our commitment to the American public in that our commitment is that we will be there and we are.

Many of the volunteers concurred that their volunteer work significantly helped the response efforts in New York City. We believe, however, that the most noteworthy impact of their volunteer work was how the experience positively affected the volunteers themselves. The interview data suggest that spontaneous volunteers experienced increased feelings of interconnection, healing, and empowerment.

One positive outcome was that the volunteers found that by working with new groups of people during their volunteering, they experienced a sense of solidarity with different community members. Steve, a waiter in his 50s and of Irish and Native American descent, shared his thoughts on this:

> In the beginning we were doing 12-hour shifts and you just go and go and go and when you go home you are just totally exhausted. So there's a lot of fun, there's a lot of work, there's a lot of healthiness to it, there's a lot of interaction with a lot of different kinds of people from every walk of life and who knows how many nationalities.

Olivia, a 46-year-old Jewish single mother, explained what change she experienced as a result of giving massages to rescue workers:

> There was a breakdown of a certain isolation and connecting to the larger community that happened as a result of living through this and volunteering. My relationship to the world was expanded by serving and relating to new groups of people like the police.

Like Olivia, other volunteers also expressed new relationships with firefighters, police, and hospital personnel. Because of their volunteer work, many of the volunteers were able to see these personnel in action. They often praised these workers for their preparedness and well-organized response strategies. Many of the volunteers expressed a deepened understanding and appreciation of emergency responders with comments like, "I now see what disaster groups do and how well society is organized to address this kind of thing," and, "It was amazing to think that these are the men that dedicate their lives to running into the mouth of the fire while other people are running for their lives."

The most significant outcomes for volunteers that we found in our study were the positive emotional experiences that the participants had when they were able to help other people. According to individuals who successfully helped, the experiences of volunteering were "empowering" and "healing" for them. They described feeling like authentic contributors to the response efforts. The acts of helping to transform the physical and emotional spaces of the disaster site changed their roles from passive victims of loss to active participants in the recovery of their community. Jack, a 32-year-old financial analyst, shared the following:

> [Volunteering] was one of the best days of my life. I wish they could have found a way to let more people help who wanted to help . . . even if it was busy work . . . even if it was filing that needs to be done and it might not have anything to do with the tragedy but someone could have said to me, "You know, we have had this filing stacked up for about 2 months now and we are really backed up and if you help us file that frees somebody else who is more experienced in this situation to go and do something else." And I would be helping, even though I wasn't helping with the specific disaster. . . . I think a lot of people who wanted to volunteer would have had the healing experience that I had that way.

Lucy, who had been discouraged by her lack of skills, found a volunteer job serving food. She described the experience to be emotionally positive for several reasons:

> It was a huge kind of therapeutic process for me. Definitely a relief to be occupied with something to do. It was really frustrating to not work and not be able to do anything to distract myself. It was awesome to get down to Ground Zero and get a sense for the reality rather than the movie version that we've all kind of got inside our minds. It was really amazing to help all the relief workers from the human connection. Helping really strong, but totally fatigued guys who can barely hold their plate of food. It was really an emotional thing but it was much better than sitting at home.

It should be noted how Lucy provided both self-oriented and other-oriented explanations for why the experience was emotionally positive for her. Steve also explained how the most basic tasks took on great importance:

> I think psychologically [volunteering is] a very good thing to do because you're able to work through a lot of the problems in a very constructive way and in a way you help affect the recovery, even if it's just making beds. . . . I've unloaded trucks, we've scrubbed floors, we've vacuumed, I vacuumed for 5 hours one day. . . . It's not that glamorous or glorious or anything but it's healthy, it's very healthy.

His statement highlights again the benefits of volunteering for the volunteers themselves; not only were they doing something helpful for others, but they were doing something "healthy" for themselves.

As a result of participating actively in the recovery of the community, volunteers also experienced heightened personal power. Joy, who was the 23-year-old crisis counselor battling a terminal illness, expressed the impact of her volunteer activity:

> I experienced so much good out of this . . . because I was working on the positive end of the process, I was able to walk away with a stronger sense of who I am and what I can do, . . . I really do feel lucky that I was able to focus my shock and anger and my pain, sadness, and grief, all those other negative feelings into something positive. If you can't do that, it just eats you up. I think that's why I'm able to move on. I think that I have a lot more faith in other people. . . . I'm happier in some ways about the state of the society we live in, the community that we live in. But realizing that [I], and everyone else, we are so much stronger than I thought we were.

Like Joy, Josh was empowered by his experiences working on the bucket brigade and delivering supplies to official rescue workers:

> [There was a] confirmation of what I believed of myself, that I'm a good man. I just feel now, more than ever, that I don't need to waste energy apologizing for being involved with things. There are some things in life that just have to get done. It's that simple, and somebody has got to do them. There are (issues) in our social lives that need to be addressed: forms of prejudice, famine throughout the world, planes flying into buildings. Of all the good that is in my country, I am deeply in love with that. Of that which is darker, of the mistakes we've made, or the ones we continue to make, I feel a greater resolve now to speak the truth that I know in the hopes that that can be changed, and speak it from a place of love. To know that I've had some piece of that legacy in my life, then it will be a life well lived.

The majority of those who had not volunteered before responding to this disaster expressed a likelihood of taking action to serve their community in the future. Other research (Fothergill, forthcoming) also has found that many first-time disaster volunteers plan to volunteer in future disasters, and some even plan to devote their retirement to disaster volunteer activities.

Discussion and Conclusion

Research on the September 11th attacks can help us to understand response and recovery in various disaster settings. While many aspects of this disaster were unique, it was a large-scale crisis event that had similarities to other disasters, including many natural disasters. This study was intended to increase our knowledge about volunteer convergence and helping behaviors in a disaster setting and to offer suggestions for new directions in policy. The data reveal interesting and useful information about the reactions, motivations, and behaviors of spontaneous volunteers. In addition, and most significant from our perspective, the findings suggest positive outcomes for the volunteers themselves. As we explore the motivations, behaviors, and changes experienced by spontaneous volunteers, it is important to consider the extant literature on volunteerism and disaster-related volunteerism.

Community Volunteerism

Sociologists have explored variables influencing volunteer activities, motives for volunteering, and consequences from volunteer participation. In his summary, Smith (1994) noted that most research finds that participation is influenced by context, social background, personality, and attitudinal and situational variables. Social backgrounds of higher education and higher income are the most consistent predictors of volunteerism, while female gender and higher occupational status also have positive relationships to volunteering (see also Okun, 1993). In the area of personality, those with such social orientations as empathy and morality are more likely to volunteer, and in the area of attitudes, positive feelings toward the group to be served and feelings of civic duty have positive impacts. In terms of context variables, environments that are large and urban tend to be less conducive to volunteering (Smith, 1994).

Most research on volunteer motives fits within a functionalist framework theorizing that volunteer activity is sought to fulfill social-psychological goals. Goals fulfilled by volunteerism may be extrinsic, with a desired outcome, or intrinsic, with benefit derived from the activity itself (Isley, 1990). For example, AIDS volunteers were motivated by both the extrinsic reward “to be of service to others” and the intrinsic reward of doing something “that could be ‘transformative’ for the volunteers themselves” (Chambré, 1991, p. 284). Research shows that most volunteers are motivated

by altruistic and humanitarian values, desires to increase understanding, needs to enhance esteem, and interests in fitting in socially (Clary et al., 1996; Omoto and Snyder, 2002). Altruistic motives, or those motives intended for the benefit of others with no benefits to oneself (Kohn, 1990; Oliner, 2000; Piliavin et al., 1981), appear to be consistently strong predictors of volunteer behaviors (Penner and Finkelstein, 1998). Recent research, however, also identifies a psychological sense of community as a significant impetus for volunteering (Omoto and Snyder, 2002). For those who pursue volunteering, there is evidence of positive outcomes such as enhanced well-being (Wheeler et al., 1998), increased commitment to community (Astin et al., 1999), and heightened social responsibility (Hamilton and Fenzel, 1988) for participants, among other benefits.

There is also some research, although limited, that has addressed community volunteerism in natural disaster situations. Dynes and Quarantelli (1980) suggest that there are many different types of disaster volunteers, including organizational volunteers who volunteer because their member organization mobilized them (Quarantelli, 1994). In his review of research findings on volunteer behavior, Wenger (1991) reports that there is "conflicting evidence" regarding who is most likely to participate in emergent volunteerism after a disaster. Based on some research, volunteers are most likely to be males, people of ages 18–45, members of the upper class, and those with high levels of formal education (Wenger, 1991). However, Wenger (1991) states that other research has found that socioeconomic status and gender do not influence volunteering. From his analysis, he determined that more research is needed on the factors that facilitate volunteerism in a natural disaster. Tierney et al. (2001) also argue that "not much is understood about which social groups volunteer and why" (p. 113), and that the disaster field knows relatively little about spontaneous volunteers.

Emergent Volunteer Behavior after September 11th

This exploratory study of volunteerism after September 11th has increased understanding about disaster-related volunteering by expanding the knowledge base on convergence behaviors of the group Fritz and Mathewson (1957) call the "helpers." In particular, these findings contribute to sociological knowledge about the factors that influence emergent volunteer behavior. Our study focused on the influences, motives, and impacts of spontaneous volunteerism in an effort to understand why the "helpers" decided to help, what actions they took, and how those behaviors affected community members or the community itself.

Our analysis of the motivations of spontaneous volunteers suggests that victimization affects emergent volunteerism. In New York City, it is clear that the attacks were personalized. Community members, as New Yorkers and

Americans, felt targeted by the terrorists. Indeed, it appears from our fieldwork that people internalized the loss and suffering of their fellow residents in the disaster even if they did not have any family or friends hurt or killed by the attacks. Research on other large-scale disasters, such as the Loma Prieta earthquake, also found that residents experienced both personalization and identification with the disaster even if they were not victims (O'Brien and Mileti, 1992). With those findings in mind, we believe that the nature of this disaster—the murder of thousands of people at the hands of terrorists—did have an effect on the degree to which people felt victimized by the attacks and the reasons that they volunteered during the response and recovery.

Our data reveal that heightened feelings of victimization played a strong role in the decisions to converge on the disaster scene and take part in emergent volunteer behaviors. The spontaneous volunteers in this study engaged in helping behaviors both because of compelling altruistic needs to serve members of their community and compelling personal needs to serve themselves. Consistent with other research on volunteerism (Clary et al., 1996; Omoto and Snyder, 2002), their altruistic motives were oriented toward outcomes that would better the situation for those who were directly affected by the brutality of the attacks. Overwhelmingly, the data demonstrate volunteers being extrinsically motivated to help others in order to relieve their pain and suffering. The intrinsic motivations, however, also appeared to be directed toward helping victims—the volunteers themselves. As mentioned earlier, the spontaneous volunteers were compelled by needs to take some action for change that could create hopeful outcomes from disastrous circumstances. It appears that the spontaneous volunteers were intuitively aware of their power to redefine the situation (Thomas, 1928/1994) of their lived experience as actors interacting with circumstances and constructing the meaning of the consequences (Collins, 1985). In other words, they recognized that they could make choices that would affect how they felt after having been attacked. Many of the spontaneous volunteers, by recognizing their choice "to act or be paralyzed" in the face of the attacks, illustrate the symbolic interactionist paradigm (Blumer, 1969). As agents capable of redefining the situation through their actions and interpretations (Blumer, 1969), they were motivated to take steps to alter their negative experiences of victimization through volunteering to "make it [the situation] positive."

Last, our study found that, in addition to the benefits typically yielded for community recovery (Tierney et al., 2001), the helping behavior of volunteerism during disaster convergence was an effective strategy for individual recovery. Specifically, the volunteers reported emotional impacts of healing and empowerment. It appears that the positive experiences of agency through volunteerism helped heal the victimization by transforming feelings of helplessness to feelings of efficacy. The presence of efficacy, or

the belief that one has the ability to influence one's environment (Berman, 1997; Gecas, 1989), reflected a positive social-psychological state change for volunteers who had felt victimized by having been members of the community affected by the attacks. As mentioned earlier, the acts of helping to transform the physical and emotional spaces of the disaster site changed their role from passive victims of loss and suffering to active participants in the recovery of their community. By doing something altruistic that benefitted others, they transformed the negative into something positive, thereby experiencing their power to influence their environment.

Policy Implications

The most significant implications from this study are drawn from our findings about the motives for and impacts of spontaneous volunteerism. It is important for both disaster researchers and practitioners to understand the need to volunteer and the positive impacts provided by volunteering. Disaster researchers have begun to document the enormous protective response benefits of volunteer activities. In many disasters, the first people on the scene are members of the affected community who spontaneously volunteer before official responders arrive (Mileti, 1999; Tierney et al., 2001). Indeed, "key response tasks typically are performed by community residents themselves" (Tierney et al., 2001, p. 110). Some of these volunteer activities include search and rescue efforts that save many lives. As discussed earlier, large disasters often elicit a therapeutic community response where victims help other victims (Barton, 1969; Fritz, 1961a, 1961b; O'Brien and Mileti, 1992; Wilmer, 1958). It is clear that, in addition to recognizing those benefits, we need to consider the intrinsic benefits for the "helpers." Given the generalized experience of victimization described by respondents in this study who were members of the community affected by the disaster, the significant benefits to spontaneous volunteers need to be taken into account.

Trends about convergence and the tendency to do so en masse (Barton, 1969; Dynes et al., 1990) are known and accepted (Scanlon, 1992). Disaster researchers have documented the large-scale convergence of volunteers in natural disasters in general (O'Brien and Mileti, 1992), and specifically in New York City after the September 11th terrorist attacks (Kendra and Wachtendorf, 2002; Lien, 2002; National Academy of Sciences, 2002). Based on the findings in our study, spontaneous volunteers are converging because they are compelled by needs to help others by being of service and to help themselves by constructing new meaning. While some research has found that the convergence of volunteers can be problematic to relief efforts (Wenger, 1991) and even disruptive (Halford and Nolan, 2002), we urge a reframing of spontaneous volunteers as both victims and community resources. It is clear that a balance needs to be found between the emotional needs of community

residents who want to volunteer and the needs of official response agencies that may be hindered and overwhelmed by too many volunteers.

In the spirit of finding that balance, we offer several suggestions. First, we suggest that disaster response strategies make a commitment during the disaster planning stages to serve all members of a community who feel victimized by a disaster. Second, we suggest that an effective way to serve those indirectly affected is to design emergency response plans in anticipation of the "need to do something." A plan could include established on- and off-the-scene work that allows those with and without skills to be of service to the community and thereby heal themselves. A strategy also could train community members in areas at high risk from terrorism to be "a 'resource' rather than a 'victim'" (Lichterman, 2000, p. 262). The "community as a resource" model can contribute significantly to the overall health of a community by preparing citizens to be soft mitigation resources (Lichterman, 2000) and proactively engaging them as agents in their own and their community's response and recovery.

Notes

1. Kendra and Wachtendorf (2002) suggest in New York after September 11th another category of "supporters/fans" was observed.

2. Although Kendra and Wachtendorf (2002) categorize this convergence behavior not as "helper" but as "supporter" or "fan," we believe that those who cheered on the Ground Zero workers felt as though they were indeed "helping" the recovery efforts by showing their support.

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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Jenna Peck for her extraordinary service to this project as our Research Assistant. Without Jenna's dedication in the field, this study would not have been possible. We also thank Greg Murr for his invaluable support, Lori Peek for her assistance, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. This project was funded by a Quick Response grant from the Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center in Boulder, Colorado, which is gratefully acknowledged.

Please direct all correspondence regarding this paper to Seana Lowe, INVST Community Studies Program, University of Colorado, 471 UCB, Boulder, CO, 80309-0471, e-mail: lowes@Colorado.edu or to Alice Fothergill, Department of Sociology, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405-0176; (802) 656-2127; e-mail: alice.fothergill@uvm.edu.