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A Call to Action: Examining the Experiences of American Red Cross Disaster Services Volunteers

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A CALL TO ACTION: EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF AMERICAN RED
CROSS DISASTER SERVICES VOLUNTEERS

NICHOLE M. BRANTS

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Disasters come in many forms from natural to technological, and can occur without warning. A disaster causes loss of property, loss of life, and disrupts daily life. In the aftermath of a disaster, there are many organizations that step in to assist those affected. One such organization is the American Red Cross, which trains disaster responders to assist in relief efforts. Disaster services volunteers with Red Cross are trained in a variety of functions, some of which deal more directly with victims of disaster than others. In an effort to understand the unique experiences of volunteers in disaster relief, a series of qualitative interviews were conducted with ten American Red Cross volunteer disaster responders. This study explores how they became interested in volunteering, what they have accomplished since the first time they volunteered for disaster work, what skills they believe they have gained from their work, their perceptions of the persons that they help, and their overall satisfaction with the volunteer experience.

A CALL TO ACTION: EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF AMERICAN RED

CROSS DISASTER SERVICES VOLUNTEERS

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A CALL TO ACTION: EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF AMERICAN RED

CROSS DISASTER SERVICES VOLUNTEERS

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CHAPTER I

A CALL TO ACTION: EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF AMERICAN RED

CROSS DISASTER SERVICES VOLUNTEERS

Disasters can occur without warning, leaving devastation in their wake. These can range from natural disasters like hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods, to man-made technological disasters and acts of terrorism. In any case, a disaster disrupts everyday life, often in an extreme way. When disaster strikes, there are organizations that step in to provide relief, one such being the American Red Cross. It is not the only disaster relief organization, but it is certainly the largest and most recognizable. After a disaster, there are many organizations that provide relief. For example, there are faith-based organizations like the Salvation Army, governmental agencies like the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, as well as other non-governmental organizations.

What sets the American Red Cross apart is its reliance on its vast network of volunteers. The organization does employ staff who conduct the day-to-day business, but the majority of disaster relief comes from volunteers. According to American Red Cross, around 90-94% of the disaster relief effort is done by volunteers. These volunteers are trained in functions like Client Casework, Sheltering, Feeding, Public Affairs, and many other service delivery areas. Disaster services volunteers respond to a variety of disasters that include both small-scale incidents like single-family home fires to large-scale ones like floods that affect entire towns.

Red Cross disaster volunteers represent an organized response to disaster (Dynes 1970). Britton (1991) highlights that Red Cross plays a support role and is comprised of individuals "concerned with more generalized compassion, welfare, and relief" (p. 397). According to the Red Cross website, there are nearly 70,000 natural and man-made

disasters in the U.S. that the Red Cross responds to each year. Internationally, the Red

Cross Red Crescent society boasts nearly 13 million active volunteers who respond when

emergencies strike (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

2013). However, there is no current data available on the total number of volunteers with

American Red Cross disaster services, although Red Cross reportedly called out an

estimated 40,000 volunteers from across the nation to respond to Hurricane Katrina in

2005 (American Red Cross 2005; Villagran, Wittenberg-Lyles, and Garza 2006). More

recently, during the relief efforts of Superstorm Sandy, the Red Cross reportedly

mobilized nearly 16,000 trained workers, of which 90 percent were volunteers from all

50 states (American Red Cross 2012). Volunteers with the Red Cross come from many

different backgrounds and bring with them a variety of skills. They also work in varying

capacities with Red Cross Disaster Services. Whether providing sheltering or providing

meals in a large-scale disaster or responding to single-family home fires, Red Cross

volunteers help meet community needs.

  Since its founding in 1881, the American Red Cross has been providing relief

services to victims of war and natural disasters. In fact, it is the largest disaster relief

organization in the United States. Following an emergency, the Red Cross serves as a

direct service provider to disaster victims. The Red Cross provides assistance to those

affected by disaster including feeding, sheltering, and financial assistance (U.S.

Government Accountability Office 2006).

  This research is an attempt to better understand the unique experience of

volunteers in disaster work. This research explores how volunteers account for their

experiences: how they became interested in volunteering, what they have accomplished since first volunteering for disaster work, what skills they have gained from their work, their perceptions of the persons that they have helped, and their overall satisfaction with the volunteer experience. These research questions were answered through in-depth interviews with ten volunteer disaster responders from a Midwest chapter of American Red Cross. To be considered a disaster responder, participants will have had some disaster training and have responded to at least two disasters.

My interest in studying this topic came about because I previously worked at the American Red Cross and was trained as a disaster responder. While serving with the American Red Cross, I became very interested in the culture of disaster and learning of the varied experiences of fellow responders. There is an extensive literature on the sociology of disaster and the sociology of volunteering, but I have found that there is a gap in the literature about American Red Cross disaster relief and the motives behind volunteering for such work. The effects of disaster on survivors and their communities have been extensively studied, but Raphael, Singh, Bradbury, and Lambert (1984) point out that there is nearly no literature on how rescue workers are affected or more specifically, on how these experiences impact disaster responders. In fact, volunteer disaster responders in general are a largely unexplored area of research, as Britton (1991:395) states, "Voluntary action scholars and disaster researchers have paid little attention to the permanent disaster volunteer." Britton (1991) also laments the fact that there is little qualitative data that has been completed on volunteer disaster responders. In

an effort to address this gap, this research conducted in-depth interviews with American Red Cross volunteer disaster responders in a chapter in the Midwest.

This research will also add to the sociological literature on volunteering. Fernandez, Barbera, and van Dorp (2006) define volunteers using two concepts, that is, "the provision of a service of one's own free will and/or provision of a service without promise, expectation, or receipt of compensation for the service" (p. 57). Stoddard (1969) distinguished the types of volunteers between "those who arrive on the scene at the time of disaster and desire to help" and those who "have some disaster training and carry a designated title which facilitates role-playing expectations prior to and during the disaster" (p. 188). To the latter group, Stoddard (1969) gave the title *permanent disaster volunteer*. Moran, Britton, and Corey (1992) note that the permanent disaster volunteers make up the backbone of society's organized response to disaster.

Similarly, Fernandez et al. (2006) also categorized disaster volunteers based on how they respond and whether they were requested to respond. The first category noted by Fernandez et al. (2006) are those volunteers who are assigned to the incident command system; these might be members of a search and rescue squad or Red Cross-trained personnel. The second category is comprised of those who are recruited for their skills and the needs of the disaster response by the incident command system. The last category includes spontaneous volunteers who are not assigned or recruited, but who wish to help in some way without any compensation. For the purposes of this study, the focus is on the first category: those who are trained and specifically assigned a task in a disaster relief operation.

Villagran et al. (2006) highlight that because organizations like the Red Cross rely so heavily on volunteers, it is important to understand the experiences of volunteers and how they may be impacted by those experiences to better meet their needs. Studying volunteers in this organization could help influence recruitment and retention. This research will provide a unique opportunity to study volunteers in this capacity.

<u>REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE</u>

In order to provide a theoretical framework for this study, an examination of relevant disaster research, along with research concerning the sociology of volunteering and helping behaviors, was conducted. Previous research provides a valuable insight into some of the key themes concerning disaster research and volunteering. The first section will focus on the sociology of disaster, looking specifically at the history of the field of disaster research, collective responses to disaster, organizational responses to disaster, and volunteerism in emergencies. The second section will focus on the sociology of volunteering, highlighting studies of the rates of volunteering, some of the factors involved in volunteering, characteristics of those who volunteer, why they volunteer, their levels of commitment, the consequences of volunteering, and lastly, what remains to be learned about volunteers in disaster relief.

Sociology of Disaster

History of Disaster Research

The National Research Council (2006) highlighted that the first sociological account of disaster and collective behavioral response was completed by Samuel Prince, who wrote his dissertation on the response to an explosion in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in

1917. This event prompted social scientists to take an interest in disasters, collective response, hazards, and risks.

Initial research in the sociology of disaster largely took functionalist or systems-oriented approaches to disaster. This is reflected in the definition of disaster by Fritz (1961):

> An event, concentrated in time and space, in which a society, or a relatively self-sufficient subdivision of society, undergoes severe danger and incurs such losses to its members and physical appurtenances that the social structure is disrupted and the fulfillment of all or some of the essential functions of the society is prevented. (P. 655)

This remains the predominant conceptualization of disaster, which assumes that disasters involve demands that surpass capabilities: "When an extreme event impacts a vulnerable community it creates pressure on that community to prevent adverse impacts on public health, safety, and property" (Tierney, Lindell, and Perry 2001:9). Tierney et al. (2001) assert that this conceptualization of disaster reflects the initial funding by government agencies and concerns over nuclear war.

The field of disaster research largely took hold in the period following World War II and preceding the Cold War, as the government and military began to focus on potential public response to extreme hazards, particularly nuclear war (National Research Council 2006). Research in disaster followed federal policy in that it was reactive, meaning that it was not ongoing, but rather took place once a disaster event occurred. For example, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, was created in 1978 to initially focus on preparedness for nuclear war. However, it shifted to focusing on disaster relief efforts and hazard mitigation after the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief

and Emergency Assistance Act was enacted in 1988. The change over time in disaster research is highly reflective of the federal policy changes in general and the changes in American society and world events in particular.

Tierney (2007) states that "sociological research on disasters was initially focused on organized behavior during and immediately following disaster impact," which followed the priorities of original funding agencies (i.e., government) (p. 504). The current state of disaster research is a direct descendant of this focus. The Disaster Research Center, or DRC, was founded in 1963 and one of the founding members, E.L. Quarantelli, was trained in this research tradition. Tierney (2007) indicates that Quarantelli was concerned with collective behavior and symbolic interactionism, while other co-founders were focused on organizational concerns. Some of the early publications from the DRC focused on refuting myths concerning public responses to disaster. The myths, or what is termed "disaster mythology," are based on the idea that there is widespread panic, lawlessness, shock, and negative mental health outcomes as a result of disaster (Tierney 2007).

Disaster Mythology

The term was first coined by Quarantelli (1954) to describe the public perception of how people behave in disaster. Some of his earliest works suggested that this perception is largely false. Fischer (2008) identifies eleven myths about how individuals impacted will behave in a disaster, including misconceptions about that behavior. It is assumed that those affected by disaster will flee in panic, engage in looting, price gouging, and other selfish behaviors, as well as notions that relief shelters will be full to

capacity. Included in the myths of disaster are the assumptions that people will act irrationally. As Fischer (2008) states, "The norms which govern our behavior collapse into Durkheim's anomie" (p. 49). Quarantelli and Dynes (1972) conducted one of the first empirical studies exploring common disaster myths. Quarantelli (1981) also conducted research on panic behavior following disaster, suggesting that "panic flight" is very rare at any time before, during, or immediately following disaster impact.

Research has also shown that looting is largely rare in U.S. disasters, but that is not to say that it is nonexistent. Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski (2006) note that when looting does occur, "It tends to be transient, to be carried out in secret, and to involve isolated groups rather than large numbers of people" (p. 65). The perpetuation of looting stories in disasters can be dangerous if community residents ignore evacuation warnings in an effort to safeguard their belongings from looters and the propagation of this myth may actually increase their risk of death and injury in disasters (Fischer 2008).

Similarly, notions of panic can be harmful because of the potential for influencing organizational, governmental, and public responses during disasters. The concern that a warning could increase panic behaviors could influence officials to avoid issuing timely warnings and to leave out pertinent risk-related information from the public (Fischer 2008). This sets the stage for more dangerous conditions when threats materialize. The main argument, however, is that panic behavior is uncommon, as Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) note, "In the face of disaster, most people do not engage in the barbaric, selfish, unthinking, emotional, and often self-destructive behavior depicted in the media" (p. 3).

While these myths abound regarding individual and community response to disaster, many early studies have refuted them by documenting a number of changes that occur at the community level in disaster situations (Barton 1969; Dynes 1970; Dynes and Quarantelli 1971; Fritz 1961). Tierney et al. (2001) found that solidarity and morale are enhanced, conflicts that existed prior to the disaster are suspended, there is greater community involvement and participation, and priorities shift to central tasks of protecting human life. In general, disaster-stricken communities have been described as altruistic, therapeutic, resourceful, problem-focused, and adaptive. An example of this is evident in the statement by Dynes (1970) when he observed that:

> Disasters create unity rather than disorganization. The consequence of a disaster event on a locality is in the direction of the 'creation' of community, not its disorganization, because during the emergency period a consensus of opinion on the priority of values within a community emerges; a set of norms which encourages and reinforces community members to act in an altruistic fashion develops; also, a disaster minimizes conflict which may have divided the community prior to the disaster event. (P. 84)

Despite the many academic studies that refute these myths, they manage to regain relevance after each new disaster event. People maintain their preconceived notions of panic behavior in disasters, as Cornwell, Harmon, Mason, Merz, and Lampe (2001) state, of "people running and shrieking, arms gesticulating wildly, pushing and shoving others to reach safety" (p. 6). Media accounts of behavior during disasters tend to reinforce these preconceptions. Nowhere is this more evident than in media coverage of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, where stories of criminal behavior were common, the media frequently overemphasized crime and panic and underrepresented acts of kindness (Tierney, Bevc,

and Kuligowski 2006). Although, Tierney et al. (2006) stated that looting did happen, it was highly exaggerated as were reports of murder and other violent acts.

Organizational Response

Given that disaster responders work within this context of myth and reality, it is important to understand how they view those they assist and whether the disaster responders believe in aspects of disaster myths and how it might affect their work. Fischer (2008) took this question to emergency management officials to ascertain their views on disaster and public responses. Fischer (2008) noted the importance of this study believing that these notions could have adverse effects on the public, specifically in the timeliness and accuracy of warnings disseminated to the public in an emergency. Fischer (2008) surveyed local emergency management agency, or LEMA, directors to ascertain how accurately they understand behavioral response to disaster, which disaster myths they believe, if any, and to determine if experience or education played a factor in their belief in such myths. Fischer (2008) asked the respondents a variety of questions to determine whether they believed in disaster mythology using a Likert scale. Respondents were asked to indicate the likelihood that a certain behavior, such as looting by local citizens, was of great concern after disaster.

A similar study completed by Wenger, James, and Faupel (1980:91) stated that LEMA directors scored a 43 percent on their ability to accurately understand behavioral responses to disaster in comparison to the general public, which scored a 30 percent on the same measures. However, as Fischer (2008) notes, a 43 percent and 30 percent respectively would both constitute failing grades. In Fischer's (2008) study, the mean

score for LEMA directors was 65 percent. This higher percentage suggests that training for LEMA officials has improved. Fischer (2008) also suggested that education played a significant role in determining the accuracy of behavioral response. Fischer (2008) found that education played a greater role than disaster experience or work experience in drills or seminars. For my study, participants were asked about their perceptions of those affected by disaster to determine whether they believe the myths any more or less than professional emergency management officials and whether it affects their service delivery.

Volunteerism in Emergencies

A major theme that is missing from sociological research on disaster is the experiences of volunteers working in disaster relief. Much research has been devoted to communities and individuals affected by disaster and the recovery process (Puig and Glynn 2008). However, volunteers make up a staggering number of relief efforts. Tierney et al. (2001) note that volunteer activity, whether spontaneous or institutionalized, increases at the time of disaster impact and remains widespread during the emergency period, particularly in the worst-hit areas. Fernandez et al. (2006) highlight the spontaneous volunteer response in disaster, noting that during disaster events, large numbers of people converge at the scene to offer assistance. Fernandez et al. (2006) also highlight how this mass convergence is not a new phenomenon, as it has been documented for over 85 years, since the Halifax explosion in 1917.

There have been very few studies that have focused specifically on the experiences of volunteers in disaster (Hodgkinson and Shepherd 1994; Hodgkinson and

Stewart 1991; Moran and Britton 1994a; Moran and Britton 1994a; Raphael et al. 1984).

As many scholars have noted, much attention is given to those directly affected by

disaster. Hodgkinson and Stewart (1991) state that the service providers, that is, the

rescuers and helpers, are too often the neglected survivors of disaster. Hodgkinson and

Stewart (1991) further argue that disaster workers are ignored by researchers and their

employers alike, citing stereotypes of helpers as strong and resourceful as one of the

reasons for this neglect.

Moran and Britton (1994b) explore the experiences of volunteer emergency

workers, looking specifically at their reactions to traumatic incidents within the context

of prior experience in an emergency. Raphael (1986) proposed that continued experience

with emergency situations or disasters helped to equip workers with an ability to resist

the effects of exposure to traumatic events (Moran and Britton 1994b). Moran, Britton,

and Correy (1992) also explored coping strategies, finding that participants' reactions

were associated with the amount of training they had received and a focus on the task at

hand. Moran, Britton, and Correy (1992) also found that participants often used talking

and humor as a way of coping in the face of disaster.

Another study that greatly informed this research was from Lois (2003), who

conducted an ethnographic study in order to examine the emotional culture of search and

rescue volunteers. In her study, Lois (2003) explores reasons behind volunteering for

such high-risk work and how group members view their participation, including the

rewards they receive from their involvement. Her main research question was "how do

[search and rescue volunteers] understand their rescue experiences and how do these

understandings affect their lives?" (Lois 2003:25). Lois (2003) found that the "rescuer's understandings of heroism and the acts that they performed through their work …influenced their selves and their identities" (p. 11). Indeed, Lois (2003) found that their understanding of heroism drove them to continue, and "rescuers were socialized to downplay any kind of self-aggrandizing or selfish behavior." Lois (2003) also studied the emotional experiences of rescuers, noting that rescuers learned to control their emotions depending on the situation, for example, "Becoming emotionally detached when dealing with death or controlling a victim's panic during a dangerous or difficult rescue" (p. 12). The research being conducted at present sought to answer similar questions to those posed by Lois (2003).

In order to understand the volunteer experience in disaster, it is necessary to place it within a broader understanding of volunteerism. This research will explore some of the values that volunteers bring to their work, commitment to a cause, and consequences of volunteering in disaster relief specifically.

<div align="center">Sociology of Volunteering[1]</div>

Research in the field of voluntary associations and volunteering, in general, has deep roots within the field of sociology. Bonikowski and McPherson (2007) note that this interest stems from the prevalence of associations in the United States as well as the fact that voluntary associations provide an opportunity to study social interaction. Alexis de Tocqueville (1835) was perhaps one of the first in the field to write about voluntary associations and the role they played in civil society (Bonikowski and McPherson 2007).

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[1] In my review of the sociology of volunteering, I am indebted to the work of Wilson (2000) for his succinct analysis of volunteering.

Early research in the field of voluntary associations followed along these lines as well, focusing on social cohesion and political debate (Bonikowski and McPherson 2007). However, Bonikowski and McPherson (2007) highlight a change in the field beginning in the 1920s, which introduced more empirical research led by the Chicago school, focusing on community through an ecological perspective. Bonikowski and McPherson (2007) highlight how this focus on empirical research led to quantitative inquiry, which allowed researchers to explore questions of who joins voluntary organizations by looking at demographic factors and the consequences of their membership by studying outcomes such as mental health, life satisfaction, and political participation.

Wilson (2000) provides one of the most comprehensive reviews on volunteering. He provides a definition of volunteering as "any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or cause" (p. 215). Wilson (2000) highlights how scholars argue over the specific definition of volunteering, specifically whether a definition should include benefits received from this work or whether if receiving benefits precludes the activity from being described as volunteering. Wilson (2000) also notes contention over whether volunteering should be concerned with intentions or motives.

Regardless of intent, volunteering is considered a helping behavior, often inextricably linked to altruism. Wilson (2000) further notes that volunteering entails more commitment than spontaneous assistance, but requires less than the care offered to family and friends. Cnaan, Handy, and Wadsworth (1996) highlighted four components found in most definitions of volunteerism: free will behavior, with no monetary reward, aimed to help strangers, on a long-term basis or in a formal setting.

Who Volunteers?

Research on volunteering explores the rates of volunteering, looking at demographic factors and resources that encourage volunteerism. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the volunteer rate for the United States in 2012 was 26.5 percent. The Bureau of Labor Statistics also reported that between 2011 and 2012 about 64.5 million people volunteered through or for an organization at least once. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, the total number of volunteer hours was 7.85 billion. Women volunteered at a higher rate than men, 29.5 and 23.2 respectively. Middle-aged adults, 35 to 44, were most likely to volunteer, 31.6 percent. For adults 45 and older, the rate of volunteering tapered off as age increased. Teens, 16 to 19, had a volunteer rate of 27.4 percent. Volunteer rates were lowest among young adults, aged 20 to 24, at 18.9 percent.

There are a variety of demographic factors that researchers have found that help explain rates of volunteering. For instance, Wilson (2000) found that as age increases so does the likelihood of volunteering. Wilson (2000) highlights research that found that rates of volunteering peak at middle age (Herzog, Kahn, and Morgan 1989; Menchik and Weisbrod 1987; National Association of Secretaries of State 1999; Schoenberg 1980). However, high-risk volunteering tends to skew towards a younger population (Thompson 1993; Wilson 2000; Wiltfang 1991).

Gender is another variable that explains rates of volunteering. Wilson (2000) highlights findings that report that within North America, females are slightly more likely to volunteer than males; the same could not be found in Europe as it varied country to

country (Gaskin and Smith 1997; Hodgkinson and Weiztman 1996; Hall et al. 1998).

Gender differences are found to vary by life cycle stage (Wilson 2000). Wuthnow (1995) found that among younger people, females contribute the most volunteer hours, whereas, the opposite is true for older people (Gallagher 1994). Wilson (2000) also underlines gender differences in type of volunteer work, finding that females tend toward care-giving roles and less public or political activities (Cable 1992; Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen 1991; Menchik and Weisbrod 1987; Perkins 1990; Schlozman, Burns, and Verba 1994; Thompson 1993).

Wilson (2000) also explores racial differences in rates of volunteering. Hodgkinson and Weitzman (1996) report that whites tend to volunteer more than blacks. Wilson (2000) notes that the difference could be due in part to lower levels of education, income, or occupational status among blacks. Wilson (2000) also underlines how racial differences influence the kind of volunteer work that people engage in. Wilson (2000) highlights research that asserted that black volunteers focus more on needs of the black community (Ferree, Barry, and Manno 1998; Portney and Berry 1997; Sundeen 1992).

Finally, context plays an important role in rates of volunteering. Although, scholars note that it is one of the least understood factors in this field (Smith 1994; Wilson 2000; Wuthnow 1998). Sundeen and Raskoff (1994) explore the context of school, finding that students who attend a school that encourages community service are much more likely to volunteer. Wilson and Musick (1997) examine the context of work, finding that those who held a government job were more likely to volunteer than people in the private sector. The context of neighborhoods has also been studied, finding that

rates of volunteering are significantly lower in inner-city areas where people don't know their neighbors (Wuthnow 1998). However, Wilson (2000) comments that there have been no significant findings about neighborhood conditions.

Pearce (1993) highlights the large body of research that reports on the socio-demographic factors of volunteers, finding that people with higher income, higher education, jobs and family tend to volunteer more and be more committed to their volunteer work (Haski-Leventhal 2009). However, Haski-Leventhal (2009) notes that these factors are not always definitive predictors of volunteering; except for education, which tends to be more consistent in predicting volunteerism (Pearce 1993, Wilson 2000, Haski-Leventhal 2009).

Why do People Volunteer?

Researchers in the sociology of volunteering have also concerned themselves with the factors involved in volunteering, which include values, supply of resources, cost/benefit analyses on the part of volunteers, and social capital. Values or motives play an important role in choosing to volunteer. Wilson (2000) contends that many sociologists might deny that any drive or impulse to volunteer exists and so they reject the notion of motivations altogether. However, Wilson (2000) highlights that this assumption is flawed because everyday life is organized based on motives. Wilson (2000) further states, "Humans impute motives–to themselves and to others–and thereby validate or challenge identities, strengthen or weaken commitments" (p. 218). Therefore, my research includes what participants identify as their motives or values in choosing to volunteer for disaster work.

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Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen, and Miene (1998) identify several

reasons for volunteering. One such reason is values, as Finkelstein (2008) describes as

those related to altruistic or humanitarian concern for others. Another reason is an attempt

to gain new learning experiences. A third reason is to strengthen social relationships. A

fourth reason identified by Clary et al. (1998) was a means to gain experience that lends

itself well to a career. The last reason is the ability to address personal problems and

enhance self-esteem.

Meltzer (1994) explains altruism as a concern for the well-being and devotion to

the interests of others. Altruism is also often linked to volunteerism. However, Haski-

Leventhal (2009) notes that "not every act of volunteering is altruistic and not every

altruistic act is volunteering" (p. 271). Haski-Leventhal (2009) highlights research that

showed how people's readiness to help others was dependent on the situation. For

example, Piliavin and Charng (1990) find that people were more willing to help after a

disaster rather than in an everyday capacity.

Wilson (2000) highlights the behaviorist approach, which argues that

volunteerism is only made possible by available resources. For example, higher levels of

education have a stronger correlation to volunteering (Wilson 2000). This is due in part to

the notions that education tends to make people more aware of the issues concerning

society, strengthens empathy, and fosters greater self-esteem (Brady, Verba, and

Schlozman 1995; Rosenthal, Feiring, and Lewis 1998; Wilson 2000). Additionally, those

with higher levels of education are more likely to be asked to volunteer. It is not always

the case, however, that higher education accurately predicts volunteerism. As Thompson

(1993) shows, volunteer firefighters are more likely than other community members to have graduated high school, but less likely to hold a college degree (Wilson 2000).

This approach to volunteerism is less about ideals than it is about the supply of resources. Wilson (2000) highlights that human capital theory provides a valid explanation for volunteering habits passed from parents to children. As Sundeen and Raskoff (1994) note, children with high-status parents are more likely to volunteer because they have greater access to resources. However, Wilson (2000) points out that human capital theory does not clearly predict the types of volunteer work that actors will engage in.

Wilson (2000) highlights how work and free time, as a resource, can be used to predict volunteering. Wilson (2000) notes that there was an assumption that paid employment and volunteering were incompatible and he provides an example of how it was long believed that women made up the bulk of the volunteer labor force because they had a lot of time on their hands. Part-time workers are more likely than full-time workers to volunteer. The lowest rates of volunteering are found among unemployed persons and homemakers (Stubbings and Humble 1984; Wilson 2000). Wilson (2000) also notes that hours worked may not be as important as an individual's control over those hours. For example, those with flexible schedules are more likely to volunteer (Freeman 1997; Thompson 1993; Wilson 2000). Additionally, Wilson (2000) highlights the importance of not only the hours worked, but the kinds of work people engage in. In this case, managers and those at a professional level are more likely to be asked to volunteer. Regarding the factor of income, Freeman (1997) found a negative relation between income and

volunteering. However, Wilson (2000) contends that the overall effect of income on volunteering varies widely.

Stebbins (1996) states that volunteering is a work-like activity but one without remuneration. In his 1996 article, Stebbins highlights the work of researchers who argued that volunteering is inherently a form of leisure. Stebbins (1996) takes issue with the notion of volunteering as mere leisure because as he argues "leisure trivializes volunteering, implying in the extreme case that volunteers are…selfish, unreliable, and prone to giving their least effort" (p. 212).

Henderson (1981, 1984) finds that scholars regard volunteering similarly to paid work, "of having an external, or extrinsic, orientation; the volunteer has a job to complete for the benefit of the community" (Stebbins 1996:214). However, Henderson (1981, 1984) finds that this contrasted with the view held by volunteers, who tended to see their volunteering as leisure, oriented by intrinsic interests: "The participant enjoys the activity for itself and for the self-expression and self-actualization that it may engender" (Stebbins 1996:214). Similarly, other researchers find that volunteers regarded their work as leisure, including Chambré (1987) who studied elderly volunteers, finding that while they may have been moved by their sense of altruism to take up a volunteer role, they continued on because of the intrinsic satisfaction they found there.

Stebbins (1996) addresses volunteering as "serious leisure," which is "the systematic pursuit of an amateur, a hobbyist, or a volunteer activity sufficiently substantial and interesting in nature for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and

experience" (p.215). Stebbins (1996) further places volunteering in the category of serious leisure because he posits that many volunteer roles offer their occupants access to special careers and distinct rewards.

His concept of "serious leisure" views volunteering as inspired by two key motives: altruism and self-interestedness. Stebbins (1996) notes that "serious leisure volunteering is *career* volunteering" (p.216). Those who participate in career volunteering are most likely motivated by self-interestedness. As stated previously, Chambré (1987) found that while people were motivated by altruism to take up a volunteer role, the motive of self-interestedness kept them in the volunteer role. Stebbins (1996) explains that this is due in part to the specific skills, knowledge, and training that volunteering requires. He notes how the acquisition of the skills and knowledge can be very rewarding in itself.

Smith (1982) argues that people will not contribute time or money to others unless they receive something in return, in doing so they conduct a cost-benefit analysis. Wilson (2000) highlights exchange theory to explain variation in volunteering. Wilson (2000) asserts this because he finds an obvious weighing of costs and benefits when considering volunteer work. Firstly, volunteers tend to choose something they have a stake in. For example, parents whose children are in school are more likely to join the parent teacher association, or PTA (Wilson 2000). Second, people might volunteer because they anticipate needing help in the future or if they have already received assistance and desire to give back. Third, volunteers may be explicit in their acknowledgement of the benefits they receive from volunteering (i.e., a greater

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appreciation for life or enhanced self-confidence). Fourth, volunteers may desire

recognition for their efforts. In fact, Field and Johnson (1993) find that volunteers were

more likely to withdraw from volunteering if they did not receive recognition for their

efforts. Lastly, volunteering brings the benefits of social attachments (Wilson 2000).

However, this theory does not provide a whole picture of volunteerism either.

Rather it assumes that everyone will act purely out of self-interest. Wilson (2000)

highlights that while there might be some "psychic benefits," they are hardly the only

reason people choose to volunteer. As Wilson (2000) notes, "A volunteer might feel good

about doing the right thing, but she does not do it because it makes her feel good; rather it

makes her feel good because she thinks she ought to have done it" (p. 222). Wilson

(2000) highlights competing theory as being a better predictor of volunteerism.

Competing theory contends that identity is of the utmost importance and many people

want to think of themselves as the type of person who helps others regardless of any

benefit they receive from their actions (Hart, Atkins, and Ford 1996; Schervish and

Havens 1997; Wilson 2000).

Wilson and Musick (1998) note the importance of social capital to volunteering.

They explain that high social involvement depends on social capital, that is, social

networks, contacts, and affiliation in organizations. Research consistently finds strong

correlations between levels of social capital and volunteerism (Pearce 1993; Wilson

2000; Haski-Leventhal 2009). Having a larger social network increases the chance that

someone will be asked to volunteer, and research suggests that people are more likely to

volunteer if they are asked face-to-face. In fact, Penner (2004) finds that people who are invited to volunteer are four times more likely to do so than others.

Wilson (2000) contends that family relations are an important factor in volunteering. Marital status as well, is an important factor, with Sundeen (1990) stating that married people are more likely to volunteer than single people, although single people without children give the most hours volunteering. Wilson (2000) also highlights that children can be both a limitation and an opportunity with regard to volunteering. He notes that it is highly dependent on the number of children, their ages, the nature of the volunteer work, and among other factors. Wuthnow (1998) finds that parents were more likely to volunteer if they have children in the home, but it was dependent on the ages, for example, parents with young children were less likely to volunteer than parents with older children.

What Affects Commitment to the Role?

Wilson (2000) considers commitment to volunteerism in two ways: "as attachment to the volunteer role over time, and as commitment to a particular organization or task" (p. 230). Commitment is affected by a variety of factors. Those factors that influence people to begin volunteering also influence their commitment to their role. As an example, Wilson (2000) notes that highly educated people are more likely to volunteer and they are less likely to discontinue volunteering. Motives are also an important aspect of commitment, as Snyder and Omoto (1992) find that volunteers who claimed personal enhancement as their motive were more likely to have stayed,

while those who expressed values as their motive for volunteering were more likely to withdraw (Wilson 2000).

Allahyari (2000) also addresses commitment among volunteers in a social service capacity. In her study, Allahyari (2000) spoke with volunteers at two organizations who worked with homeless individuals. Her participants expressed a commitment to self-betterment as well as to helping others. Allahyari (2000) notes how volunteers' life stories led them to volunteer for Loaves and Fishes, an agency that provided meals to the homeless. She found that many of the routine volunteers, that is, those individuals who do the year-round day-to-day work, had volunteer experiences dating back to their childhoods. She also found that most of the volunteers came to the organization after "fortuitous contact with other volunteers" (p. 111). In addition, her participants spoke of wanting to do something meaningful in their lives. Participants in her study also highlighted a personal commitment to their community, which instilled in them a feeling that they needed to give back to their community (Allahyari 2000). She found that many volunteers came to the organization after retirement, perhaps in an effort to stay busy. Allahyari (2000) also highlights commitment to an organization. Some of her participants expressed their commitment as stemming from a personal experience with a specific institution and an appreciation of organizational mission and values. Lastly, Allahyari (2000) provides insight into what volunteer work means to those who perform it and offers a unique perspective on how volunteers experience personal growth as a result of their time volunteering.

What are the Consequences of Volunteering?

Volunteering certainly has an effect on those who participate in it. Volunteering has an effect on citizenship. Wilson (2000) asserts that those who volunteer tend to be more politically active than non-volunteers. Volunteering also fosters political socialization, as Wilson (2000) finds that adolescents who volunteered expressed the responsibility of society to care for the needy (Hamilton and Fenzel 1988) and also conveyed the importance to serving the public interest (Flanagan et al. 1998). Another consequence is a reduction in antisocial behavior because it involves social connections. Wilson (2000) highlights a commonly held belief that volunteering helps "keep kids out of trouble." However, Wilson (2000) asserts that the connection between volunteering and keeping young people out of trouble is unclear. Volunteering is also thought to have a positive effect on physical and mental health, which may be due in part to the notion that volunteering tends to boost self-esteem and increase life satisfaction (Wilson 2000; Harlow and Cantor 1996). Lastly, Wilson (2000) emphasizes socioeconomic achievement as a consequence of volunteering. Wilson (2000) reports there is little empirical evidence that supports the idea that volunteering helps people find jobs. However, Wuthnow (1998) contends that since volunteers have more social contacts, they could use those ties to find work (Wilson 2000).

Gap in the Literature

I have highlighted the vast literature concerning the sociology of disaster and the sociology of volunteering, but there is little research that addresses both fields and scarcely any sociological literature about American Red Cross disaster relief and the

volunteer force. While the value of volunteer work in disaster is noted, there has been very little analysis of disaster volunteerism, as noted by Moran et al. (1992). Similarly, Baxter-Tomkins and Wallace (2006) also highlight that the activities and behaviors of volunteers in the emergency context are largely under-researched. Other scholars have noted that volunteer disaster responders, in general, are a largely unexplored area of research. Britton (1991:395), for example, states that "voluntary action scholars and disaster researchers have paid little attention to the permanent disaster volunteer." Other scholars have agreed that this is an area where much more could be undertaken; in fact, Oppenheimer and Warburton (2000:1) argue that "volunteering as an activity has long been underestimated, under-researched and undervalued." Baxter-Tomkins and Wallace (2006) recommend that "more intensive qualitative inquiry into the experiences of the emergency volunteer" be conducted (p. 13).

Despite all that is known about volunteers, there is still much to be learned about the "careers" of these volunteers. Researchers have studied similar themes of career volunteers, often using different terms. For example, Allahyari (2000) writes about *committed volunteers*, or routine volunteers who do the year-round day-to-day work for their organization. Allahyari (2000) notes the importance of these volunteers' "charitable labor" because without it, the organizations would not be able to meet the demands of the people they serve (p. 9). Allahyari's (2000) study highlights the importance of volunteers to an organization. While the organizations in her study focused primarily on the needs of homeless individuals, the Red Cross is similar in that it relies on volunteers to deliver valuable services to the community. Red Cross disaster relief is primarily conducted by

individuals who volunteer their time and are trained in disaster services. Understanding the who and why of volunteering is important, but examining commitment to this role and accomplishments are themes that have not yet been studied.

This research also adds to the sociological literature on volunteering. Volunteerism can mean a variety of things, but this work focused on volunteers who are organized and trained in a specific area. Villagran et al. (2006) highlight that because organizations like the Red Cross rely so heavily on volunteers, it is important to understand the values and experiences of volunteers. Studying volunteers in this organization could help influence recruitment and retention. Volunteers play a very pivotal role in emergency work worldwide (Moran et al. 1992). In fact, Baxter-Tomkins and Wallace (2006) estimate that permanent disaster volunteers save governments and society, in general, millions of dollars each year. Since disasters do not operate on a schedule, it is important to constantly assess the volunteer force to ensure they are ready to respond. This research provides a unique opportunity to work closely with Red Cross personnel to address the current situation and needs of their volunteer force.

My research attempts to address the lack of analysis of disaster responders. In addition to adding to the literature on disaster volunteers, this research utilized qualitative inquiry whereas much of the current research is quantitative in nature. Qualitative inquiry allowed for more detailed responses from participants and allowed them to share specifics about their work in disaster relief, in order to provide a better understanding of this volunteer role. This research topic was conducted by utilizing in-depth interviews with Red Cross disaster responders in a chapter in the Midwest.

DATA AND METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative method of research, using semi-structured interviews to explore the research questions. This method was ideal for this research as it attempts to discover the varied experiences and perspectives of disaster responders with the American Red Cross. These responders receive disaster training through the Red Cross and volunteer their time in order to respond to emergencies. Volunteers in disaster relief are able to determine their availability for response, whether they want to respond to small-scale events, like a single-family home fire, or larger-scale events like a flood or hurricane. This research was specifically interested in volunteers' perceptions of their work: how they became interested in volunteering, what they have specifically accomplished since the first time they volunteered for disaster work, what skills they believe they have gained from their work, their perceptions of the persons that they help, and their overall satisfaction with the volunteer experience. Respondents were asked to share their experiences from doing disaster relief work. Conducting in-depth interviews allowed for rich detail and direct feedback from participants.

Interviews were conducted with ten American Red Cross volunteer disaster responders from January 2014 through April 2014. The interviews lasted between one hour and two hours. The audio-recorded interviews took place either in the homes of the participants or in a public place of the participants' choosing. For interviews in a public place, the researcher made every attempt to locate a secluded table to ensure confidentiality.

Participants were located through purposive non-probability sampling. Babbie

(2013) defines purposive sampling as selecting participants "on the basis of knowledge of

a population, its elements, and the purpose of the study" (p. 190). I was able to use my

contacts with American Red Cross staff who passed along information regarding my

research interests and contact information in order to recruit participants. I was able to

attend monthly Disaster Action Team meetings in order to explain my research and

recruit participants to my study. Additionally, I contacted volunteers whom I worked with

during my time as an AmeriCorps member with the American Red Cross to ask them to

participate. I assured them that their participation was strictly voluntary, their names were

kept confidential, and that no compensation would be provided.

My sample consisted of ten disaster responders. Participants included disaster

responders from a variety of service area functions from individual client services to

external services and staff relations.[2] My reason for recruiting participants from a variety

of functions is that most volunteers with the Red Cross take most, if not all, of the

disaster services training and can respond in different functions. For example, while

deployed on a national disaster, volunteers can be sent out as one function such as

Disaster Assessment, which is typically one of the first tasks that need to be completed in

a disaster. Once that task is completed or winding down, someone can be transferred to

another task, for instance, Client Casework, which requires many volunteers in the

recovery phase. Participants in my study were not chosen based on age, although all

volunteers with Red Cross Disaster Services are 18 or older. Gender was also not a

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[2] For more information on the functions within disaster services, see the Group/Activity/Position chart in Appendix B.

qualifying factor in recruiting volunteers; my sample size was too small to come up with meaningful comparisons by gender.

My only requirement for participants in the study was that they have responded to at least two disasters as an American Red Cross volunteer, which ensured that they had the requisite training and experience. Those who agreed to be in my study were contacted by phone or e-mail to set up an interview.

Ten volunteer disaster responders were interviewed. All of the participants met the requirement of having at least two disaster responses. In fact, the average number of large-scale disaster responses by the participants was ten with many more small-scale responses. The average length of time that participants had volunteered with Red Cross was around twelve years. The average age of participants was sixty-five years old. My sample was fairly consistent with Red Cross in terms of the average age of volunteers, which is in the mid to upper fifties. All of the participants were Caucasian. Nine of the ten participants were married. The majority of participants had a master's degree or higher. In addition, a majority of the participants were retired, and five of the ten had a background in teaching at various levels. Lastly, participants spanned a variety of functions within the Red Cross disaster framework, with a majority claiming Mass Care as their primary function. Other groups that were represented in this sample included Logistics, Staff Services, Individual Client Services, and External Relations.

For the interviews, I employed a semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide helped to ensure that pertinent questions were asked of each participant, but also allowed for digressions on the part of the respondent. As Berg (2009) details, "Questions

are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but the interviewers are allowed freedom to digress; that is, the interviewers are permitted (in fact, expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions" (p. 107). By asking open-ended questions, participants were able to share relevant stories regarding their own disaster experiences.

In fact, when participants hinted at something significant, I was able to follow-up on these themes right away rather than sticking to a strict interview protocol (Weiss 1995). As Weiss (1995) recommends, when participants mention noteworthy themes, I followed up on these themes as soon as possible rather than strictly following the interview protocol.

The interview guide began with some basic demographic questions and a summary of their volunteer history, including when they first started with Red Cross disaster services and their motivations for joining. Participants were asked to provide the story of how they became involved in disaster work. This included their initial motivations for volunteering for this kind of work, any prior volunteer experience, and their first experiences in disaster work. Participants were also asked about how they perceive their role in a disaster relief operation, whether they feel prepared to go into the field, any accomplishments they have attained, and any skills they feel they may have gained while volunteering in this field. Additionally, participants were asked how they perceive those they assist while conducting disaster work and their overall satisfaction with the volunteer experience. Finally, I thanked participants for contributing to my

study, and I asked participants if they would allow me to follow-up with them in case I had more questions at a later date.

Interviews were recorded using a digital audio recording device in order to guarantee an accurate account of their responses. Participants were informed before the interview began that they would be recorded. Before beginning the interview, participants were asked to sign two copies of the letter of consent. Participants were given one copy to keep so they might contact me with any questions or contact the Research Ethics and Compliance Office at Illinois State University to report any ethical problems in this research. I also kept one signed copy for use throughout the research process. The informed consent detailed the research, explained their rights in the process, and assured them that every attempt would be made to maintain their confidentiality. Participants were assigned a pseudonym in order to further maintain confidentiality. By obtaining informed consent, I ensured that participants knew that their involvement was strictly voluntary and they had the right to withdraw at any time; this also removed the possibility of coercion (Kvale 1996). Other than the opportunity to share their stories, participants did not receive any benefit or form of compensation for their participation.

As far as how I might have influenced the participants, I was concerned that some might think of me in my former role as an AmeriCorps member with the Red Cross, in which I was the response coordinator and managed the disaster services operations for the chapter where I worked. However, I assured them that I am no longer affiliated with the staff at Red Cross, and their responses would be completely confidential and that any information they provided would not be shared. In addition, most of the participants I

interviewed were not from the chapter where I worked. Before beginning the interviews I told participants of my background to establish my credibility.

All identifiers, including names of any persons or organizations mentioned, were removed so that no one could tie responses back to a specific volunteer; this is especially important in the instance that Red Cross staff members wish to view the results of this study. I believe that my own experience in disaster relief helped to build rapport with participants. However, I was brief in sharing my experience because as Weiss (1995) points out, the interview should be about the interviewee, not the interviewer.

Lastly, the audio recordings were erased once the interviews were transcribed. All data concerning this research, including the signed informed consent letters, recordings, and transcriptions were kept in a locked file cabinet in my home and password protected on my personal computer. I was the only person with access to these data. Upon the completion of my research, the data will be erased from my computer and the letters of consent will be shredded.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

The interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure that the appropriate meaning was conveyed. I did remove some placeholders that participants used, for example, um, uh, or anything similar. However, if the pauses seem significant to the story being told, I left in placeholders to convey deeper meaning and perhaps show that the participant was hesitant to share. Kvale (1996) argues that there is no standard of practice regarding either form, but rather that it is dependent on the intended use and the audience for whom it is intended.

My data analysis was based on a grounded theory method of analysis. This allowed for themes to emerge from the data through an inductive process. However, I also used some predetermined codes based on my knowledge of the disaster volunteer literature. As Charmaz (2006) commented, a theorist brings prior ideas to her analysis (p. 48). These predetermined codes may be altered during the iterative process of analysis. I began coding immediately upon completing a transcription.

I also coded using the two phases of coding recommended by Charmaz (2006): initial coding and focused coding. Charmaz (2006) states that initial coding involves "naming each word, line, or segment of data followed by… a focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data" (p. 46). I used line-by-line coding for the initial coding, which allowed me to remain open to possible themes rather than only using predetermined codes.

These initial codes allowed me to interact with the data, sort it into categories, and focus on the themes that emerge. Then I was able to conduct focused coding, which was more directed and selective of the most frequent initial codes. Focused coding allowed me to make decisions about the adequacy of initial codes and help categorize the data into overarching themes. I also made use of memo-writing, as it was helpful in analyzing codes. Charmaz (2006) finds memo-writing to be a crucial step in grounded theory because, as she states, "Memo-writing provides a space to become actively engaged in your materials, to develop your ideas, and to fine-tune your subsequent data-gathering" (p. 72). Using memo-writing allowed me to make comparisons between the data and the

codes and provide the basis of my analysis of the findings. Memo-writing is a process of note-taking that allows for free-flowing ideas to come to the forefront and helps to identify and elaborate on categories within the data.

<div align="center">FINDINGS</div>

The research findings are organized into several categories that address the study's research questions. These questions examine the reasons behind volunteering, what disaster responders have accomplished since first volunteering for disaster work, what skills they believe they have gained from their work, their perceptions of the persons that they help, and their overall satisfaction with the volunteer experience. Interviewing volunteer disaster responders adds to the discourse on the sociology of volunteering and of disaster research.

The first section addresses why people volunteer, specifically looking at how they became interested and some of the skills they have gained and their accomplishments. The second section explores what might affect volunteers' commitment to their role, examining their training, whether they feel appreciated, their perceptions of clients, and coping with tragic events. The last section addresses the consequences of volunteering, the benefits and their overall satisfaction with volunteering for disaster.

<div align="center">Why do People Volunteer?</div>

All of the interviewed disaster responders described their interest in volunteering for disaster and how they view themselves within this role. This involved the call to action, their initial interest, the characteristics of a typical volunteer, reasons for

volunteering, skills brought to their role as well as those they have gained, and lastly their

accomplishments.

Call to Action

Participants described a variety of aspects in how they became involved in

disaster, but each had a distinct moment, what I referred to as a call to action, that moved

them to seek out options for volunteering in disaster. Eight out of the ten volunteers

explained how their initial involvement stemmed from watching or hearing about a

disaster as it was going on and wanting to help in some way. Each described how they

had the time available and wanted to help in whatever way possible and so they sought

out their local Red Cross chapter. Betsy, a disaster services volunteer for over eight years,

illustrated this saying:

> The year I retired, that fall was the year of all the huge fires in California and I
> remember sitting watching TV going, I can do that now…. It wasn't something I
> thought about prior to retiring though…it was just one of those spark moments.

Many also explained how they had admired Red Cross before joining, and the

reputation of the organization also helped make their decision to volunteer. Edna, a

volunteer for nearly fifteen years, explained an experience volunteering for a disaster

where she worked filling sand bags after a flood in the Midwest. Edna described how she

felt good about what she had done, explaining that helping gave her a feeling of joy. She

wanted to become a disaster volunteer because as she said, "I've always admired the Red

Cross…. I know they do good things." Most of the volunteers also stated that they had

been active volunteers since joining; however they were able to determine their

availability, so not necessarily doing something each month.

Characteristics of a Volunteer

Participants were asked to describe the kind of person who volunteers for disaster and the characteristics of someone who does this type of volunteer work. Participants provided a variety of answers, but most touched on the importance of compassion and a need to feel like you were doing something worthwhile. A volunteer with Red Cross for over ten years, Mitch, explained three key variables in who volunteers for disaster, stating:

> There are a lot of variables. I think you have to have the time. So it tends to be people who are a little older, retired, or at least have some time. It's not uncommon to have people between jobs, but when they get a new job they do drop off or do it much less. And I think you have to have some sort of orientation toward humanitarian values…and you've got to want some social contact.

Participants really touched on attributes of being hard-working and selfless as key as well. Several participants also expressed the importance of having an adventurous spirit. Since volunteers tend to deploy to various locations in the United States, if registered for national disasters, having a sense of adventure was key as well as being flexible because you may not know what to expect once you get to your location. Donna, a volunteer with twelve years of experience as a Red Cross volunteer, explained it this way:

> With me, I just don't have to have a lot of details. My first experience was with Hurricane Katrina and that's the first time I had ever deployed on a national disaster. I just got on a plane and flew there and [had] no idea really what I was expecting, but I can function that way. I know a lot of people can't function that way, so you kind of need to be spontaneous. If you get too bogged down by the details, you really won't be as productive or survive as well.

Through their descriptions, participants in this study painted a picture of the type

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of person who volunteers for disaster responder. Participants highlighted a variety of attributes that they felt depicted a typical volunteer. Some of the most important attributes included a sense of compassion, a sense of organization, having free time, being flexible, and hard-working. Hazel, a volunteer for over ten years, noted that volunteering in disaster entails hard work, explaining that:

> Those involved are hard workers, they do a lot of labor and cleaning and washing out things and jobs that really aren't fun, but they are really dedicated to that.

By describing the characteristics, participants were also able to reflect on their own attributes that make them successful in their role.

Reasons for Volunteering

Participants shared some similar reasons as above as their reasons for volunteering. Each participant highlighted how they wanted to help others as their main reason for volunteering in disaster and their personal values. For Mitch, a volunteer for over ten years, he described it this way:

> For me, it was a huge shift in my values…from being oriented toward achievement and success, money. To being interested in doing for others. Even though my work…was doing for others, that wasn't the primary driver, it really wasn't. It was making a living and raising a family and those kinds of things, and once they were raised and I was doing okay financially and didn't have to work quite as hard, it was a big shift, you know, like okay, now it's time to do for others.

Going along with the notion of time, many participants emphasized the availability of time as a key factor in their reason to volunteer. Grace, a volunteer for fifteen years, explained it this way, "You've got to be available, and we're not available every day and every night but you've got to have some availability or you're not going to

be involved very much." Perhaps more important, participants stressed how they wanted to be able to help in some way after a disaster and the psychic benefits that come from volunteering. Donna, a volunteer for twelve years, stated it this way:

> My first deployment was Hurricane Katrina, so to think that I could actually help somebody with that big disaster…. I had always volunteered locally, but to do it on a national level was exciting to me and fed me spiritually as well.

This statement highlights the benefits that come along with volunteering for disaster, as well as the excitement and adventure that participants discussed. While the benefits received are not generally the primary reason people chose to volunteer, it was a bonus. Hazel, a volunteer for ten years, really brought the whole idea together with this statement:

> All my life, I have been a very empathetic person. Throw all this together - talents, skills and a desire to help others and you've got your dedicated volunteer in any capacity. Add the ability to adjust, a love of travel and meeting people and an openness to face challenges and to put up with some minor hardships and you've got your Red Cross disaster volunteer.

The reasons for volunteering varied widely, but each was drawn in by a sense of wanting to help. While their reasons for first volunteering are interesting to note, the reasons they continue in this role are also of concern for this research.

Skills

Participants were also asked about what skills they brought to their volunteer role and also the skills they may have gained in performing this role. Participants often highlighted some of the skills they had cultivated in their work life. Since there were several retired teachers in my study, they each noted communication as a skill and the ability to relate to others. Additionally, some of those retired teachers spoke about how

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they have utilized that teaching background because they also volunteer their time to teach disaster courses with the Red Cross to help train new volunteers. Participants also emphasized organization as a skill they brought to the role. A volunteer for fifteen years, Grace, pointed out the importance of organization, but said, "Even though the situation may not be organized, but when you go out to do your thing, you need to be organized." To highlight this, Grace provided an example of a deployment when organization was key:

> For example, at [disaster site], for the week, we had to make sure that we had what we needed for breakfast and then for between breakfast and lunch and you have to make sure you've got everything in there and in a place where you can get to them easily where you can hand them to people through the window [of an Emergency Response Vehicle].

Participants also shared the skills they gained in their role in disaster work. Skills gained varied widely between participants, but most agreed that they learned something, no matter how big or small. For Charley, a volunteer for three years, he explained that "it took me out of my comfort zone a lot. I learned a lot of other stuff there, like grant writing, how to manage volunteers, how to teach people and things like that." Other participants highlighted more specific skills they've gained. Like Betsy, a volunteer with over eight years in disaster services, who has deployed numerous times as Mass Care driving an Emergency Response Vehicle (ERV), explained, "Well, I can drive a truck, I can back up an ERV into a warehouse dock. I know where the warehouses are in every major city I've been to; I would never have known them any other way." In addition to that very practical skill, Betsy went on to say:

> I think it's helped me talk to people. I've always been able to talk to kids because

I was a teacher, but to put me in a position to talk to people I wouldn't have met any other time in my life and to absolutely love it has been a gift to me.

Participants also stressed how they have gained more patience because often the work is slow to get going. In some instances, when an intense storm has been forecasted, Red Cross will send in volunteers to prepare for a disaster and then all they can do is wait. Betsy, a volunteer for over eight years, provided an example of this:

I was in Bismarck when the Missouri [river] was flooding and…we were waiting for the water to rise and the dam on the biggest man-made lake was either going to hold or not, and if it didn't hold basically all hell was going to break loose. And we had to get shelters up for 1600 people in two hours and we actually practiced that because for a week we did nothing except drive around the town and I remember being at this little café…and talking to the waitresses and how were their houses, were they in the flood zone? Because the initial people knew that the river had already been flooded; they just didn't know how far this was going to go and everything was sandbagged and holding and this one waitress said, 'Why are you here?' And I said, 'We're waiting with you.' …It was an answer she wasn't expecting and the idea is, we're waiting with you, you don't want to have to call us if that dam breaks. So we were there taking care of volunteers and filling sandbags and the National Guard was out, so we spent a week doing that and then it was a waiting game.

Another important aspect that one participant highlighted was that his volunteer experience has helped him be more open-minded and given him perspective that he had not had before. Gilbert, a volunteer with Red Cross for over fifteen years, discussed how people cannot understand the enormity of a disaster unless they see it firsthand:

Throughout your lifetime growing up, you see on TV that people are having disasters and you see the pictures of what's happening and you say, "Boy, that's really terrible"…but when we were [responding to a hurricane] our leader took us through and drove us around some of the area and it's just eerie, not a sound, and you look out and everything is gone. Nothing's there and just sitting there looking at it, it's just so different being there and looking at it on TV. It's something you have to experience to really understand it.

Sense of Accomplishment

Participants cited a wide variety of accomplishments from their role. Participants

generally shared a story from a deployment they had been on to highlight an

accomplishment. Others noted some overall accomplishments of their time volunteering

for disaster. The accomplishments that the participants shared were of two categories:

one was of the work itself and the other was on a more personal level.

Of the work, participants felt a sense of accomplishment in doing the task

assigned. As Grace, a volunteer for fifteen years, stated:

> I think I had a sense of accomplishment that we accomplished what they told us to
> and went every place we were supposed to go over an area that we had no idea
> about. We just got in the car and went.

In addition, that sense of accomplishment came from feeling that they were doing

something good for someone. Dean, a nearly twenty-year veteran with the Red Cross,

found a sense of accomplishment in connecting disaster survivors to resources. To

illuminate this, Dean provided an example of a deployment in a rather impoverished and

rural area where residents were in need of generators, which is not something that Red

Cross furnishes, but Dean found a way to make a connection. Dean described a time

when they were deployed to a disaster, they were having breakfast and happened to

overhear a truck driver discussing how he was picking up generators to bring to a disaster

area, and so Dean spoke with him and was able to pass on information to the local fire

station to get generators for people in town.

On a more personal level, a volunteer spoke of having a sense of accomplishment

in building rapport with people affected by disaster. Betsy, a volunteer for over eight

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years, recalled a deployment, which greatly varied from her others, where she was assigned to deliver meals with the ERV to the same neighborhood for nearly three weeks. The work in a disaster is rarely so consistent. So Betsy related how in this instance she really built a relationship with the individuals who were served by the ERV and how this connection proved emotional:

> …We ended up delivering food twice a day to this same neighborhood for three weeks and so we really built this bond of friendship…. It was a very culturally mixed neighborhood and as it turns out my partner had this gift of talking to people. Of all my Red Cross deployments this one was the most emotional because when we told people, in 24 hours we'll be gone, we'll have dinner tonight, and breakfast and lunch tomorrow, but at dinner tomorrow that's the last time we'll be here, we got hugs and kisses and people brought out cameras and we took pictures and it was a very personal connection. That one was very emotional because usually in the Red Cross you don't see the same people, twice a day for three weeks.

In this instance, Betsy's sense of accomplishment was tied to those relationships she built and in the comfort she and her partner were able to provide. Hazel, a volunteer for over ten years, shared something similar, in that the sense of accomplishment came from the interaction with those affected by the disaster. Hazel went on to say that she relishes "the little victories" in volunteering for disaster. Additionally, Hazel highlighted a sense of accomplishment in her own personal growth and the fact that this experience has allowed her to learn more about Red Cross and how it functions.

What Affects Commitment to the Role?

Participants were asked a variety of questions to determine what might affect their commitment to the role of volunteer disaster responder. Questions included aspects of training and whether they felt that the disaster services prepared them for the work.

Participants were asked whether they felt their efforts were appreciated by Red Cross and also by communities and individuals affected by disaster. Participants were also asked about their interactions with other disaster responders and with those affected by disaster, as well as some of the typical behaviors displayed by disaster survivors and community members. Lastly, participants were asked how they cope with tragic events in the course of doing disaster work.

Training for Disaster

When asked whether they felt that the training in disaster services courses prepared them for disaster relief work, participants were very positive. Nevertheless, participants stressed that the classes can only do so much and the majority of learning happens in the field. Charley, a volunteer for three years, explained it this way:

> There were classes that were offered and they would give you a basic amount of stuff you would need, but a lot of the skills you would need you learn on the job. And you learn from talking to other people that had been out more than just from classes. So I would say that I probably learned more from doing stuff outside than in the classroom.

Another volunteer stressed that the training is comparable to any school class. Betsy, a volunteer for over eight years, explained that she learned "as much as any school class will ever prepare you for anything you'll ever do in life, but then when you get your feet on the ground you learn how to really do it." More important than the courses for Betsy is the mentoring that takes place in the Red Cross, whereby inexperienced volunteers are able to train with more experienced volunteers.

Appreciation

Participants generally felt appreciated by both the Red Cross as an organization

and by the communities and individuals affected by disaster. Participants highlighted some instances when they felt appreciated. Participants were quick to note that being appreciated was important in doing the work. In instances where volunteers did not feel appreciated, it generally had to do with a failure in communication between the various positions within the disaster framework.

Regarding whether they felt appreciated by the organization of Red Cross, participants citied specific events that Red Cross puts on to show their appreciation to volunteers. Participants spoke of a dinner or picnic that Red Cross holds once a year. Others also cited the support received from Red Cross staff helps them to feel appreciated. Hazel, a volunteer for over ten years, explained that on deployments, disaster responders get an e-mail from Red Cross headquarters thanking them and providing updates. Carla, a volunteer for over ten years, cited something similar, stating that the CEO of her chapter is very personable and, as she stated, "always stops by, thanks us and tells us what a great job we're doing." Mitch, a volunteer for over ten years, also highlighted a positive experience with Red Cross staff, noting that they had nominated him for an award for volunteer service for the state of Illinois, which was a great honor and made him feel very appreciated.

Grace, a volunteer for fifteen years, noted how after a deployment she was invited to debrief with her local chapter and discuss any issues she had. Of this she said, "I do feel that they care about our experiences. They want us to have a good experience." Participants seemed to really value the appreciation they receive from Red Cross. Betsy, a volunteer for over eight years, stressed that while the organization is quick to show

appreciation, its communication during disaster could be improved. Other participants

also agreed that communication could be better, commenting that in disaster deployments

many things are going on at once and lines of communication can break down easily. As

an example, Dean, a volunteer with nearly twenty years of experience, described a

deployment where he was working in Logistics and he had several different supervisors

and each was giving him different instructions.

Participants also felt very appreciated by the communities and individuals

affected by disaster. Most of the participants shared stories of positive experiences of

how they were thanked on countless occasions by those they were helping. A volunteer

for over ten years, Mitch shared a story of a moment that particularly touched him:

> I had a card placed on my cot when I was in New Orleans by a little boy named
> [Conrad], who I never met, but when I came back from wherever I was that day,
> on the cot there was this picture of a, looked like a tornado, but it was supposed to
> be a hurricane. You opened it up and it said, "Thanks for helping my daddy" and
> then it was signed by [Conrad]…I treasure that.

Another volunteer explained that the level of appreciation varied by the scale of

the event. Charley, a volunteer for three years, noted that on local disasters, typically

single family fires, he felt appreciation by those affected. However, Charley said that on

national disasters appreciation was dependent on the people and on the situation. He said

it this way, "On the national disasters, for Hurricane Sandy, some people yes, some

people no, not really. But I think that just comes down to them not getting what they need

right then, having gone through stress."

Interactions with Others

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that there was a sense of camaraderie among

disaster responders, albeit one with some limits. Participants shared some examples of the camaraderie they experienced. Participants were most likely to discuss the interactions within the function in which they were deployed. To illuminate this, Charley, a volunteer for three years, spoke of the camaraderie between his team of Public Affairs when deployed to a disaster on the East Coast, how they would go to meals together and had inside jokes. Betsy, a volunteer with over eight years' experience, also spoke about the group mentality among ERV drivers. On being asked if there was a sense of camaraderie between disaster responders, Betsy said:

> Definitely, the biggest one is in ERV drivers… it's like we joined the teamsters…. [There is] a great sense of camaraderie and just watching out for each other. So that's real strong among the ERV drivers. Now disaster assessment, those are the hotshots, I love disaster assessment, but you get in the car and you're your own boss and unless someone calls you on the phone, you're gone for the day until you get back. They're not really the team players as such. And then client casework is also very, very different.

However, like with anything, there were times when interactions were strained among disaster responders. Charley, a volunteer for three years, described how interactions can often be strained between different functions. Charley believed this stemmed from disaster responders thinking that their job they were doing was the hardest or the most stressful and not caring about other groups or not really knowing what they were doing. Charley explained that Red Cross tries to combat this by having Public Affairs write feature stories about different functions and volunteers in an effort to raise awareness of the various tasks being completed on a disaster deployment.

Participants mentioned how the Red Cross consists of diverse groups and all different kinds of personalities, so there are bound to be some conflicts. Betsy, a

volunteer for over eight years, noted that the conflict, however, was "no more than any other human nature where you have a group of people together." Betsy stated that she only recalled several people who had been sent home in all of her deployments. She went on to say:

> Each time the person sent home deserved it, but the people were remarkably forgiving and patient until finally they reached that breaking point…. Nobody wants to work with this person, nobody wants them on their truck, usually it's a safety issue, they don't know what they're doing or they take wild chances.

Another volunteer also commented on strained interactions, noting that the situation can be stressful, and the conditions in which volunteers are staying are not ideal. Edna, a volunteer for nearly fifteen years, noted how difficult it might be for people to get sleep, and showers are not always readily available, which may lead to more stress in an already stressful situation. However, with all this, Edna explained that interactions were generally positive:

> I think that pretty much we have great interaction with one another and support. There are times when you find people that you can't work together on anything, but basically we're all there for the same purpose…. You help me and I'll help you and we'll get through this together. I think that most of the time, of course in Katrina, that was different than any other DR [Disaster Relief Operation] because they were sending people there that weren't trained. It was not a good situation for everybody…. Red Cross learned a lot after Katrina. Basically most people are compatible, but there were a lot of people that were untrained that went down…. [Red Cross] got it fixed and there were enough of us there that knew what we were doing. I think Red Cross is always learning, always trying to do better.

Participants also highlighted the importance of group association. More important was the association with Red Cross, which gave participants the opportunity to help in disaster as well as the training that made them qualified to respond to disasters. Participants were also happy with the support and direction that they get from this group

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association.

Coping with Disaster

Participants were asked how they perceive the typical behaviors by survivors in disaster as well as the behaviors by community members and emergency responders in the wake of disaster. Participants were asked whether there were misconceptions about how people behave in disaster. Respondents were also asked how they themselves cope with the tragic events in the course of doing disaster work.

Respondents did share that often by the time they get to the scene of a disaster some time has already passed and so perhaps the initial shock has worn off. Specifically in more local, small-scale events, responders may not be called upon right away. A volunteer for nearly fifteen years, Edna explained, "We can't go until the fire department calls us." And Edna went on to explain that once they are allowed in, the survivors are generally very appreciative and quite often emotional. Carla, a volunteer for over ten years, also shared this sentiment, stating that survivors start out very distraught and in the course of filling out paperwork, "they calm down and know that there's someone there helping them to plan and figuring out what to do next." Other participants expressed similar perceptions. Charley, a volunteer for three years, noted how people often seem overwhelmed, but that their reactions formed a spectrum from sadness, shock, or even anger. Charley mentioned that with some people they are quick to accept their lot and ready to move on, while others were "just furious at everyone and thought that no one was doing enough for them and maybe their lives weren't great before the disaster and now this just compounded it." Charley also commented on how first responders can be

equally affected "because some of them were from those communities, so they had that extra weight on their shoulders."

Participants also weighed in on misconceptions that proliferate about disaster victims. Participants noted how common themes emerge in news coverage about looting, but noted that the looting isn't done by those affected but rather by people outside the community looking to take advantage. Grace, a volunteer for fifteen years, said that one way affected communities try to cut down on looting is to set up checkpoints, only allowing people access if they have a purpose (i.e., working with Red Cross). Dean, a volunteer for nearly twenty years, remarked that news coverage of looting, in particular, helps to raise awareness and warns victims that not all people are good-intentioned and to be wary of those seeking to take advantage.

Disaster can take a toll on the responders as well. Providing for their own mental health was important to the volunteer disaster responders in this study. Participants noted that they are often encouraged to seek out the mental health nurse while deployed on disaster. Indeed, Red Cross is so concerned for the emotional wellbeing of the responders that they require volunteers to check out with mental health as part of the exit process. Participants discussed how speaking about their experiences helped them to process the situations. In fact, Mitch, a volunteer for over ten years, noted a course that Red Cross offers called Psychological First Aid, which details how to provide assistance to others, but also how to take care of yourself. Mitch stated that he uses what he learned in this course, particularly by taking breaks and saying no when he needs to. Other volunteers discussed how they create an emotional barrier and aren't necessarily affected. Donna, a

volunteer for twelve years, explained:

> I just put my whole self in it really. The adrenaline kind of gives me the energy to go forward and I'm just totally concentrated on that and not really thinking about myself or anything like that. It's just what I'm doing at the time.

Betsy, a volunteer for over eight years, described something similar, noting only one time when she found the work overly emotional, but typically she was able to detach from the situation in order to be of the most help to victims. She explained it this way:

> …The very first time [my partner and I] finished what we were doing, we pulled into a side street and we would just hug each other and cry because of what we were feeling coming from the people because it became so personal. They told us their life stories and because they did, we were able to make some phone calls and make some other connections for them because we got some information from them. But it's not my disaster, it's theirs. So I can, to help them the most, not be emotionally involved in it. They don't need me to be emotionally involved in it; they need me to be clear-headed. They need me to listen, take notes, make phone calls….

Hazel, a volunteer for over ten years, noted a similar situation, stating that crying was not an unusual response from volunteers and they need to release the tears. Hazel explained that volunteers who work in more direct services like Client Casework and Feeding need to have a "heavy armor on to hear all those stories and give all those hugs." Charley, a volunteer for three years, also remarked that having a sense of humor was key in coping; he noted that among his group, members often have a sarcastic wit that helps them detach and deal with emotional aspects of the work.

What are the Consequences of Volunteering?

Participants also discussed the consequences of volunteering, particularly the costs to them personally, whether financial, time, or relationship-wise. After outlining any costs, participants discussed the benefits of volunteering or what they get out of

volunteering. Finally, participants noted how volunteering has affected their lives and their sense of identity.

In terms of costs, participants often noted that they do not concern themselves with cost. Due to the fact that Red Cross pays for airfare and/or rental car to deploy people to disaster, participants noted that there really is not a financial cost to them. Participants did mention how volunteering can be a huge time cost, but Mitch, a volunteer for over ten years, explained that he doesn't consider it a real cost. He said, "I hesitate to call it a cost because I put in about 35-40 hours a week and I do it because I want to; so it's not a cost in that sense." Other participants noted that they experienced some stress from working in disaster and that it can be often be exhausting.

The benefits were much more notable by participants. Each participant discussed a positive feeling they got from volunteering. Gilbert, a volunteer for fifteen years, described the benefits as such "self-satisfaction, a feeling of helping, accomplishment, doing some good, giving back to the community." Others noted how seeing that they were making a difference was a great boost to them. A volunteer for over ten years, Mitch explained the benefits this way:

> People say, "Thank you for doing this." It's like we're some kind of…we're better than other people, or we do it out of the goodness of our own hearts, and I think to some extent that's true. That is why I started, but that's not what keeps me going. What keeps me doing it is all the appreciation that I get, and if I'm not appreciated then I don't go there anymore or I don't do that particular thing or I don't work with that particular person anymore. I figure I'm a volunteer, I want to get something out of it, too, and what I want to get out of it is a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

Similarly, Hazel, a volunteer for over ten years, explained how she enjoys the

adventure of it; she likes to travel and finds the unpredictability fun. A volunteer for over

eight years, Betsy also noted how volunteering helps to keep her busy and she explained:

> As you get old they say there are about five things you need to do to age successfully, and the Red Cross provides all of them. It gives you a social network. It gives you something that you can be passionately committed to. It has almost a spiritual aspect to it because of the strong humanitarian base. It certainly is intellectually challenging, and especially when you're an ERV driver it is physically demanding…. It's a win, win, win, it's the best thing that I could be doing, and I'll see people out there that are 83 years old still doing this stuff and that's what I want to be doing.

> Participants also were asked whether they were changed by their experiences.

Most noted how their experiences helped them to build confidence, be more

compassionate, and more independent. Participants also noted how volunteering has had

an effect on their sense of identity. A volunteer for over ten years, Mitch noted that "I'm

sure I will never stop volunteering, it has become a huge part of who I am." Similarly,

Betsy, volunteer for over eight years, stated how other people see her in this role and

have taken an interest in disaster because of their relationship. Betsy noted how her role

as disaster responder encouraged a relative to seek out becoming a volunteer with Red

Cross as well. Several participants mentioned that volunteering is a humbling experience

and that their experiences helped them to gain perspective on how others live.

Participants noted that they became more compassionate through volunteering. Grace, a

volunteer for fifteen years, stated that she was "more open to people's hurts" after

volunteering for so long with Red Cross. Continuing on, Grace said:

> You hear about something that's hundreds and hundreds of miles away and it doesn't affect you because you don't see it, but when you go out and see it and see the pain and see the disruption of peoples' lives…. In the blink of an eye your world can change….That is exactly what happened with these tornadoes, they

come in the blink of an eye and all at once you don't have a home or your home is all disrupted and you can't live there for 5-6 months, but it's not destroyed, it all happens in the blink of an eye. So…by the grace of God go I, so when I'm helping someone else I think it's only by God's grace that I, that this is not me. So I think it humbles you.

Participants felt very positive about their experiences in disaster. Participants discussed how those experiences helped them grow. Participants spoke of how they were able to become knowledgeable about issues they didn't know much about before. Lastly, participants noted that volunteering for disaster provided an opportunity to try things that they maybe hadn't done before. Carla, a volunteer for over ten years, explained that volunteering in disaster allowed her the opportunity to take on a leadership role for the first time in her life and she has enjoyed the responsibility.

DISCUSSION

Moran et al. (1992) outlined a lack of analysis of disaster volunteerism. As well, Baxter-Tomkins and Wallace (2006) noted that the activities and behaviors of disaster volunteers were largely under-researched. In fact, Baxter-Tomkins and Wallace (2006) recommended utilizing qualitative inquiry in order to better understand the experiences of a disaster volunteer. My research utilized a qualitative method of study, however much of the current literature was based on quantitative data and so the comparisons are somewhat limited.

My research helps to address these calls for research by examining how volunteer disaster responders with American Red Cross became interested in volunteering, what they have accomplished since the first time they volunteered for disaster work, what skills they believe they have gained from their work, their perceptions of the persons that

they help, and their overall satisfaction with the volunteer experience. This research

highlights the importance of who volunteers and why, but also addresses commitment to

the role and accomplishments.

<center>Who Volunteers?</center>

Previous literature explored rates of volunteering, examining demographic factors

and resources that encourage volunteerism (Wilson 2000). Participants in this study were

not chosen at random and so it is more difficult to confirm those findings. Data from the

Corporation for National and Community Service (2013) found that women volunteered

at a higher rate than men, 29.5 and 23.2 percent respectively. While more women were

interviewed in this study, this finding cannot be confirmed. The Corporation for National

and Community Service also found that middle-aged adults were most likely to

volunteer. Again this statistic is not confirmed in this study. The majority of respondents

in this study were older, with an average age of sixty-five. This study also does not

address any racial differences in rates of volunteering; all of the participants were

Caucasian. Level of education also was not necessarily a factor in choosing to volunteer,

participants in this study spanned a variety of education levels, but the average was some

post-graduate schooling. Wilson (2000) also highlighted how work and free time may be

used to predict rates of volunteering. Wilson (2000) found that hours worked was less

important than an individual's control over those hours, finding that those with more

flexible schedules were more likely to volunteer. The finding was confirmed in this

study. Several participants noted that their occupations, namely teaching, allowed them to

have summers off and so they had time for volunteering. This study also confirmed

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Wilson's (2000) point that family relations were a significant factor in volunteering. Many of the participants noted how they first got involved in volunteering for disaster and then their spouse joined as well or vice versa.

Why do People Volunteer?

This research aimed to understand some of the reasons that people chose to volunteer. Wilson (2000) noted that values and motives play an important role in choosing to volunteer, and so this study asked participants to identify their motives. This study confirmed most of the reasons identified by Clary et al. (1998). Participants identified humanitarian values as well as gaining new skills as their main motives. Smith (1982) argued that people would not devote time or money to a cause unless they received something in return, therefore conducting a cost-benefit analysis. Wilson (2000) highlights several examples: first, that volunteers choose something they personally have a stake in; second, that they anticipate needing help in the future; third, that they wish to enhance self-confidence; fourth, that they desire recognition; or lastly, that they are looking for social attachments. Participants in this study did not confirm these as motives for joining, and these motives assume that everyone is acting out of self-interest. While they may not be motives for volunteering, they may contribute to staying in a volunteer role. This was a confirmation of a study by Chambré (1987) who found that while people were motivated by altruism to take up a volunteer role, the motive of self-interestedness kept them in the volunteer role. This very thought was echoed by Mitch who spoke of how he began volunteering for the humanitarian aspect, but he continues because of the appreciation, the sense of accomplishment, and the recognition he receives for his work.

This research also confirmed previous literature by Tierney et al. (2001) and

Fernandez et al. (2006) who find that volunteerism increases at the time of disaster

impact and that people converge at the scene to offer assistance. Participants confirmed

that their initial call to action came from seeing news coverage of disaster. However,

rather than just going to the disaster area to help, participants went to the Red Cross to

offer their services and become trained in disaster services. Participants noted how people

just want to help in the face of a disaster, but that those people, while often well-meaning,

get in the way of the relief effort and are not needed at the initial phase. One participant

noted how large convergences of people at a disaster quickly overwhelm the available

resources and create a disaster after the disaster.

<div align="center">Commitment</div>

Participants in this study fit with the notion of *committed volunteers*, or routine

volunteers who do the year-round day-to-day work for their organization as discussed by

Allahyari (2000). Wilson (2000) considers commitment to volunteerism in two ways: "as

attachment to the volunteer role over time and as commitment to a particular organization

or task" (p. 230). Participants confirmed these notions of commitment, noting how they

enjoyed their role and also how they agreed with the mission and values of Red Cross and

it helped foster their commitment. In addition, the sense of camaraderie among the

various functions was pivotal in promoting commitment to Red Cross.

Allahyari (2000) notes the importance of these volunteers' "charitable labor"

because without it, the organizations would not be able to meet the demands of the people

they serve (p. 9). Participants in this study confirmed how important volunteers are to the

<div align="center">58</div>

disaster relief effort. Betsy stated that Red Cross is a volunteer organization, as she said

"without their volunteers, they've got nothing." Betsy also noted that Red Cross

continues to cut back on their overhead and so there are fewer employees meaning that

more work needs to be done by volunteers. In an unexpected finding, participants noted

the importance of mentoring with more experienced responders helped them prepare for

disaster work more so than some of the courses.

This research has also added to the sociological literature on volunteering.

Villagran et al. (2006) highlight that because organizations like the Red Cross rely so

heavily on volunteers, it is important to understand the values and experiences of

volunteers. Studying volunteers in this organization could help influence recruitment and

retention. Volunteers play a very pivotal role in emergency work worldwide (Moran et al.

1992). In fact, Baxter-Tomkins and Wallace (2006) estimate that permanent disaster

volunteers save governments and society, in general, millions of dollars each year. Since

disasters do not operate on a schedule, it is important to constantly assess the volunteer

force to ensure they are ready to respond. This research provided a unique opportunity to

work closely with Red Cross personnel to address the current situation and needs of their

volunteer force.

This research also addressed previous literature on disaster myths, that is, the

public perception of how people will behave in disaster, specifically how those affected

will behave. Disaster myths encompass ideas of panic, looting, and other selfish

behaviors. A study by Fischer (2008) focused on how accurately emergency management

directors understand behavioral response to disaster, finding the mean score to be 65

percent. This research did not distribute a survey to replicate Fischer's (2008) study. However, participants were asked how they perceive the typical behaviors. Participants shared a variety of reactions, mainly shock and sadness, but did not mention selfish behaviors committed by those affected by disaster. Participants touched on how they often see neighbors helping neighbors, mainly in smaller communities.

This study also confirmed findings by Raphael (1986) and Moran and Britton (1994) that continued experiences with emergency situations or disasters helped to equip workers with an ability to resist the effects of exposure to traumatic events. Participants in this study confirmed that they are able to detach from the situation, and several participants noted how the best way they can help survivors is to not become emotionally involved because it is not their disaster. Participants shared that this emotional distance is rather easy because they rarely see the same people while deployed on disaster. One participant noted that she had only one experience where she was assigned to the same area to deliver meals twice a day for three weeks. In this instance she did form a connection with the families being served and she shared how it was difficult for her, but she had to remember that she was there to assist and so the best way she could help was to maintain her distance and provide them with referrals to get their lives back on track. This also confirms Lois's (2003) findings from her study of search and rescue volunteers who managed their emotions and the emotions of others in the course of search and rescue operations. This study also corroborated Moran, Britton, and Correy's (1992) findings that participants would use talking and humor as a way of coping in the face of

disaster. Having a sense of humor helped with the ability to focus on the task at hand. Participants noted how humor played a large role in coping among certain groups.

Consequences of Volunteering

This study did confirm some of the positive consequences as highlighted by Wilson (2000). However, this study did not find a connection between volunteering and political participation. This study did confirm that there is a positive effect on physical and mental health, this may be due in part to the notion that volunteering tends to boost self-esteem and increase life satisfaction (Wilson 2000; Harlow and Cantor 1996). Nearly all of the participants in this study noted how their experiences helped to build self-confidence and had a positive effect on their sense of efficacy. Participants also noted how volunteering has become part of their identity. In addition, participants explained how their role as a volunteer encouraged others to seek out volunteering as well. This was a somewhat unexpected finding, but it was fairly common. Participants spoke of how they began volunteering and their spouse joined later or vice versa.

This research also confirmed Allahyari's (2000) finding that volunteering enhances personal growth. Participants in this study did report that they experienced personal growth from their involvement with Red Cross. Participants spoke of how their experiences helped them to gain perspective of how others live and how they became more compassionate through their volunteering. As Grace noted, that she was "more open to people's hurts" after her experiences volunteering with Red Cross.

Despite the study's limitations, this research attempted to address the lack of analysis of disaster responders. Additionally it aimed to examine their experiences and

accomplishments. In addition to adding to the literature on disaster volunteers, this research utilized qualitative inquiry whereas much of the current research is quantitative in nature. Qualitative inquiry allowed for more detailed responses from participants and allowed them to share specifics about their work in disaster relief, in order to provide a better understanding of this volunteer role.

Limitations

While this study adds to the literature on volunteer experiences through qualitative analysis, it does not have the benefit of generalizability in the broadest sense, which Fine, Morrill, and Surianarain (2008) posit is an "'enumerative' generalizability; that is, the ability of a finding to represent some social process or state in a larger population from which a random sample was drawn" (p. 613). Due to the fact that my study was not a random sample, it is not generalizable in this sense. However, Fine et al. (2008) expand the relationship between ethnography and generalizability in three ways. They argue that qualitative findings can be used in meta-analyses "to translate findings across contexts," can contribute to coming up with new concepts and theoretical interpretations, and can be generalized by readers to their own experiences (p. 613). In my study, the findings met all three of these types of generalizability.

Because participants were recruited through a non-probability method of purposive sampling, my results were not representative of any specific functions, like Client Casework, or of Red Cross disaster responders in general. Additionally, since I drew a small sample of only ten participants from the same geographic region, my study is not able to draw any conclusions based on regional differences. However, I feel that

this limitation does not hinder the study overall. This was an exploratory study and the in-depth interviews allowed participants to share stories and convey meaning much better than a survey or questionnaire would have done.

<center>Suggestions for Future Research</center>

Additional research will help to provide a picture of the career of a volunteer, both the objective and subjective careers. Wilson (2000) highlights that there has been little longitudinal analysis of volunteering, so further research could be undertaken to examine the process volunteers go through as they move in and out of their "career." In addition, research could examine how volunteering affects sense of identity and how that might contrast with volunteers' professional lives.

Further research on volunteer disaster responders at each level within the disaster services framework would provide more clarity and be more representative of this population of volunteers. Additional research could examine whether their experiences differ between a hurricane and a flood, etc. In addition, research could also look at the division of labor on a disaster operation and how the scale of the response differs based on the type of disaster. Lastly, future research could investigate disaster responders who decide to stop volunteering along with those who stay to determine what factors affect longevity.

CHAPTER II

NOTES ON POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Disasters are certainly not a new phenomenon. In fact, Brunsma and Picou (2008) note that human communities have always been plagued by disaster and crises. However, in the last decade or so, it would seem that disasters are increasing in frequency and intensity. This is due in part to an increased "consciousness of catastrophe," as noted by Brunsma and Picou (2008), meaning that more global attention is being given to mass destruction than in decades prior. Brunsma and Picou (2008), however, also report that numbers of natural and technological disasters have increased considerably over the past few decades.

In the United States alone, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, reported over four hundred major disaster declarations during the Bush administration, from 2000-2007. During the more recent administration, FEMA has recorded similarly high figures for major disaster declarations from 2008-2013. Since FEMA began recording the numbers of major disaster declarations there has been an upward trend in disasters. See figure 1 (below) for more detail on disaster declarations from 1953 to 2013.[3]

Figure 1: Major Disaster Declarations 1953-2013

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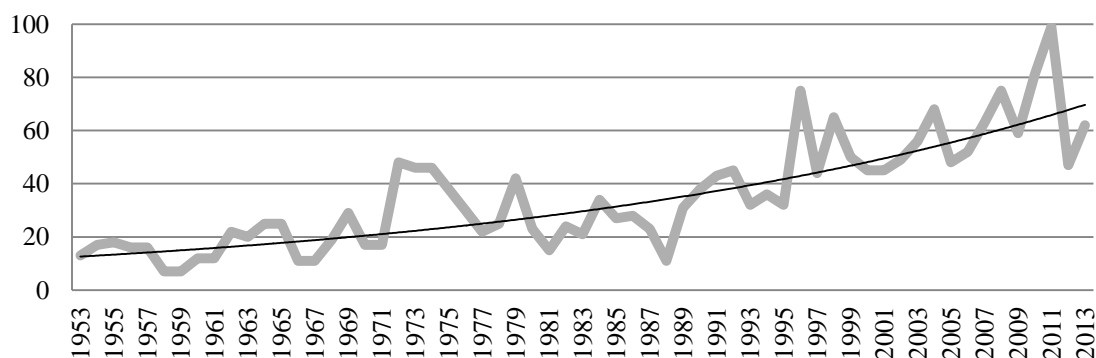
[3] Figure 1 created from data collected from FEMA (2014).

As disasters increase in frequency, so does the cost of responses. According to

FEMA, between 1990 to 1999, $27 billion was spent on disaster relief and recovery,

which is 50 times more than the figures from 1950-1959. More recently, a report from the

Center for American Progress (2013) stated that an astounding $136 billion was spent

Figure 2: American Red Cross Disaster Services Spending
FY13
(in millions)
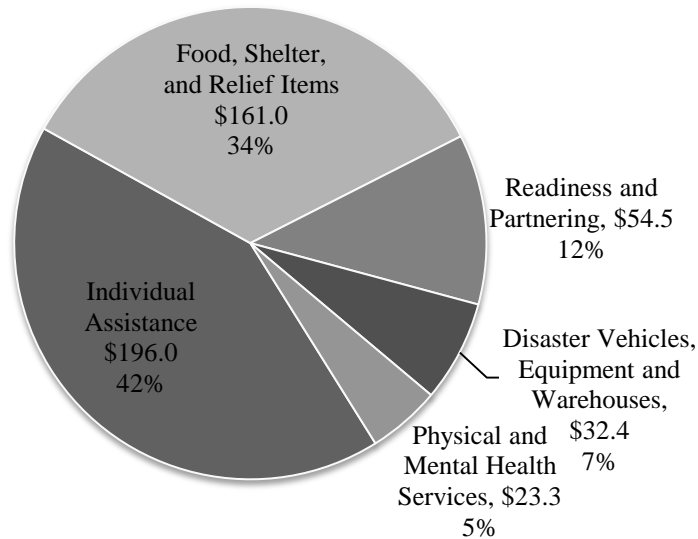
between 2011 and 2013 alone (Weiss and Weidman 2013). In fact, on average, disasters

cost the U.S. $80 billion each year. The American Red Cross, using donated dollars,

spent $467.2 million in fiscal year 2013 providing disaster services. See figure 2 (above)

for more information on the breakdown of services provided by Red Cross.[4]

There is certainly a monetary cost, but there is also a human cost. American Red

Cross provides assistance through funding and supplies, and they also deploy a large

number of people to respond to disasters, mostly volunteers. According to American Red

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[4] This figure was created using data collected from American Red Cross (2013a).

Cross (2013b), they deployed 35,000 disaster relief workers, opened 916 shelters, provided 19.6 million meals, and distributed 7.8 million relief items during large-scale disaster relief operations taking place in fiscal year 2013, from July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013.

Since Red Cross plays such a pivotal role in providing emergency assistance in the wake of disasters, it is important to examine the sustainability of the organization. It will certainly continue to fundraise more than most other non-profits because of its positive reputation and brand recognition. Red Cross, as an organization, took some hits after its responses to Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy, mainly because assistance wasn't provided in a timely manner and a slew of other issues. However, Red Cross is very proactive with their reputation and crisis management. Concurrently, if the volunteer force is to be relied on as it is currently, examining how they are recruiting and managing volunteers is paramount. I would encourage Red Cross to examine rates of attrition. For example, Red Cross could survey volunteers who ended their involvement in order to determine what the organization could do better, if anything.

Being that this research employed nonprobability sampling and had a very small sample size, the participants were certainly not representative of all Red Cross volunteers. However, a large numbers of volunteers are retired and part of the Baby Boomer generation. So understanding how Red Cross is reaching out to younger generations to recruit volunteers could be important for the future of disaster relief operations.

Additionally, there is a continual restructuring going on within the Red Cross. They are constantly trying to shrink their overhead to try to maximize donor dollars. This

means that whereas Red Cross used to be more based on small chapters, they are focusing

more on regional chapters and reducing staff. Participants in this study highlighted how

this restructuring has made them question their place in the organization. Red Cross has

had a problem of communication in the past, hopefully they will continue to work on it

and keep working on engaging and maintaining volunteers. Findings from this study

suggest that volunteers are committed to the mission of Red Cross and that commitment

is affected by the training they receive as well as the interactions with other responders.

Participants noted that they prepare for disaster mostly through mentoring with other

disaster responders and so I would encourage Red Cross to institute some kind of

mentoring in order to keep volunteers engaged and to help prepare them for the work.

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INTERVIEW GUIDE

Demographics
1. What is your age?
2. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
3. What is your marital status?
4. What is your occupation? Or what was your occupation, if retired?
5. Do you have children? Do they live at home?
6. How many disasters have you responded to?
7. What is your primary function when deployed to a disaster?

Why do people volunteer?
1. Could you tell me the story of how you became involved in disaster relief work?
    a. What led to your initial interest in volunteering for disaster relief?
        i. was it a key person?
        ii. family?
        iii. a past experience with disaster?
        iv. school or work assignment?
    b. Were you asked to volunteer or did you seek out this work?
    c. How long have you been a disaster responder with the American Red Cross?
    d. Have you volunteered for other organizations that provide disaster relief? If so, which ones?
    e. Did you ever take a break from volunteering for disaster relief, or would you say you have been an active volunteer from the start?
2. How would you describe the kind of person who volunteers for disaster relief?

3. Could you tell me about some of the reasons you chose to volunteer?
    a. values – altruism or humanitarianism?
    b. to learn skills?
    c. to grow and develop better understanding?
    d. gaining career-related experience?
    e. strengthening social relationships?
    f. to escape personal problems, or reduce negative feelings (i.e., guilt)?

4. What would you say were some of the skills you brought to your volunteer role?
    a. What skills have you gained in doing disaster work?
    b. What have been some of your accomplishments?

What affects volunteers' commitment to the role?
1. Do you feel that your training in disaster services courses prepared you for disaster relief work?
    a. Do you participate in drills prior to and in-between disaster response operations?
        i. Do you feel that they prepare you well for an actual response?

2. How are your efforts appreciated by the organization?
    a. Could you provide an example?

3. How are your efforts appreciated by the communities and individuals affected by disaster?
    a. Could you provide an example?

4. How would you describe your interactions with other disaster responders?
    a. Is there a sense of camaraderie?
    b. Are there any instances where interactions between disaster responders are strained or difficult?

5. What would you say are some of the typical behaviors you see in disasters? By survivors, community members, or even emergency responders?
    a. Could you provide an example?
        PROBES:
        i. panic
        ii. looting
        iii. chaos
        iv. rational behavior – organized and purposeful
        v. altruism – neighbors helping neighbors
    b. Do you think there are misconceptions about how people behave in disaster that proliferate by the general public or in the media?

6. How would you say you cope with tragic events in the course of doing disaster work?
    a. Do you share your experiences in disaster with friends or family?
        i. If so, what do you typically share?
        ii. Would you say the stories are mainly positive or negative?
        iii. Could you provide an example?

7. What would you say are some of the costs of volunteering?
    a. Could you provide an example?
        PROBES:
        i. Time?
        ii. Relationships?
        iii. Money?

Consequences of volunteering
1. What would you say you get out of volunteering in this type of work?
    a. Do you think that your volunteer experience has changed you?
    b. Do you feel like your volunteer experience has made you a better person?
    c. Has it affected your political participation?
    d. Has it affected your self-esteem or self-confidence?
    e. Has it provided you with professional benefits (i.e., helped you to get paid work)?

Conclusions
1. Is there anything else you would like to add that will help me understand the experiences of disaster relief workers?

APPENDIX B

GROUP/ACTIVITY/POSITION (GAP) CHART

Individual Client Services	Mass Care	External Relations	Information & Planning	Logistics	Staff Services	Disaster Services Technology
Client Casework	Sheltering	Government Operations	Disaster Assessment	Facilities	Local Community Volunteers	Computer Operations
Recovery Planning & Assistance	Feeding	Community Partnerships	Information Dissemination	In-Kind Donations	Staff Planning & Support	Communications
Disaster Health Services	Bulk Distribution	Public Affairs	Financial & Statistical Information	Warehousing	Staff Relations	Networking
Disaster Mental Health	Safe & Well Linking	Fund Raising	Finance	Transportation	Staff Wellness	Computer Service
				Life, Safety, & Asset Protection	Training	
				Procurement		
				Supply		

Position			
Service Associate	Supervisor	Manager	Chief

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