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SITUATIONAL ALTRUISM: TOWARD AN
EXPLANATION OF PATHOLOGIES IN
DISASTER ASSISTANCE

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INTRODUCTION

Case studies of emergency response in disasters suggest that certain problems recur, regardless of location or timing. Among these recurrent problems are instances of too much assistance and/or the wrong kind of assistance. Too, that assistance is often delivered in inefficient and ineffective ways. Massive human and material resources produce convergence and lack of coordination. Among helping organizations, there is overlap as well as gaps in service. Questions of equity in assistance are raised as well as the possibility of exploitation of victims while concern is expressed to avoid victim dependance. Efficient assistance is impeded by bureaucratic norms which lead to confusion and frustration. Bureaucratic organizations are seen as uncaring while caring organizations lack standards. While these issues are well known, they are often seen as quite solvable. For some, they indicate the necessity of preplanning. For others, they require the imposition of strong leadership. A less sanguine view is taken here in that these problems cannot be easily solved since they are part and parcel of the solution to disaster assistance which has emerged in industrial societies. The point of view here is that situational altruism produces a massive response of human and material resources to cope effectively with disaster. That response is, in many ways, very inefficient.

Understanding that process of situational altruism provides basis for evaluating misplaced policy solutions as well as a basis for understanding how the process works as well as it does.

ON THE SOCIOLOGICAL TREATMENT OF ALTRUISM

One way to conceptualize the emergency response after a disaster is to see it as an "outbreak" of situational altruistic behavior. Such outbreaks are both predictable and unusual--predictable in that such outbreaks occur after sudden onset-diffuse disasters and unusual in that this behavior is conventionally seen as being out of the ordinary.[1] In placing the emergency response in the context of the generation of altruistic behavior, there has been limited attention given to the conditions generating altruism within sociological theory. Among major sociological theorists, only Sorokin, and perhaps Comte, gave attention to altruism. Sorokin's long career culminated in the creation of a Center in Altruistic Integration and Creativity and, during this phase, he produced several books, including The Reconstruction of Humanity (1981), and he published several studies on "good neighbors" and Christian saints. This empirical work was only one part of his more encompassing conceptualization of altruism. He argued that altruism should be considered simultaneously at the cultural, social and personal level. It is in that context that a

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distinction is drawn here between three different types of altruism--individual, collective and situational.

Individual altruism involve actions by persons who give time, money and energy to "good" causes. Good causes, of course, are culturally defined but there is the notion that individuals exhibiting altruistic behavior derive a minimum of ego satisfaction--that is, it is selfless behavior. The common definitional opposite is egoism. It is in that context that Sorokin studied good neighbors and Christian saints. Such actions are still culturally valued as in the recent designation in the U.S. of persons who are a "thousand points of light."

Aside from individual altruism, in contemporary industrial societies, most altruism is routinized and institutionalized in what has come to be known as the "welfare state." This means that recurrent helping needs have been collectively identified and, as a result of public policy, structures have been initiated to deal with the situations. These processes of identification and institutionalization comprises the social history of nation states. And at the core of continuing political discussion within these states is the appropriate division of responsibility between collective and individual altruism. At any particular point in time, we can assume a loose coupling between the social definition of when helping behavior is appropriate to particular social categories and the ability of institutions to deliver such assistance.

Between individual and collective altruism, thee is a third category called here situational altruism. This emergence in situations when "new" victims have been created and there is doubt that the existing institutional resources can deal with their needs. Thus, it is a situation in which individual altruism needs to be enhanced and the institutions traditionally involved in helping activities need to be supplemented. Since these needs are newly created, the helping activity will not follow strictly previous institutionalized patterns. Traditional roles are expanded. New roles are created. Organizations are transformed. New actors, both individual and collective, assume new responsibilities for providing assistance. There are also shifts in value priorities. The changes which create situational altruism are rather rapid and are often experienced by the participants as chaotic and confusing. Because these changes are not institutionalized, they are often seen as departures from previous norms and only aberrations. It will be argued here that situational altruism in the emergency period is patterned and important.

FACTORS LEADING TO THE EMERGENCE OF SITUATIONAL ALTRUISM

Accounting for the emergence of structural altruism in the emergency period, most useful is a theoretical perspective of collective behavior combined with organizational theory. such an integrative potential can be found in emergent norm theory, most closely identified with Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian (1987). (See also Weller, J. and E. L. Quarantelli, 1973; K. J. Tierney, 1980. For more specific application to disaster conditions, see Dynes, R. R. and E. L. Quarantelli, 1968.) This theoretical orientation looks at the effects of an event which is sufficiently outside the ordinary so that persons look to others in interpreting (definition of the situation) and responding to the situation with appropriate behavior (emergent norms). These emergent norms lead to new and/or modified social relationships and structure (emergent structures). These changes are rather short-lived. While the subsequent discussion is analytically divided into the three categories, they occur simultaneously, not necessarily sequentially.

1. Changes in the Definition of the Situation. As a starting point, a disaster in the conventional wisdom is a situation where a number of victims have been created and it is anticipated that increase in victims outstrips the helping resources available. Most of the effects on victims are within the scope of traditional cultural responsibility, and require some form of collective response.

Comprehending a disaster is complex, only tangentially related to one's own personal experience. For some in the impacted areas, the initiation of a change in the definition of the situation may come from a physical clue-sudden noise, incessant rains, high winds, earth tremors. On the other hand, for most, information comes from other people or from radio or TV which indicates that something bad has happened. In industrial societies, disaster experience is increasingly mediated through the media, which serves as the basic information for further conversations. People carry into those conversations images of past disasters in coming to terms with what must have happened.

Media consumers approach a disaster story with the expectations of dramatic community change, in part generated by classic disaster movie scenarios and the nightly diet of disaster news. These images, usually visual, reinforce a number of cultural myths of disaster which emphasize overwhelming tragedy, victim helplessness, the emergency of anti-social behavior and the wide spread destruction of daily amenities. These beliefs about such consequences are widespread not only in public opinion but also among those who have "official" responsibilities during the emergency. (See Quarantelli, E. L. and R. R. Dynes, 1973; Wenger, D. E., et al., 1975).

These anticipations are reinforced by the nature and format of media reporting. In visual media, camera angles chosen by producers to reflect damage, often convey what has been called the Dresden syndrome—that everything has been destroyed. The lack of precision about the location of the picture allows it to be generalized to a much wider area. An earthquake damage "shot" in Los Angeles can easily be broadened by far away relatives to imply extensive damage from San Diego to the suburbs of San Francisco. Too, the conventional media interview format emphasizes both damage and personal trauma.

It is important to understand media coverage, not in terms of providing "accurate" information but in terms of transmitting symbols which encourage altruistic behavior. Invariably the media gives attention to stories of anti-social behavior—looting, profiteering and exploitation. There is little empirical support for the fact that there are significant increases in such behaviors during the emergency period. In fact, the evidence suggests that the rates of pathological and exploitative behavior are considerably lower during the emergency period when compared with their preimpact incidence. But the persistence of such accounts in the fact of little evidence suggest that such stories are best seen as moral myths encouraging altruistic behavior. They constitute moral tales which warn against such behavior, rather than factual evidence about incidence. In this context, they are obviously grim fairy tales. When evidence is presented that these fears have not been realized, the warnings are judged to have been effective prevention.

Another media theme which quickly becomes evident is the focus on heroic actions, which symbolize the necessity of action in the fact of overwhelming odds. The media's coverage is presented in terms of the difficulties which the media itself have in doing its part.

The reality which is socially constructed confirms that "something" bad has happened; that many undeserving people are now victims; that these victims need, and more importantly, deserve help and that help is not likely to come from the local community since helping institutions and their capacity to deal with problems has been damaged.

While it is easy in retrospect to discount media symbolism as inaccurate, one should not underestimate the degree to which emergency management organizations themselves depend on the mass media for information. Even if such organizations develop a more accurate view which contradict the media view, by their corrections, officials run the risk of being charged as incompetent and insensitive. Thus, official statements to the media are usually qualified by "it probably will be worse." Too, officials often feel that their own knowledge is confined to their limited responsibility and that the media provides a more inclusive view.

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The net impression is that the situation itself is one in which altruistic behavior is not only appropriate but essential. The victims are themselves blameless and that extraordinary effort on the part of others, both individuals and organizations, is necessary.

While primary attention has been given here to the impact of the media in defining the situations, that focus slights the reinforcing/confirming process which occurs within the context of personal interaction-family and neighborhood conversations, work related exchanges and the content of meetings by religious, ethnic and other voluntary organizations. These informal exchanges mirror the perceptions from the media confirming the dramatic changes in fortunes which have occurred in the impacted area. They also recall personal and kin ties with potentially affected persons in the impacted area. They also evoke memories of the area as well as recalling other experiences, related to disaster events. Consequently, this change in the definition of the situation prompts a wide variety of actions by individuals as well as provides initiative for a variety of collective actions. Depending on proximity and speed of mobilization, some of the action has immediate consequences within the impact area.

2. Changes in normative patterns. Concommitment with the changes in the definition of the situation are, of course, normative changes. If one conceptualizes the preimpact community as a social system acting in a collective fashion to solve persistent problems, that system in its daily activity is directed toward many different values, some of them conflicting and competitive. Issues of value priority are seldom raised directly or dramatically. When those issues are raised, they can be resolved by the slow pace of the political process. However, the perception of the dramatic increase in victims implicitly raises the necessity of choice and/or prioritization in the collective allocation of effort. A number of observers have identified the development of an "emergency consensus" (see Yutzy, 1970; Dynes, 1972). At the top of the priorities are core values which center on care for "victims." Values which support these core activities are given high priority, for example, maintaining medical care facilities while other activities are devalued, for example, maintaining the spring garden show. In fact, certain traditional activities are suspended during the emergency period, especially those that seem to be a diversion from the seriousness of the situation. In fact, quite important activities in consistent with the new priorities may be canceled, as was evidenced in the U.S. in the postponement of the 1989 World Series in the context of the Loma Prieta earthquake and the ensuing public discussion of when to restart the Series since that action would symbolically end the emergency period.

That important norms can change almost instantaneously in the new situation can be illustrated by the following discussion of property rights.

> In effect, property is a shared understanding about who can do what with the valued resources within a community. Normally, these understandings or expectations are widely shared and accepted. There are all kinds of norms, the legal ones in particular, which specify the legitimate forms of use, control, and disposal of economically valued resources within a community. It is these expectations which change in both kinds of community emergencies we are talking about.
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> In natural disasters, in American society at least, there quickly develops a consensus that all private property rights are temporarily suspended for the common good. In one way, all goods become "community property" and can be used as needed for the general welfare. Thus, warehouses can be broken into without the owner's permission to obtain generators necessary to keep hospitals functioning, and the act is seen as legitimate if undertaken for this purpose even though in a strict sense the participants might agree that it was technically an act of burglary. However, the parties involved, the local legal authorities and the general public in the area at the time of the emergency do not define such actions as looting and would react very negatively to attempts to impose such a definition. (Quarantelli, E. L. and R. R. Dynes, 1969:285)

3. <u>Changes in social structure</u>. During the emergency period, "unexpected" altruistic behavior has a number of important consequences. These consequences have never been identified systematically, in part because such mapping would require a stand-by multilevel research design which currently is beyond the capacity of existing resources. However, there exists enough evidence, cumulated from different studies, to identify the extent and importance of social structural changes.

A. **Creation of ephemeral roles.** Barton (1969) suggested the term "mass assault" to describe the initial collective response in the emergency period. The assault metaphor points to the fact that many individuals and organizations enter the emergency social system. For example, following a 1979 Wichita Falls, Texas tornado, Drabek, et al. (1981:97) projected that over 5,000 individuals needed immediate help.

> While emergency organizations mobilized even before the funnel's deadly dance had ended, only 13% of our victim sample indicated that they had been rescued by someone they recognized--usually by uniform--as being associated

with an emergency organization. The others were assisted
by average citizens, many of whom were themselves
victims. Nearly three-fifths (59%) of all uninjured
victims we interviewed rendered aid to someone else
within minutes after the tornado passed. Projecting this
to the estimated population at risk (21,000), it is
possible that upwards of 10,000 individuals may have been
helping to search through the rubble that minutes earlier
had been their neighborhoods.

That number constitutes about ten percent of the resident
population. In our own study of the 1985 Mexico City earthquake,
based on a random sample of the population, we found that about ten
percent of that population had engaged in volunteer activity
directly related to the earthquake, an event which affected only
two percent of the housing stock (Dynes, R. R., E. L. Quarantelli,
D. Wenger, 1990). Over half of these volunteers worked four days
or longer and nearly 18 percent worked ten days or more. Those
contributed work days were not conventional ones, since 45 percent
worked at least nine hours and 22 percent indicated they worked an
average of 17 hours a day. Projecting these volunteers to the
total Mexico City population, we would estimate that over two
million volunteers were involved.

In a different context, after the Loma Prieta earthquake, a
survey conducted by O'Brien and Mileti (1993) with a representative
sample of residents in Santa Cruz and San Francisco counties found
that a large majority of residents in both counties--70% in Santa
Cruz and 60% in San Francisco County--participated in some type of
emergency response activity following the earthquake. Among the
most widely reported activities were providing food and water to
others (35% in Santa Cruz, 14% in San Francisco); helping with
clean-up and debris removal (44% in Santa Cruz, 11% in San
Francisco); providing shelter to others (18% in Santa Cruz, 12% in
San Francisco); and providing counseling to victims (17% in Santa
Cruz, 8% in San Francisco). Three percent of San Francisco
respondents and about 5% of Santa Cruz respondents reported
engaging in emergency search and rescue activities. Although these
percentages seem small, when extrapolated to the entire population
of those counties, they add up to more than 31,000 search and
rescue volunteers. Clearly, the response by the public was massive
following Loma Prieta, and a large share of the assistance that was
provided to victims was given through informal roles.

The dynamics of involvement in such volunteer activity is
described in Zurcher's (1968) analysis of a debris clearance craw
in the immediate aftermath of extensive tornado damage. In this
instance, there was an accidental quality to the merging of 10
persons who wanted to do "something." With few social ties prior
to the tornado, they worked together for three days, until they
disbanded. Such helping groups are quickly created and quickly
fade away when the "necessary" tasks are completed.

B. The activation of kin relationships. Part of the initial convergence on a disaster impact area come from attempts to establish telephone contact to determine the health of the "victims." While the impact area might be quite small, the inquiry area is much larger. The volume of calls can paralyze local telephone systems to the dismay of emergency managers, but such inquiries are only a small part of the involvement of relatives. In a study done by NORC (1954), 52 percent of the families in an area affected by a major tornado had out of town relatives and friends visit them within the first two weeks of impact. These visitors brought assistance, both in terms of immediate needs but also in terms of other material and financial assistance.

C. Expansion of organizational capacity. Situational altruism mediate through individual actions, represent only a small part of the total picture. Contrary to perception that local organizations are incapacitated, the major expression of situational altruism comes through rather conventional organizational means.   These organizations, many of which have emergency responsibility as a part of their mission, have a number of adaptive strategies which increase their capacity to provide assistance.

   1. Increased capacity by extending work hours and by double shifting. Organizations that expect to become involved in emergencies develop techniques to mobilize quickly, either by self-reporting or by notification. When these techniques are utilized, the nature of the disaster event as well as the scope of organizational tasks are very unclear.   This leads to the enhancement of organizational capability, at times doubling capacity.

   2. Increased capacity by utilization of volunteers. Some organizations anticipate expansion through the addition of volunteers. For example, many Red Cross shelter operations are dependent on both space and personnel from school systems. Because of this intent, these organizations also become the focus for unanticipated volunteers. In addition, in many shelter operations, the bulk of the effort and responsibility for the operation of the shelter is assumed by the "evacuees" or the victims themselves.

   3. Unanticipated involvement of "new" organizations in the emergency social system.   At times, organizations with no preplanned disaster role may divert its resources away from its usual activities and assume emergency tasks.   In particular instances, these resources can be extensive. As an example, PEMEX, the national petroleum company in Mexico, utilized its headquarters staff in a variety of disaster related activities in the emergency period of the 1985 Mexico City earthquake. Its personnel were involved in search and rescue at 24 sites, including two of the most heavily damaged hospitals. It managed two major shelters, through its Union of Petroleum Workers. Food and materials were provided by PEMEX and the staffing of the shelters was handled by

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the union. It was estimated that over 5,000 personnel were involved, including architects, doctors, construction supervisors, security personnel and distribution workers PEMEX moved into these areas because its personnel felt there was a need which matched their motivation to help.

4. The emergence of new social networks to deal with new problems. Another feature of the emergency period is the emergence of new social networks, often coordinating major activities which have little significance in the preimpact community. While initial search and rescue is often spontaneous, a more organized effort to recheck the initial search usually emerges. In high casualty situations, coordinating groups may also emerge. In most instances, overall coordinating networks may operate during the entire emergency period.

Taylor (1976) has described the evolution of an emergent mental health network in the immediate aftermath of a tornado in Xenia. While some established agencies continued to deliver conventional mental health services, some emergent groups focused less on potential pathologies than with acting as "advocates" for disaster victims who were not served by established agencies. One such group was the Xenia Area Interfaith Council. This emerged from the ecumenical effort of Xenia clergy which developed an outreach program for victims. Pulling together some 175 volunteers, ninety percent who were not in mental health occupations, these persons served over 3,000 persons with about 800 families who received visits from the advocates. The organization, in addition to agency referrals, food, clothing, furniture and other services, provided cash grants totaling over $500,000 which were made directly to disaster victims. This activity has no predisaster existence.

D. **The activation of extra-community assistance.** In most industrial societies, local organizations are most frequently linked to regional and national networks or to national industry associations. In some instances, the involvement of local organization is prompted by the expectation of organizational directions from outside the community. Offers of assistance from outside the community may prompt local branches to become involved.

All of these manifestations of situational altruism--the creation of ephemeral roles, the activation of kin relationships, the increase in organizational capacity and the activation of extra-community ties--create the expansion of the human and material resources available to deal with the problems created by disaster impact.

THE PROBLEMATIC ASPECTS OF SITUATIONAL ALTRUISM

It was suggested earlier that situational altruism emerged based on the changed perception that victims had been created and that helping resources were inadequate to deal with the increase. There are a number of problems with those changed perceptions. First, "victimization" is illustrated and symbolized by individual needs, centering on notions that survival, both personal and collective, is threatened. The threat then is cast in terms of "rescuing" individuals, providing for their basic needs of medical help, food, clothing and shelter. Those needs are assumed to be problematic for all of the victims. The perception of the reduction of helping resources is often portrayed by damage to a hospital or to utility systems or to freeway overpasses but with little information as to the continuity of available and operational resources. While there is no easy determination of what is "expected" damage, some approximation of the relationship between resources and personal victimization can be illustrated. In the 1985 Loma Prieta earthquake, 62 persons were killed and 1,100 persons visited emergency rooms with earthquake related injuries. Of this number, 73 percent were treated and released. Damage to one hospital required evacuation. This impact can be compared with the number of "survivors" in the six county affected area which would approximate 4,219,131. Of those survivors, it is unlikely that 10 percent did become involved in search and rescue since 42 of the deaths occurred in one location. Within that six county area, there were 64 hospitals with a normal bed capacity of 14,808 as well as 35 ambulance companies. Examining the case loads of the hospitals the night of the earthquake, less than half the visits were earthquake related. Tierney says (1992:302) "...although a number of operational problems were encountered, the capacity of the region's health care system was more than sufficient to handle the demand."

The point to be emphasized is that, in industrial societies, the normal resources which are enhanced through situational altruism in the emergency period are more than sufficient to deal with the consequences created by common disaster agents. That effectiveness, however, is hampered by certain problematic aspects produced by situational altruism. It is to those aspects we now turn.

VICTIM NEEDS AND VICTIMIZATION

Since the changed perception is cast primarily in terms of survival needs, there is strong encouragement for those outside the community to provide "needed" resources. However, most of that assistance will be irrelevant. Medical needs, of course, are given immediate attention by the local emergency medical system. Those within the local community will develop a more realistic knowledge of the actual effect of impact and the status of local resources.

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This means that both search and rescue and prompt medical attention are handled within the context of local resources. By the time that either personnel or supplies arrive from outside the community, the necessary medical helping roles have already been filled.

In addition to the perception of "unmet" medical needs, there is also the perception of the lack of basic necessities, such as food, shelter and clothing.[2] No conventional disaster agent has the unique capacity to destroy food and clothing stocks. Even with extensive housing loss, existing food and clothing stock are usually salvageable. Even with diffuse damage, most food stores and warehouses remain. Although there can be considerable inconvenience and isolated shortages, food is available. The same holds true for clothing. Although sartorial expectations during the emergency period are lowered from predisaster standards, clothing contributions always become problematic. Overcoats are seldom useful in tropical climates and outdated teenage fashions in one household are usually outdated elsewhere. Clothing that nobody wants, nobody wants. The handling, storing and developing a meaningful distribution systems again require allocation of personnel to these low priority tasks. Of course, regardless of need, it is quite possible to find persons to accept free food and clothing. More critically, the contributions of food and clothing undercuts the economic recovery of local merchants already affected by business disruption. These merchants can suffer a double disaster--first from initial damage and then from competition from "dumped" goods.

The donation of "survival" goods is impossible to control since decisions to donate are also being made outside the impacted community by many different individuals and organizations. Suggestions by local emergency organizations that such donations might not be necessary is seen by the motivated donor as indicative of either traumatic denial or bureaucratic insensitivity. The widespread availability of such help has two significant consequences. First, it increases the number of victims from the disaster and, second, it perpetuates the length of dependency of victims.

The widespread availability of various types of contributed resources and the need to distribute them in some fashion expands the notion of who is a disaster victim. Since donations were intended for victim use, anyone accepting them becomes a victim, even though initially most persons in the impacted area will not consider themselves victimized. On the other hand, the availability of donations intended for victims and the necessity for organizations to get rid of the donations allows the definition of who is a victim to expand to anyone who wants and is given something. Such a extensive distribution system confers victim status. However, assistance at some later point may be conditional

of proof of "real" damage so newly sanctioned victims may find that they are no longer accorded that status. This reduction to nonvictim status usually evokes hostility toward those sources which now require qualifications. Of course, the major sources of unqualified giving will have left the disaster scene by this time, pleased with their altruistic efforts.

In addition to increasing the scope of victimization, situational altruism also creates victim dependency. In order to become a helper, one needs someone to be helped. Such reciprocity is seen in the development of ephemeral roles in search and rescue. If one finds a victim, even accidentally, a helping role relationship easily develops. So in situations where there are more helpers than victims, there is the need to create more victims and to continue to keep the victims in that status in order to continue to justify the helping effort. This means that instead of programmatic efforts to develop self reliance and independence during the recovery process, there are considerable organizational pressures to keep victims in a dependent status in order to justify the continuation of helping activity.

Instead of fitting the assistance to the victims, structural altruism has the effect of increasing the number of victims to fit the available assistance. In order to maintain that balance, there is a tendency to maintain victim dependency for as long as help is available. This, of course, has importance implications for recovery.

DIFFICULTIES IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

While situational altruism provides the necessary resources to create an effective response, it also produces certain complications for the nature of the response. In the early stages of the emergency period when the nature of the problems created by disaster impact in unclear, the motivation to help leads to over mobilization and convergence of communication, personnel and material resources. The increasing complexity of the response creates problems for conventional emergency organizations in maintaining their autonomy. Too, the rapid expansion of the helping capacity and the shortage of victims often leads to competition among organizations for helping credit. The openness of participation in the emergency response can lead to self interested involvement. And the increased complexity of response heightens the need for coordination. Each of these consequences will be discussed further.

Convergence. In one of the first studies which gave significant attention to the consequences of situational altruism, Fritz and Mathewson (1957) conceptualized the issue in spatial terms in discussing the movement of people, messages and supplies toward an area impacted by disaster. In that study, Fritz and

Mathewson pointed out that supplies arrive in amounts in far excess of actual needs and usually comprise unneeded and unusable supplies which require the diversion of local attention from more urgent and relevant tasks. This "over mobilization" of resources lead to what they called convergence behavior. In that study, there were several important policy themes: first, that people moved to a disaster area rather than away from it and second, that those who did come into an impacted area had honorable motives. Both of these themes were counter intuitive to conventional civil defense thinking of the times which assumed that disasters produced fear and flight reactions and also that disasters evoked anti-social behavior. More recently, Scanlon (1991) has looked at the consequences of convergence in several Canadian situations. In contrast to the focus in the Fritz and Mathewson study on "unofficial" convergence, Scanlon suggested that "official" convergence can be equally problematic showing that, in one instance, there were 500 official responders, five times the number of persons affected. Scanlon also highlighted another source of convergence which has become more important since the original study. Now a significant part of the convergence of people are representatives of media organizations. In one instance, Scanlon found, of 346 participants, 56 were from the media. The phenomena of convergence is, of course, an outgrowth of what has been called situational altruism here. It reflects the helping resources which were mobilized but, on the other hand, such mobilization can complicate the emergency response by creating transportation and communication gridlock.

Loss of autonomy in established organization. The convergence of individuals and organizations bring resources to bear but also can create a number of new problems for traditional emergency organizations such as police and fire departments. In their predisaster activities, these organizations operate on "standard" tasks and by routine procedures in a familiar pattern of relationships with other segments of the community. When disasters occur, these organizations are confronted with new demands and with new relationships. These changes create considerable uncertainty for these traditional organizations. They are threatened by becoming involved in new tasks, having to incorporate new personnel and having to develop new coordinative relationships. During the emergency period, these organizations devote considerable effort to defending their autonomy by keeping their activities restricted to traditional ones, by resisting volunteer help and by maintaining their independence. In addition, these traditional organizations assume that since they deal with the most "critical" disaster tasks, they will always dominate the emergent disaster response. With increased complexity of the disaster response, they may find they cannot dominate so they withdraw from coordination to continue the activities where they have a clear monopoly.

Organizational Competition. While, by large, the emergency response is distinguished by cooperative relationships, in certain instances, organizational competition emerges. When organizations mobilize to help and there is a shortage of victims, it can result in competitive action. For example, all hospitals in a community may mobilize their disaster plans in anticipation of an influx of patients. Not having one's fair share of patients can lead to a search for victims. In our own research, we have observed several situations when local media have been asked to broadcast that the usual emergency hospitals were full and that new patients should be sent to another hospital. When the emergency hospitals deny that they are full and the requesting hospital denies that they made the request, the media will claim they were only passing on what they considered a legitimate request. As a result of the "confusion," having a few victims can legitimize the hospital's effort to mobilize.

Mixed Motivation. The openness for participation created by situational altruism can create other problems. The desire to help is frequently complicated by motives, other than a simple concern for victims. Some organizations participate in the emergency response for a justification for fund raising to support their future activities. Other organizations, including religious, ethnic and social groups, become involved as a way of strengthening their own member loyalty. Others seek to legitimize their own interests as being disaster relevant and significant, such as dog owners imputing search and rescue skills to their dogs or therapists validating their clinical assumptions about stress or salesmen seeking to extend their sales for communications technology. Other groups see contributions as one manifestation of their ongoing public relations. Most of these participants operate quite independently. They are unwilling or unable to coordinate with more experienced helping groups and they lack knowledge of the community and its preparedness planning. In most instances, they work on the margins of the emergency social system and complicate it.

Coordination. The increase in involvement and participation increases the need for interorganizational coordination far beyond what is anticipated in most conventional disaster planning. In fact, a very frequent pattern is the development of "segmental" coordination, involving, for example, those who participate in delimited areas such as the medical/hospital, search and rescue, social services and public services. Each of these segments develop forms of coordination within these areas but have few relationships with other segments or with any attempts to develop overall coordination.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF STRUCTURAL ALTRUISM FOR
OTHER STAGES OF THE DISASTER CYCLE

The consequences of structural altruism extend far beyond its consequences during the emergency period.

Recovery. As has already been indicated, situational altruism extends victimization so that in the community, the number of people who feel that they have been victimized has increased. Also, the transition from the emergency period to recovery is marked by a transition from unqualified giving to the establishment of requirements and qualifications. That transition is often complicated since some of the victims have been used by organizations as prima facie evidence for the need to continue to help. In addition, that transition is also complicated by the fact that some organizations may continue to give unrestricted help while others are imposing qualifications. This mixed picture usually evokes hostility toward those organizations which attempt to establish criteria and eligibility.

Certainly a major barrier to recovery is that much of the material assistance evoked by structural altruism does not address actual needs. Food and clothing contributions undercut the local markets where such goods continue to be available. On the other hand, short and long term housing as well as relocation costs are seldom easily acquired. Neither is assistance for economic disruption and the interruption of transportation services to places of employment. In particular, the costs of disruption of such services often fall most heavily on lower socioeconomic groups which have the fewest resources to carry them through disruption and dislocation.

Mitigation. Structural altruism also has a delayed effect on the initiation of disaster mitigation programs. Currently, it is argued that a disaster event can be used as an object lesson to encourage both future disaster planning and to initiate mitigation efforts, utilizing past consequences to encourage rational planning for the future. For mitigation, the appeal is made to self-interest to avoid damage and loss in the future. The argument is that, by small inexpensive steps, more severe future losses will be avoided. It is assumed that those with disaster experience would have the greatest interest in such efforts. The opposite may be the most likely outcome. The lesson derived from disaster experience is exactly the opposite. Structural altruism provides for those who have taken precautions and for those who have not. While there will be uncompensated losses in every disaster situation, it is likely that, numerically, those who have benefitted from structural altruism will be greater than those who "lost" significantly. This outcome reduces the motivation to support mitigation efforts which have defined payoff, even with minimum risk. Reinforcement of that relationship comes from the General Accounting Office's lessons from the U.S. Federal Crop

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Insurance Program. Commenting on the fact that voluntary participation of farmers in the program averaged only about 34 percent but also Congress each year has adopted ad hoc disaster assistance legislation, averaging $1 billion a year.

> "We have reported that providing federal disaster grants and low interest emergency loans discourages farmers from participating in the crop insurance program. As long as people expect federal disaster assistance, they will be reluctant to purchase insurance. And when a disaster occurs, the federal government generally feels compelled to provide assistance to uninsured who are financially harmed, perpetuating the cycle."
> (GAO/T-GGD-94-153, p. 7)

In this example, the conclusions are based solely on federal assistance but in most disasters, nonfederal sources of assistance compound and negate the enthusiasm for mitigation. While it is popular currently to contend that the post disaster period presents a window of opportunity for initiating mitigation programs, that window is obviously quite opaque.

Disaster Planning. Structural altruism produces a number of effects which contradict traditional assumptions of disaster planning. Much of that planning centers around understanding characteristics of specific disaster agents, although structural altruism is generic. Much of disaster planning is predicated on maintaining social order, while the emergency response necessitates flexibility and adaptability. Much planning centers on increasing the speed of mobilization and avoiding the loss of personnel but ignores issues of organizational expansion and the utilization of volunteers. Much planning centers on the functioning of established organizations but ignores the importance of emergent organizations. Much of planning is preoccupied with establishing authority, rather than being concerned with coordination.

While disaster experience contravenes much of current disaster planning, such experience does not necessarily lead to improvements. While it is conventional to hold post disaster critiques, these events are attended by persons who hold official positions in established organizations and for whom situational altruism is often experienced as chaos and as a result of faulty planning. The modifications derived from post disaster critiques are usually to increase rigidity, instead of creating flexibility; of increasing efficiency rather than insuring effectiveness. Even revisions made in post disaster planning continue the presumption that, if you do not mention something in the written plan, it will not happen. The more important lesson, however, is often lost that situational altruism provides the resources, human and material, to create an effective emergency response. While it has its inefficiencies, it is usually more effective than the rational solutions which are currently offered as improvements.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The paper deals with a theoretical explanation for persistent disaster assistance problems in industrial societies. Developing the concept of situational altruism in the context of emergent norm theory, an explanation is offered for the emergence of massive helping behavior in disaster. Situational altruism motivates persons to enter the emergency social system, in ways quite different than is anticipated in most disaster planning. This is particularly true for needs which are difficult to anticipate, such as search and rescue. Situational altruism also creates the means to enlarge and enhance organizational activity to adapt to the scope of the emergency. It also promotes the transfer of goods and services, not bound by conventional predisaster contractual relations. It reinforces and assists victims with basic "survival" needs. In effect, situational altruism creates the resources in personnel and material, to make an effective emergency response.

On the other hand, that effective response comes with a predictable price. It produces the convergence of personnel, communications and goods on the impacted area. While there are new ephemeral helping roles created, it also produces organizational competition for victims. The disbalance between helpers and victims expands the process of victimization, creates dependency and often delays recovery. The new norms of situational altruism undercuts the rational bureaucratic procedures, valued by most emergency organizations.

Situational altruism thus creates a paradox. It is the primary basis for solving most of the emergency needs created by disaster impact. It provides sufficient resources in both personnel and materials goods, to solve the emergency needs. In other words, an effective response is one outcome. On the other hand, from a number of points of view, that response is inefficient. It can be suggested here that many current attempts to improve the emergency response are likely to reduce its effectiveness.

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1. There are several important issues which cannot be given extended treatment here. These are the conditions which give rise to situational altruism and the way that different societies modify the expression of it.

   The conditions for the development of situational altruism are optimum in sudden onset, diffuse consensus disasters but also can emerge in gradual onset disasters, such as the 1993 Midwestern floods. The conditions also prevail in the reaction in industrial societies to some disaster situations in developing societies. While fewer personnel converge from outside, food, clothing, medical supplies and building supplies often arrive in massive quantities and eventually are distributed to "victims" quite distant from the impact area.

   Situational altruism does not necessarily lead to "unqualified giving." Victimization may be delimited by group membership. After the Loma Prieta earthquake, a public discussion developed as to the appropriateness of assistance to illegal aliens. The general resolution of this debate was that it was appropriate to provide food, clothing, and temporary shelter but not longer term housing assistance. That restriction was eventually built into legislation. This suggests that "citizenship" is an added variable.

   Using the terminology of "industrial" societies may obscure differences in the form of expression of situational altruism. For example, the United States may be an extreme case for the encouragement of voluntary action. By contrast, other similar societies may provide fewer sanctioned opportunities for volunteers. These differences may be difficult to discern since "official" descriptions of disasters usually ignore voluntary activity.

2. The assumption of the lack of food is contradicted in many ways. Wartime experience suggested that communities which were isolated by conflict had food supplies, in home storage and in existing food distribution system, which would last four weeks.

Shelter is becoming a more difficult problem, especially since much of the damage in industrial societies is to property. A particularly difficult problem has emerged in recent years in some urban areas in the United States in determining the limits of situational altruism. It centers on differentiating between homeless people created by disaster impact and homeless people in general. To a large extent, the norms of situational altruism exclude predisaster victimization but the availability of help provide new opportunities for homeless people and a reluctance to institute qualifications for assistance leads to an uncomfortable "victim" sorting process.

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