THE SOCIOLOGY OF DISASTER
AND
THE SOCIOLOGY OF RISK

An
Annotated Bibliography

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SOCIOLOGY OF DISASTER

DISASTER RESEARCH HISTORY

Reference:

Summary:
This article was written to analyze and provide a historical overview of the development of disaster research (both natural and technological) during the period beginning in the 1950's through the 1980's. Quarantelli's article describes how the research field began with an applied focus to understand group and behavioral aspects in disaster. Early research funding (1950's) was predominately from United States military organizations focused on applied research that connected to situations in wartime. Most of the early work focused on social psychological aspects. During the 1960's and 1970's, disaster research expanded to field studies of organizational functioning in disasters keeping the focus on social psychological aspects and connected to wartime and civil defense interests. The author notes how the early focus on applied uses and the emphasis on defense affected how disaster was defined, what was studied and how it was studied. He believes that the early study approaches still affect perspectives of disaster research in the present.

Provocation:
This article is important to my understanding of the roots of disaster research, in terms of how the early research was shaped, what was studied, and how it was studied. It is clear that disaster research has evolved since then and one can expect it will evolve further as time marches on. At one time, disaster research was limited to U.S. defense issues and how people react, and focused primarily on social psychological aspects, whereas now the research has expanded to include a wide array of social characteristics including social class, age, race, gender on a global scale under many disaster conditions. Additionally, contemporary disaster research has begun to examine the relationship of institutions and disaster.
DISASTER THEORY

Reference:

Summary:
The main argument of this paper is that disaster is a predominantly a result of socio-economic factors rather than natural factors. The authors argue that social and economic inequality has led to an increase in disasters over time. They especially emphasize the increases in disasters in third world countries where economic inequality is the greatest. O'Keefe et al, recommend disaster planning that addresses the vulnerability factors caused by the economic and social conditions that place some people more at risk than others.

Provocation:
This argument is as cogent now as it was in 1976. While there is more awareness and more focus now on this problem, it is not nearly solved. There are many more people in the world now than there was then and the situation has become very dire. Larger populations of poor are living in harm’s way because they must live in low-lying coastal areas and other high hazard risk areas in order to subsist.

Reference:

Summary:
This was originally a talk presented at the University of Delaware Disaster Research Center, and was written to demonstrate the difference between the concepts of risk and disaster; to discuss how various sociological theories can be applied to study risk and disaster; and share thoughts on where future theoretical paths may lead. The important difference between risk and disaster, according to Stallings, is that risk is about a future threat---unknown and uncertain. Disasters are about an event that occurred in the past; therefore, the threat has now passed and information about the disaster can be found from various sources, such as the news media. He examines various sociological theories in the context of risk and disaster studies including social constructionist theory as well as, conflict, structural functionalism, and resource mobilization theories. He suggests that future theoretical directions may shift toward an institutional-level focus on disasters.
Provocation:
This article is useful because I find Stallings definitions of risk and disaster helps me to connect the fields of sociology of risk and disaster.

**SOCIOMETRY AND THE STUDY OF DISASTERS**

Reference:

Summary:
Although disaster research has come a long way since its inception, Anderson argues it is time to invest more effort in studies that examine how disasters affect children and youth. Up to this point, disaster research focused on children and youths has been very limited. In his paper, he elaborates on and emphasizes three areas where research is severely lacking: (1) the necessity to understand children's vulnerability; (2) what actions adults can take to reduce vulnerability; and (3) actions children and youth can take for themselves and others that reduce disaster impacts. Further, Anderson believes that comparing income levels and cross-cultural differences would highlight how disasters affect the areas where children and youth are most vulnerable (e.g. health, education, employment and recovery). Lastly, he advocates additional study focused on what actions can be taken on children's behalf, such as mitigation and disaster preparedness programs, and the actions children can take to communicate risk and be more prepared.

Provocation:
It is apparent that much more research is needed in the area of children and youth and how they are affected by disaster. More study has been devoted to psychological aspects of disasters on children than the sociological ones, especially in terms of vulnerability connected to social class, race, age and gender.

Reference:

Summary:
In this short article, Dynes argues the importance for disaster researchers to come to consensus on defining disaster. As some disasters are overlooked such as AIDS, and new disasters are discovered, such as terrorism and armed conflict that affect and disadvantage millions of people, there has been little interest by traditional Western disaster researchers to include these in their definition or to expand sociological theory. His major point is that as long as the definition of disaster and existing theory is limited to a focus on natural hazards, it leaves out possibilities for understanding how events
such as AIDS, and armed conflicts affect the displaced millions of people who are without adequate food, water and medical care.

**Provocation:**
This article is indeed a wake-up call to disaster researchers. I do believe some headway has been made toward resolution on expanding the definition, but I don't believe there is a yet definitive consensus. I do agree there is a need to expand the horizons.

**Reference:**

**Summary:**
This introduction introduces an essay collection published in the *International Journal of Emergencies and Disasters* in which scholars set out to define "disaster," in terms of assumptions and conceptualizations. Quarantelli emphasizes the need for disaster researchers to come to agreement on what a disaster is—what are its characteristics, what conditions lead to them and what are the consequences of disaster. Without a consensus and greater clarity on this, he argues disaster research cannot move forward.

**Provocation:**
I am not certain as to whether all this has been accomplished. I do; however, agree with Quarantelli that without a consensus, advancement of disaster research is limited.

**Reference:**

**Summary:** The sociology of disasters is on the outer fringe of mainstream sociology. Not only are disaster researchers slowly moving away from a traditional “systems perspective (functionalism),” it’s researchers lack visibility because there are too few of them and their publications are often found in multi-disciplinary “extreme-event oriented” journals. She applauds the recent trend toward the constructivist perspective by disaster researchers and emphasizes how vitally important is the need to become more theoretically diverse. Theoretical diversity and focusing on the core concerns of social inequality, diversity and social change are what is needed and necessary for disaster sociologists to become integrated with mainstream sociology. Further, she argues disaster research must link up with the related fields of sociology of risk and environmental sociology.

**Provocation:**
Hopefully this was widely disseminated among disaster sociologists, as well as, those academics and practitioners engaged in the study of risk, disaster and mainstream
sociology. Tierney is right to point to the small numbers of disaster researchers and the paucity of research that combines the sociology of risk and disaster. Research in the fields of disaster and risk are expanding, and it is hoped that more academics will delve into this field and link risk and disaster research together. It would be great if mainstream sociology will recognize the important link of risk and disaster research.

Reference:

Summary:
This book primarily addresses the social, political and economic causes of disaster. The authors argue that disasters are not only caused by natural events, but are also the outcome of social, political and economic environments. Social, political and economic processes differentially structure the lives of different groups of people whereby some are more vulnerable to disaster than others. Wisner, et. al., analyze how natural hazards, such as floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, landslides, and volcanic eruptions, and so on, affect human populations possessing little or no social, political, or economic power to demonstrate how those groups are most at risk when disaster strikes.

Provocation:
This is an important book and one of the all time classics in disaster literature. I believe it has been widely read and has been very influential in the disaster research field.

**DISASTERS, RACE, GENDER AND SOCIAL CLASS**

Reference:

Summary:
This book was written to illustrate how women experienced disaster during the 1997 flood that devastated Grand Forks, North Dakota, and one of the worst natural disasters in the United States. Fothergill conducted an ethnographic study to understand how women lived their everyday lives while dealing with post-disaster issues, including managing crisis, dealing with family stresses and maintained their social identity. The study examined women's differences and commonalities; their movement through the public, private and communal spheres, and social characteristics such as gender, class, race and sexual orientation to understand how this disaster shaped their lives.
Provocation:
This is an important book in terms of gender studies and how disaster affects women by social class, race and sexual orientation. It examines how the women maintain their "sense of self" and how they are able to handle multiple social roles.

Reference:

Summary:
This book addresses how Hurricane Katrina raised fundamental questions about the ways the United States can, and should, deal with the problems of economic risk and social responsibility. This volume is a compilation of chapters by leading experts who examine lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina in order to better assess, perceive, and manage risks from future disasters. Tierney’s chapter focuses on how social stratification in the United States affects the outcome of natural and technological disasters. She delineates how the study of disaster evolved from “consensus-oriented” perspectives to explain a disaster’s affect on society to a more recent approach on how individuals, groups, and communities experience disaster. Using Hurricane Katrina as the example, she argues that social class, race and ethnicity, and gender affects vulnerability to disaster. Unequal access to resources before, during and after disasters is a major flaw in disaster planning. As our nation’s population becomes more diverse, and with the present trend of increased social inequality, Tierney predicts more Katrina-like catastrophic disasters are to come. The lessons from Katrina have dire implications for future extreme events.

Provocation:
I think the intended audience included academia, disaster researchers, risk researchers, emergency managers and others. I wonder how wide was the dissemination. It is an important book. Tierney emphasizes the importance of addressing inequality. Our future is stark without finding solutions to not only everyday inequalities, but in times of a catastrophic disaster, the social vulnerabilities exposed in Katrina show that we cannot continue postponing a solution without experiencing dire consequences. Complacency is not an option.
ELDERLY AND DISASTER

Reference:

Summary:
This book is a sociological analysis of Chicago’s devastating 1995 heat wave where about 739 people died, most of whom were poor, elderly African Americans, in ill health and who lived alone. His methodological approach included interviews with community leaders, service providers, advocates, government representatives and the elderly, and he visited the neighborhoods and residences where the victims lived. Klinenberg’s findings attributed the high death toll to a combination of economic, social and political factors. Interesting is the fact that this tragic event was not declared a disaster, and the media coverage was lacking in proportion to its social severity and effects. Seeking to understand why so many heat-related deaths should occur when relief was nearby, his analysis showed the elderly victims lived alone and isolated in poor and deteriorating neighborhoods.

Provocation:
Klinenberg’s book is an excellent analysis that shows how social, economic and political factors can combine to create a tragic and unnecessary loss of life when it should not have happened. This analysis clearly demonstrates that more study is needed to understand how age, race, poverty and social isolation leads to having less disaster aid and resources.

CHILDREN AND DISASTER

Reference:

Summary:
This exploratory research quick response study in 2005 examined children's experiences after Hurricane Katrina. Research questions focused on the children's experiences; what others did to lessen the children's vulnerability; what children did for themselves and others to reduce the impacts of disaster; and, how children experienced relocation, especially in regards to education, family and friendships. The methodology was a combination of ethnographic methods, including informal and in-depth formal interviews, focus groups and participant observation. Findings included several recommendations: 1) schools are important for the recovery of families, children, and entire communities. Schools are central to children's routine and feelings of normalcy.
2) It is important how schools welcome and integrate displaced students; and for teachers and school administrators to be aware of diversity issues. 3) All individuals who work closely with children (e.g. day care, schools and evacuee shelters) should be aware of the need for routine, and at the same time allow for flexibility after a disaster. Shelter programs such as organized play, tutoring, and child drop-off areas gave a break to parents and kept children active. 4) FEMA disaster assistance needs reevaluating in terms of needs for single parents with children. Disaster assistance should not be a "one size fits all" approach.

Provocation:
As the authors note, this study adds to the greatly understudied body of knowledge on children in disaster. Although a very quickly done research study, this was certainly a valuable way to increase and contribute to the disaster literature. It is important too to study children's experiences in disaster at various stages of the disaster cycle.

Reference:

Summary:
The book is a collection of articles written by leading disaster and risk researchers. This purpose of this book was to demonstrate how, from a social constructionist perspective, disaster events on their own do not create the devastating social impacts that occur. Phillips, et al, discuss why the preponderance of victims are women, children, elderly, disadvantaged or disabled and the reasons why they are more vulnerable than other social groups. In addition, the book covers how change can lead to increasing resilience of these at-risk social populations. In particular, Dr. Lori Peek devotes a chapter to address the issues of children. She points out that children are especially vulnerable in disaster and vulnerability varies because of differences in social class, race/ethnicity, gender and age. Peek also highlights research gap areas on children and disaster such as risk perception and response; children are separated from parents or have no familial support and so on. Findings overall conclude children have fewer resources, limited capacity to prepare, and may suffer disproportionate losses and face barrier in recovery. Children face an increased risk for death and injury in disaster, as well as, suffer an increased risk in poorly designed and planned sheltering centers. The may need additional support for emotional distress and short/long-term psychological impairments, financial and/or educational support during the recovery process.

Provocation:
In particular, the chapter on age by Lori Peek was the chapter I found to be most critical to my research interest. For me, understanding which children and why they are more vulnerable to disaster risk and recovery efforts than other social groups (and their own age group) is central to my research. Much research is needed to understand how
vulnerabilities may be reduced. Vulnerability to risk is one side of the issue while how children can play an active role in risk is another side to further explore.

Reference:

Summary:
The purpose of this article was to argue against the dominant disaster risk reduction view that children and youth are vulnerable and passive victims who need adult protection, when in fact, there is supporting research to show a more active and contributive role is possible. Tanner’s research links climate change and disaster issues and his research findings from El Salvador and the Philippines are offered as evidence to show how children and youth can contribute before, during and after a disaster and climate change events. Research data gathered from 20 communities in El Salvador and the Philippines support the view that children and youth are able to mobilize others and utilize resources that reduce climate change and disaster risk. Hybrid methodological strategies were used that included semi-structured interviews with parents and children; drawings; games; and, “acting-out” hazards and risks. The research provides insights into how children perceive and communicate risk; what pathways they use to communicate with their parents, their peers and others; and shows that children can be agents of social change.

Provocation:
This was an interesting international study. If no similar studies have been conducted in the United States, this study could be replicated and provide valuable insights into how children contribute before, during and after disaster. The issue of perception and communication of risks is important also. Cultural differences would be expected.

**DISASTERS, LANGUAGE BARRIERS AND DISABILITIES**

Reference:

Summary:
Aguirre studied the lack of warning preceding the 1987 Saragosa tornado that resulted in 29 deaths, 121 injuries and caused major structural damage to the town. His study included interviews with survivors, local and county officials, local radio station announcers, and managers of local utilities. Saragosa’s economy was agricultural and its population was almost entirely of Mexican descent. The findings showed that had emergency warnings been transmitted to the Spanish-speaking channel popular among the Mexican residents, many lives could have been saved. Additionally, the local radio
operator likely erred in his translation of the warning message from English to Spanish, thus failing to convey the urgency of the situation.

**Provocation:**
This was a sad situation indeed, and language barriers certainly added a tragic component to this disaster. While a disaster cannot always be prevented, mitigating the effects should certainly be within society’s capability.

**Reference:**

**Summary:**
Van Willigen, et al examined experiences during Hurricanes Bonnie, Dennis and Floyd of households with physically disabled individuals compared with other households. Data was collected from phone and personal interview surveys with physically disabled individuals, family members, and individuals from local emergency management agencies. Their findings showed that households with physically disabled members were less likely to evacuate than other households. Additionally, reasons for not evacuating included a perceived lack of access at shelters, services and disaster assistance. Households with a disabled member were also more likely to experience residential damage, and the damage costs were greater proportionately based on income levels for households with a disabled member. The authors conclude that emergency management officials should pay particular attention to communicating and coordinating services, evacuation planning and assistance, and assuring the shelters are accessible by the physically disabled.

**Provocation:**
Being a retired emergency management employee, I am aware these issues have begun to be addressed. I think studies such as these go a long way to spur needed changes and improvements for physically disabled people. I also know more is needed to alleviate the accessibility, evacuation and communication issues.

**SOCIAL VULNERABILITY**

**Reference:**

**Summary:**
In this article, Boyden examines dominant theories and assumptions currently held by childhood and child development scholars in terms of how children are affected by
adverse circumstances. In it, Boyden argues that children are predominantly portrayed as vulnerable and dependent victims who need protection and care during catastrophic events. Current perceptions leave out the important capabilities that children have to act upon and influence their environments. While Boyden specifically examines how armed conflict affects children, she argues the need for a paradigm change that views childhood as not only shaped by biological and psychological processes but also by personal and environmental factors.

**Provocation:**
Boyden successfully argues that children can indeed influence their environment and when in adverse circumstances, they are very capable of resilience and of contributing to their community. She also points out the gender differences in how males and females respond during a disaster or crisis situation. One major point I got was that in a social environment where children are trusted and given the opportunity to actively participate, they do so with exceptional ability. While they may need support and protection, they have capabilities well beyond what they are given credit for.

**Reference:**

**Summary:**
The purpose of this paper is to review the concept of resilience relative to how it is defined, the role of vulnerability in resilience discourse and how resilience differs from vulnerability. Manyena argues that there are two emerging views; one view in which disaster resilience and vulnerability are factors of each other, and the other view is that resilience and vulnerability are separate entities. The implications of not having a consensus on the concepts of resilience and vulnerability will affect the planning and effectiveness of disaster preparedness and may impose limitations on effective disaster risk reduction.

**Provocation:**
The author’s points are well taken. As I see it, having a consensus on the definition of resilience and vulnerability is important in the planning and preparedness stages for emergencies, and the ability to reduce disaster risk. I am interested to see if a resolution on this issue has come about.
Reference:

Summary:
The purpose of this article was to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature on children and disasters, as well as to encourage researchers and practitioners to view children not only as victims but also as having positive participatory roles before, during and after disaster. As is well known, children are extremely vulnerable to disaster effects. Studies focused on various issues surrounding children in disaster include: psychological vulnerabilities such as post-traumatic stress disorder; are physically vulnerable to death, injury, illness, and abuse; and may experience educational delays and/or disruptions. Further, children may have special needs that require different forms of physical, social, mental and emotional support than adults. In spite of all the vulnerabilities, children have the capacity to contribute to all phases of disaster including disaster preparedness, response, and recovery activities. Promotion of these capacities is highly important, but to do so, children must have better access to resources, be empowered to participate by a show of encouragement, and by offering support and ensuring equitable treatment.

Provocation:
This paper is an excellent and comprehensive overview. It gave me a good sense of the extant research and areas where research is lacking.

Reference:

Summary:
This article was written to address research shortcomings in terms of forecasting for disaster and risk warnings for socially vulnerable populations. Phillips and Morrow define social vulnerability, and give a comprehensive overview that assesses the current state of research and recommend topics for future research. They propose researchers should pursue an "intersectional" approach to better understand socially vulnerable populations including their disaster forecasting and warning information needs. Specific to children, the authors have some recommendations that focus on exploring ways to reach latchkey children at home in times of disaster. They note that little research has been done to understand how children receive, interpret, or respond to disaster forecasts and warnings.
Provocation:
This article is related to my research on children and disaster as it specifically addressed and recommended areas where research is lacking in understanding how children receive, interpret and/or respond to risk (e.g. disaster forecasts and warnings). It appears much needs to be done to improve how warnings and forecasts are broadcast to vulnerable social groups. I think it is also important to think further about an intersectional approach for children especially when so many of them are vulnerable not only as children, but also their gender, social class, and race/ethnicity are so intertwined.

MYTHS, REALITIES AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF DISASTERS

Reference:

Summary:
In this paper, Dynes uses the interesting example of the Lisbon earthquake in 1755 to demonstrate how cultural, historical and social context can define disaster and be an impetus for social change. He analyzed written conversations between Voltaire and Rousseau to understand how their particular cultural, social and historical contexts influenced their writings about the Lisbon earthquake, and how it influenced popular culture. Among his findings, Dynes notes that Rousseau wrote what can be called the “first truly social scientific view of disaster,” and had the idea that disaster is socially created by existing cultural norms and depending on who is affected whether an event is a disaster or not. Voltaire wrote the satire ‘Candide,’ where he used the Lisbon earthquake in his criticism of social optimism and religion. From his analysis, Dynes also concludes that disasters are always interpreted in terms of the existing cultural context; understanding a disaster’s effects is dependent upon knowledge of particular social and behavioral patterns; and because significant disasters cause disruptions and threats to the social order, the state has taken on a larger role in collective responsibility.

Provocation:
I really liked Dynes analysis and perspective on how the Lisbon earthquake influenced the writings of two very prominent Enlightenment philosophers. Reading excerpts from letters between Voltaire and Rousseau was fascinating and I was amazed at how very insightful these two men were.
Reference:

Summary:
In this paper’s focus on Hurricane Katrina, the authors argue that the media has perpetuated the “myths of disaster,” in the past and continue to do so. These “myths” have led to erroneous public beliefs that disaster victims panic, are unable to take necessary protective precautions, and that looting and lawlessness is rampant during disaster events. In addition, the use of military resources to take control and restore order further compounded important issues in terms of disaster response. Further, not only did the erroneous disaster myths about panic and victim inability to take action not occur; the media exaggerated the looting and lawless behavior and placed the blame on African Americans. The purported extreme looting and lawlessness was used to justify calling in the military to “restore order.” These actions have multiple consequences, such as; the actions detrimentally affected responses by the various emergency response agencies; they interfered with a community’s ability to assist one another and restore itself after a catastrophic disaster; and the military actions only led to more misperceptions about people’s behavior in disaster.

Provocation:
This was an excellent paper. It is not likely we will soon see a major change in the media perception of how victims react in disaster or a change in the idea of increased lawlessness. My view is that for any change to occur is if sociologists strive to become more ‘public’ by using their knowledge and research analysis to demonstrate the media perspective has no factual basis.

COMMUNITY IMPACTS OF DISASTER

Reference:

Summary:
The purpose of this book was to describe the 1972 Buffalo Creek flood disaster and its devastating effects. Although all disasters have some commonalities, Erikson shows the importance in describing the uniqueness of each disaster by placing it into its own local, social and historical context. Erikson includes narratives of the flood victims thereby relating the trauma and powerlessness of watching the destruction of their homes and community. He concludes that a loss of community occurred from the disaster for a variety of reasons. The reasons include what he called the ‘mountain ethos,’ or the conflicting needs for a bit of independence and a bit of dependence drawn from their
cultural and historical roots and the poverty and isolation of Appalachia, and finally, a
dependence on the coal mining industry.

**Provocation:**
I found this book to be very interesting because of the victim narratives and how Erikson
was able to weave the story together with the history, culture and social background. It
certainly made me more aware of how disasters affect each community differently and
how understanding the ways in which the disaster affects people and their community is
so important.

**Reference:**
Peek, Lori A. and Jeannette N. Sutton. 2003. “An Exploratory Comparison of Disasters,

**Summary:**
This paper was written in an effort to categorize and classify the September 11, 2001
Terrorist Attacks into the disaster framework. Using an existing framework for disasters
that includes a consensus and/or conflict event dichotomy developed by well-known
researcher E.L. Quarantelli, Peek and Sutton compared the similarities and differences of
the September 11 terrorist attack findings. Whereas the existing framework places
disaster events into either a consensus or a conflict event, Peek and Sutton’s comparisons
resulted in finding a more complex event that extended beyond the consensus/conflict
dichotomy. This analysis contributed to a greater understanding of how crisis situations
influence individual, organizational and community-level behavior.

**Provocation:**
This is an important paper that demonstrates the need for more in-depth research in the
areas of terrorism and how it fits into disaster research. Individual, organizational and
community behavior was greatly affected by the 9/11 terrorist attack and even years later,
there are psychological, sociological and physical effects. I can still recall how it
affected me.

**Reference:**
Transformation of Chronic Disaster Impacts.” *Sociological Practice: A Journal of

**Summary:**
The devastating Exxon Valdez oil spill of 1989 greatly affected the Alaskan native
culture, economy, environment and society. In this paper, Picou demonstrates how the
use of the ‘Talking Circle,’ a participatory community intervention strategy can mitigate
the long-term cultural and social effects of a technological disaster. The Talking Circle
provided opportunities for an emerging discourse that led to a feeling of collective
empowerment, thus helping the community in a healing process. Although the memory of the spill and its devastation will not go away, the Talking Circle process was transformative in that it allowed the community to increase their cultural awareness and to move toward getting things ‘back to normal.’

**Provocation:**
This was a very interesting paper and while the devastation from the oil spill will remain for many years to come, the people have to find a way to resume their lives in a meaningful way. This participatory process was apparently very effective in aiding the healing process. Community members saw their whole way of life threatened by the oil spill. It is amazing to see the resilience of humans and how they can rebound after such devastation.

**CONSEQUENCES OF POST-DISASTER AND PROSPECTS FOR RECOVERY**

**Reference:**

**Summary:**
In this paper, Myers argues that environmental problems in developing nations, such as drought, desertification, deforestation that are a result of over-population and effects of climate change and resource depletion, cause millions of people to migrate in search of stable livelihoods. Myers calls these migrant populations “environmental refugees.” Further, he argues while the migrations are primarily caused by environmental problems, the crisis becomes even greater in terms of social, political and economic effects because the environmental refugees are marginalized and forgotten. Myers views this situation as dire and only to get worse, leading to conflict and violence if nothing is done.

**Provocation:**
If Myers is right about how this crisis is expanding and if no or only futile attempts are made to improve the living conditions and mitigate the numbers of migrants, this is a very scary prospect indeed. In terms of disaster, this situation can only exacerbate already almost insurmountable problems for response and recovery efforts.

**Reference:**

**Summary:**
The purpose of writing this article was to demonstrate how lessons learned from foreign refugee crises would have greatly reduced the chaos and missteps after Katrina. The
authors argue the catastrophic effect on the Gulf coast was not just a lack of appropriate planning, but also caused by a lack of experience handling such a large displaced population. Providing adequate resources for such large populations during a crisis situation is something humanitarian organizations have experienced with foreign refugee camps. Had the government officials known it, a field manual developed by the humanitarian organization, would have provided guidelines for meeting the needs of a large population needing emergency disaster relief. For future disasters and crisis, lessons learned from international refugee relief experiences should be incorporated into planning efforts.

**Provocation:**

It is interesting that the lessons from managing large refugee populations by humanitarian organizations had not been incorporated into U.S. disaster planning training. It does seem that it is often the case that until the unexpected happens, we do not foresee the value of experiences outside our own.
SOCIOLOGY OF RISK

RISK ANALYSIS

Reference:

Summary
In this paper, Short critically reviews the history of risk analysis and how sociology relates to it, and he presents suggestions to develop the sociology of risk. These suggestions focus on the social context of risk and the social fabric at risk. Additionally, he discusses risk perception and the mass media’s role in socially constructing risks. His central argument is that sociology, among other social science disciplines, must share their perspectives, knowledge and methods to promote a better understanding of how society perceives and acts upon risk. His fear is that without the insights of the social sciences, risk assessment and risk management are threatened by the domination of various professions and disciplines lacking this important knowledge. Short is concerned that without input from social science, social policies on risk could put our ‘social fabric,’ and thus our culture at an even greater risk.

Provocation:
Short has written an excellent paper about the importance of sociology and other social sciences and how very valuable these disciplines are to society and the understanding of risk. His paper was primarily directed at social scientists and other academics. Since he has written this paper, I believe sociology has indeed become more involved in the issues of risk. Some of the papers I have read though do seem concerned about sociology not being “taken seriously.” Short also had that concern but believed that sociology must not hold back or unfortunate consequences to society would occur.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Reference:

Summary:
In this paper, Clarke argues there is a real need for sociologists to study the processes through which social actors make choices among risks. He points out that the psychological approach has dominated risk assessment research and has been focused on how individuals perceive risk. This approach at the individual level fails to explain the
role that organizations play in making choices among risks. He further suggests that organizations, not individuals, define what are acceptable risks. Clarke discusses some examples of how organizational structure, inter and intra-organizational conflicts and elite interests shape the processes of making choices among risks. The assessment process serves to legitimize the chosen risk and to make the choice seem the most favorable.

**Provocation:**
Clarke used some interesting examples such as the exploding gas tanks on the Ford Pinto and showed how the Ford Motor Company assessment process helped to define and choose the level of risk most beneficial to their organization.

**Reference:**

**Summary:**
In this paper by Slovic, he demonstrates the complexity of risk and its assessment. Using survey data from a variety of studies, he argues that the danger of risk is real, but risk is socially constructed. Data from the studies supports the thesis that how the public and scientists view risk assessment is influenced by trust, emotion, sex, and politics. How risk is defined is value-laden and subjective, and Slovic argues that whoever controls how risk is defined controls how and what solutions are advanced. Perceptions of risk by the public and scientists have become polarized. On the one hand, the public trust has been eroded by the negativity in the media, special interest groups that promote fear and an adversarial legal system. On the other hand, scientists attempt to use analysis to allay fears about low-probability risks. In general, the public has become more concerned about risk while scientists are less concerned. He emphasizes a new approach to risk assessment and risk decision making should include more public participation, a more democratic process, improve the quality and relevance of technical analysis, and increase public trust in the legitimacy of decisions.

**Provocation:**
This was an excellent and well-written article. I do wonder if Slovic’s idea of a new approach to risk assessment and risk decision-making will turn out if implemented. I agree that whoever controls how risk is defined will control which solutions will be advanced. It is rather scary because I think it will be hard to take the power from those who now control how risk is defined. I found it especially interesting that White males (well-educated with conservative ideologies) view less risk than do women and non-Whites. A future study might include an examination of how age, religion and social class would affect risk assessment.
**RISK COMMUNICATION**

Reference:

Summary:
Earthquake prediction science and technology emerged out of the "Good Friday" quake that occurred near Anchorage, Alaska in 1964. One important focus of the book is to discuss how earthquake events shaped and increased a scientific and technological push toward improving prediction ability. The book gives the reader an historical overview of large earthquakes, their causes, and the location of earthquake-prone areas in the United States. The authors also discuss the evolution of policies and the actions that reduce risk. Another focus of the book is on the Parkfield earthquake prediction experiment; this research explored how people react to earthquake risk and under what circumstances does the public take heed. Findings from the study showed that the public needs continual reinforcement of warnings, as well as, educational and preparedness information that is detailed, specific and personalized. People will more likely prepare when they see others preparing for an earthquake. Also, when people believe there is a likelihood of physical injury or property damage, their sense of risk increases.

Provocation:
The Parkfield study results are specific to earthquakes only, however, these findings may transfer to other types of disasters. This book was published in 1993 so there are likely other studies that build upon this one. The authors cited findings from Robert Stallings whose 1982 international studies showed that trust in government plays a large part in risk perception and when people take action. Stallings also found that risk perceptions vary by social class, race/ethnicity and age. I wonder if more recent studies have found these same differences among children and youth (social class, race/ethnicity and age) and how these differences may impact trust (especially in terms of youth warning others).

Reference:

Summary:
Mitchell, et. al. used two studies; one from El Salvador and one from New Orleans to assess prevailing risk communication models and to demonstrate the valuable potential of children and youths in communicating disaster risks and response in times of disaster. The authors challenge the prevailing disaster management assumption that children and youth are passive victims with no role in communicating risks or preventing and
responding to disasters. Their research methodology included various participatory and qualitative techniques with youths, parents and policy makers. Important findings from the research show the roles of children and youth as potential informants in both informal and formal risk communication networks has been greatly underestimated, however, the findings also highlight children need adult protection. It is interesting to note that while children and youth are in need of adult protective measures before, during and after disaster, their rights should also be recognized so they can significantly reduce vulnerability for themselves, their families and others by communicating risk. Much more research is needed in this area.

**Provocation:**
This paper discusses important findings about children and youth contributions in disaster. It is a challenge to balance the need for protection and to recognize their ability for contribution. More studies are needed (as the authors note) to understand under what circumstances are children and youth considered trusted communicators; how culture influences communications by children to others; how can children/youth influence policies for managing risk; age and the ability of children/youth to influence others in terms of communicating risk.

**RISK MANAGEMENT**

**Reference:**

**Summary:**
In this paper, the authors discuss the ways in which various strategies of risk management affect communities stigmatized by technologies and products such as hazardous waste storage, nuclear power, genetic engineering or communities affected by policies that change their livelihoods from a positive to a negative economic endeavor, such as logging. Gregory and Satterfield argue more emphasis should be placed on the social, psychological and cultural impacts of stigma, rather than on the adverse economic effects. The authors conclude using trade-off analysis and narrative approaches that include all community stakeholders offer the most promise in arriving at effective risk management policies.

**Provocation:**
The community stigmatization issue is a serious one and is not easily resolved. In the paper, Gregory and Satterfield emphasize how the media plays a large part in creating and perpetuating the stigma. The media is not the only interference in the community’s ability to restore itself. State and Federal agencies get involved and the community has little or no say in the outcome. Members of the stigmatized community often feel they
are unimportant and have no control over the events. I think the authors have hit upon an excellent methodological strategy to help the community restore itself.

Reference:

Summary:
This article presents an overview of the major sociological theories of risk, as well as, a focus on risk management in society. Zinn discusses how risk theory has evolved and where it is headed. Major theories discussed are the Douglas’s cultural theory of risk, Beck's risk society and its movement to reflexive modernization, from risk governmentality to uncertainty governmentality, as well as, the systems theory approach to risk. The author views risk and uncertainty as necessarily linked. Risks are viewed as both real and socially constructed, and should be managed on a case-by-case basis. Zinn argues the theoretical approaches should be more integrated.

Provocation:
This article describes the major theories of risk and how they have evolved over time, and how they are similar and different. The theoretical perspectives shape the management of risks. This gives me a better grounding in the sociology of risk theory. There is no mention of how risk connects to disaster in this article but that is not the reason the article was written. I think for me, the take home message is that the approaches should be integrated more. From what I have read so far, the sociology of risk and the sociology of disaster have not yet been integrated to any large extent. I do see there is a connection between them and fully expect to see more studies connecting the two sub-fields in the very near future.

*RISK PERCEPTION*

Reference:

Summary:
Freudenburg’s central argument is that while risk assessment is considered a physical and natural science domain, social science can make some valuable contributions. Social science has the expertise to analyze and increase understanding of public perceptions about risk. In addition, social science has the quantitative tools to achieve a greater accuracy for calculating risk consequences and probabilities, and identifying potential biases created by risk assessment procedures. In essence, his argument demonstrates that had social science knowledge about risk assessment and potential
biases been applied during the decision-making process of whether or not to launch the Challenger, the disaster could have been averted.

**Provocation:**
The author cites many important examples, such as the space shuttle Challenger disaster, where social science can contribute to better understand the social factors affecting risk assessment and identifying biases that occur. Freudenberg does an excellent job in showing how risk assessment should include the domain of social science, because of the human factor in conducting risk assessment. He devised a ‘warning signs’ decision-making matrix that could be used by a board of trustees to critically assess and evaluate recommendations put forward by experts.

**Reference:**

**Summary:**
Greening and Dollinger wanted to understand how adolescent teens perceive weather phenomena risks and how to use this knowledge to improve hazard management. In this study, the authors looked at how adolescents rated the risk of lightning fatalities relative to tornado deaths. Their findings were that the teens that actually experienced both accidents in tornadoes or lightning strikes are more likely to be more realistic in their perception of risk. Those who had not experienced a weather-related accident were more likely to underestimate the risks for lightning strikes relative to tornado events. The authors cautioned against using these findings in risk management strategies until further studies can be done.

**Provocation:**
It is not a surprise that those youth having little or no experience with weather-related accidents are likely to be unrealistic in terms of risk. I believe that follows on how adults also perceive risk. It is a useful study because future research can focus on how people can be better educated to understand the risks and be more realistic in their perception. One issue is that education must be recurring because people tend to forget or dismiss the risks. Also, the media perception of risks must be in line with the educational information. The present focus on educating the youth in school is a promising solution.
Reference:

Summary:
This study replicates and extends their previous research efforts to assess the effectiveness of hazard education programs for children and youths in terms of risk perception and mitigation, and emergency planning activities. Their original research found no differences between children unexposed to hazards education and home based readiness activities from those exposed to hazards education hazards and home-based readiness activities. One noteworthy drawback of the original data collection is that it was based solely on children’s reports. This recent exploratory study adds an “interactive” perspective that includes participation by the both the children and their parents, adds an increased range of hazards, and samples a larger number of schoolchildren. Participants included 560 school children from three primary and secondary schools in Auckland, New Zealand. The sample included an almost equal number of males & females, and was diverse culturally and ethnically. Survey methods included a self-administered questionnaire for older children and the adults, while the younger children responded to questions read aloud. The authors argue the overall research findings provide empirical support that show providing hazard education programs helps families and communities be more prepared for a range of hazardous events. The data suggest hazards education programs can help children become more aware; have more realistic perceptions of risk; have increased knowledge about risk mitigation; and children are likely to share the hazard information at home. The authors note a major limitation of their research is its correlational and exploratory nature; however, they believe their efforts should be an encouragement for other researchers to conduct further research.

Provocation:
Hazards education increases awareness in children; helps them to be more knowledgeable and more realistic about risks and risk mitigation. The findings can be useful in policy recommendations and to support other research showing children can take active helping roles before, during and after disasters. Other studies should be conducted to see if the findings hold true in other geographic and cultural areas and under different types of hazards.

Reference:

Summary:
Slovic reviews various research approaches to risk perception. In particular, he examines the psychometric paradigm approach and its ability to aid in understanding and anticipating public response to risk. His findings demonstrate there are differences in risk perception among the lay public, experts and decision makers. Experts and decision
makers need to understand and respect the public’s more broad perception of risk. Slovic argues the understandings gained about perceptions for each group should be valued and utilized to improve risk management strategies.

**Provocation:**
This research demonstrates the importance of understanding the differences in how risk is perceived by various social groups. Without an understanding of the different perspectives, it is difficult to find effective risk management strategies. More research is needed in this area and other methodologies should be considered.

**RATIONALITY**

**Reference:**

**Summary:**
The idea of risk has always been with mankind. The authors argue that contemporary risk is not a matter of the number or kind, but instead, a matter of the language we use to talk about them. Our language is highly rationalistic and risk can either be explained or explained away. In this paper, the authors use the example of the Weber's "iron cage" concept as a way to show how the use of rationalization may pose dangers to our democratic society. Their critique includes discussion about the rationalization of risk assessment, risk communication literature and its rationalization, and the recent emergence of risk as a significant theoretical category in environmental social science.

**Provocation:**
The authors make a cogent argument about how our contemporary Western society's tendency to rationalize risk (e.g. how we view the unknown to give us a sense of control and of power over risk) may or already have endangered our democracy. The authors argue "the language of risk is largely owned by the wealthy," and it has become a political tool to further their own interests.

**Reference:**

**Summary:**
Most studies of risk perception have been focused on how individuals perceive risk. Freudenburg emphasizes that little attention has been focused on institutions that are responsible for risk management. Specifically, he argues the current division of labor may increase societal risk vulnerability because of the concept of “recreancy” where either individuals do not carry out their assigned duties to the level of expectation, or the
broader system is ineffective. In other words, he argues that the failures of others (technological experts, for example), increases society’s vulnerability to risk. Recreancy as a risk concept is more related to modernity because life expectations are longer; however, the risk of failure by ‘others’ increases because of the division of labor. His analysis of survey data from nuclear waste facilities concludes that the recreancy concept provides significantly stronger explanatory power than individual characteristics of perceivers. Freudenburg emphasizes that more research and theory development are needed.

**Provocation:**
I enjoyed reading this paper and found it quite thought provoking in how the modern division of labor and the failure of others contribute to a different kind of risk than in pre-modern times.

**Reference:**

**Summary:**
Wildavsky argues that risk perception in contemporary society is higher than ever before in history and he asks what has changed? Is it society or is it our environment where risk has increased? His main point is that perceived risk outweighs real risk. What is feared or not feared are cultural constructs. He warns that being so overly cautious about technological risk may stifle scientific progress and we shall end up being less safe than before. There will always be some risk but it is not possible to attain a risk-free world. Wildavsky wonders if man would be able to conceive of risk as a social phenomenon. In his view, contemporary society has socialized risk to the point it requires a collective government response; however, at the same time, trust in government is very low. At the collective level in society, risk allocation is bound up with economics and politics.

**Provocation:**
This article was written in 1979 and its argument certainly appears valid today. Viewing risk from a historical and cultural perspective, I certainly agree that risk is socially constructed. I do see how excess caution about technological risk could stifle scientific progress but I also believe that who controls the perception of risks also controls the direction scientific progress may take.
**RISK THEORY**

*Comparisons of Culture, Governmentality and Functionalist Theories*

**Reference:**


**Summary:**

Luhmann's reason for writing "Ecological Communication" was to clarify how society itself becomes aware of environmental risks. He explains the process through his complex functionalist or systems theory approach to society. In opposition with most social theorists, Luhmann argued that communication was the "fundamental unit of society, not the individual human actor." Thus, for Luhmann, the social system was key in communicating understandings about society and not humans. Further, because social subsystems cannot communicate outside of their own binary code, the system cannot resolve the ecological problem and therefore unable to communicate risk. Society and social systems only perceive differences between themselves and their environment and are not responsive to outside disturbances. Luhmann argues the solution for communicating risk resides in an environmental ethics that does not yet exist in the social system.

**Provocation:**

Luhmann's theory is very complex and not easily understood. On one hand, his theory leaves the reader to wonder if the environmental ethic will appear too late for humanity. On the other hand, his description of the workings of the social system and its environment implies that eventually excessive ‘disturbances’ will set in motion what is needed to bring forth the requisite environmental ethic. Reading this book was helpful to me in terms of understanding the communication of risk from a functionalist perspective. I believe reading this book was also important to expand my understanding of the sociology of risk and its theoretical underpinnings. Luhmann's theory is also considered one of the three most important ones connected to the sociology of risk as a discipline.

**Reference:**


**Summary:**

Lupton wrote this book to examine the reasons why risk has risen to such prominence in contemporary western society, and how people give meaning and deal with risk. In her analysis, she describes and critiques three major contemporary theoretical perspectives on the sociology of risk. There is a "risk society" as portrayed by Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens; a "cultural/symbolic" risk based on the writings of anthropologist Mary
Douglas; and, a "governmentality" risk perspective based on Foucault's work that has been advanced by social theorists such as Robert Castel, Francois Ewald and Mitchell Dean. Each of these three types of risk perspectives have led to different ways of understanding and perceiving risk by a society.

**Provocation:**
This was an excellent book that highlights major contemporary western theories about risk. Lupton's critiques were insightful and helped me to understand what meanings people may attach to risk, and under what circumstances they act or react to what they perceive as risk. The idea that there are both macro and micro social processes that affect the perception of risk may seem rather obvious, but indeed, knowledge about these processes is still unfolding in understanding risk. Of particular interest, Lupton emphasized how being labeled "at risk" may serve to reinforce powerlessness or marginalization for those populations. She includes children and youth among the social groups that are part of the "at risk" population.

**Reference:**

**Summary:**
Wilkinson critically compares the social risk theories of Ulrich Beck and Mary Douglas. His major argument is that the risk theories proposed by Beck and Douglas are "indispensable" because they allow us to make sense of our concern with risk using "ideal type" categories. Douglas views risk as being connected to culture and symbolism, while Beck views risk as primarily socially constructed and connected to the transformation of society. The author faults Beck and Douglas for not disclosing their "political value judgments" up front. Further, Wilkinson points out their theories are "not sufficient" to provide us with a complete understanding of risk because both Beck and Douglas fail to take into account the empirical research accumulated thus far.

**Provocation:**
Interesting take on the two risk theories proposed by Mary Douglas and Ulrich Beck. The author clearly shows how theory and accumulated research can be at odds with one another. It also shows how bias cannot be eliminated by social scientists and the importance of stating one's bias at the outset.
Constructionism

Reference:

Summary:
This book describes Beck's theory of risk in contemporary western society. He argues that western society is undergoing a change from an industrialized society that has elevated wealth, expansion and a worldwide development of natural resources toward a "risk" society. A "risk" society is one in which the society has become "reflexive," meaning that a societal reaction to the current risks (these are as Beck notes "hazards and insecurities induced and produced by modernization itself") is occurring. Modern risks produced by industrialization and technology are global, will affect future generations, and no one can be held accountable. Society must deal with these risks, thus forcing social changes to emerge that affect the relationship between the social structure and social agency. The upshot of this is society reacts to the increased risks---causing a weakening of social ties in which individuals take on more capacity to make their own choices. Thus, there is less reliance on interdependence on others in society and a trend toward individualization.

Provocation:
In terms of my research, the theory of risk, and how people perceive and act upon it is relevant here. The fact that Beck does not discuss natural disasters in his book was likely a purposeful omission because he argues that industrialization and technology have created a human-caused risk society. Although humans also are responsible for factors that increase disaster risks, I believe Beck wants to focus on man-made technology in conjunction with western economic policies and how those policies are globally felt. In this case, he views risk as socially constructed.

Reference:

Summary:
Stallings argues risk perception is socially constructed. He explores media discourse dealing with risk and safety after a New York interstate highway bridge collapsed in 1987. The paper analyzes the developing story by the New York Times and noted how explanations for the bridge collapse evolved over time. Stallings identified and compared the causal explanations for the bridge collapse by experts and other sources. He emphasized there were obvious omissions from the media discourse in reference to explaining the possible causes of the collapse. Thus, he demonstrates that the media is dependent on certain resources for their information and do not seek alternate sources.
The public discourse limits what is known and can be known about a particular risk or disaster event.

**Provocation:**
Stallings effectively demonstrates how the media reports on risk and public safety events shape perception. Although he used one bridge collapse example, I think he effectively shows how the media gathers information from some sources and excludes other sources to depict an event. While the media may not purposely exclude some resources over others in reporting these events, we are able to see how public discourse is shaped by the information that becomes public. The important take-away here is that what we know about risk is shaped by media discourse and that discourse influences how risk is perceived, assessed and managed.

**Reference:**

**Summary:**
This article's main argument is that the sociological study of risk should focus more critically on the ways in which risk and power are related. Tierney proposes using a social constructionist approach by researchers to examine how organizational and institutional forces shape positions on risk, safety and power as dynamic properties of social systems, and the social forces that produce and distribute risk. Little research has been done in this area; however, she notes the closest research to looking at how institutions and organizations affect risk has been done by Ulrich Beck and Niklas Luhmann, but notes that neither address natural disasters. Tierney emphasizes that sociology can make unique and valuable contributions to the study of risk.

**Provocation:**
I liked that Tierney defined risk, and addressed current theoretical perspectives dealing with risk. This article relates to my area of interest because I need to understand in what ways the sociology of risk and the sociology of disaster are connected and overlap. The insights I gained from reading this were that risk and vulnerability are connected; that power, organizations and institutions shape the perception and allocation of risk; and in the same way, power, organizations and institutions shape the outcome of disasters.
ORGANIZATIONAL RISK PRODUCTION

Reference:

Summary:
This paper by Clarke and Short reviews and evaluates key issues, debates, and theories relating to the sociology of risk. A major focus of this paper is on organizations and institutional contexts in creating, assessing and responding to risk. The authors highlight the key issues with organizations and institutional contexts that include trust and risk, human error, normal accidents, and high reliability. Clarke and Short also point out promising research areas such as the social distribution of risk, cross-cultural studies, social movements, and organizational risk perception.

Provocation:
This paper was very useful and informative to me. Before I started reading about the sociology of risk, I really had a very limited knowledge of how broad the field is. It definitely is a growing field and as I see it, often it overlaps and links with disaster research.

Reference:

Summary:
In this paper, the authors argue that organizations incur a greater risk for failure because inconsistent goal differences between engineers and managers can result in ‘fine-tuning’ processes. Using the space shuttle Challenger disaster as an example, Starbuck and Milliken demonstrate how the repeated successes of past launches, a gradual acclimatization, and the different responsibilities of engineers and managers led to catastrophic failure for NASA. The issue of ‘fine-tuning’ refers to the O-ring seal safety controversy between management and engineers. Attempting to fix the problem led to oversights because a history of repeated successes and gradual environmental changes alter decision-making beliefs about probabilities for future success.

Provocation:
This paper by Starbuck and Milliken was really interesting. It made me think about how organizations affect behavior between different groups and how it can affect decisions and in this case a extremely important decision about risk. It certainly also relates to the Freudenburg’s paper on risk and recreancy where the division of labor and decisions by ‘others’ increases vulnerability to risk.
Reference:

Summary:
Weick argues that high-risk organizations can become high reliability organizations by successfully combining a centralized and decentralized approach. Using three highly technological and complex high-risk organizations, he demonstrates how their catastrophic failures involved issues of reliability. Weick argues that organizational culture plays a significant role in centralization because culture can impose order. While standard operating procedures typically are used as a centralization measure, culture adds a component in terms of how humans interpret, improvise and react. Before decision-making process can occur among the various organizational actors, centralization must occur such that everyone operates under similar assumptions. Once the organizational actors are operating under similar assumptions, then a decentralized approach can be implemented that allows for independence and autonomy to achieve a highly reliable decision-making process. In this manner, a high-risk technological organization can make highly reliable decisions that substantially reduce risk.

Provocation:
This article was interesting and made a lot of sense in terms of how culture or socialization processes have the ability to reduce risk. Some examples he cited about the Challenger disaster were especially interesting----the difference between face-to-face versus telephone conversations among the engineers and management, and how important non-verbal cues are in high-risk environments. Had some of those conversations taken place face-to-face, rather than by telephone, it is possible the disaster would not have happened.