

Disability Studies and Disaster Services: Putting the “DS” in “DS”  
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**Abstract:** This article is a synopsis of articles found in this special issue of the *Review of Disability Studies* that focused on disability and disaster. In this article, information is gleaned and summarized from all the historical, research, and current events discussed in this issue. As part of the synopsis, the question is posed, “How can Disability Studies, as an academic and social endeavor, inform disaster services?” Examples from various articles are provided to inform readers how “DS” (disability studies) might influence “DS” (disaster services).

**Key Words:** disability, disaster, current events

### Introduction

Recent events in the U.S., Canada, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa have raised global awareness about human responses to natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and health crises'. Media images of the political turmoil in the Middle East, the tsunami in southeast Asia, the Al Qaeda attacks on New York City, the ice storm in Quebec, Hurricane Katrina in the U.S. South, and the African AIDS crisis have reinforced notions that humans are still at the mercy of nature and other humans, even when their lives appear tranquil.

To this end, this edition of the *Review of Disability Studies* highlights the efforts of disaster response teams to curb the deleterious effects of unplanned incidents. As we learn from all of our authors, the effects of natural disasters, human tragedy, and health crises' are exacerbated by impairment and by inappropriate responses to persons with special health, mobility, and communication needs. The authors of this special issue of *RDS* provide readers with both historical context and first-hand, research-based, and media-inspired accounts of the tragedies and hopeful successes related to the immediate needs of persons with disabilities when unexpected disasters occur.

The issue spans millennia in terms of coverage. Lubet's and Epstein's reviews of ancient texts provide valuable insights into the cultural and religious interpretations of disability that have permeated modern Judeo-Christian and Islamic culture. Lubet's investigation into music, disability, and deliverance in Jewish tradition provides context and a long view of disability in society, demonstrating that disability has been a socially-constructed concept for time immemorial.

The modern critiques found in the pages of this journal are sound, based on evidence gathered using a variety of methods (literature review, first-person narrative, media analysis, surveys, and interviews). Authors, however, move beyond the act of simply critiquing practice to make concrete suggestions for policy makers and disaster response teams regarding future approaches to disaster relief for persons with disabilities.

For example, Epstein takes a cultural-studies approach to contemplating interpretations of disability on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Images of war and heroism are present throughout Epstein's discussion. She demonstrates that both cultures valorize persons who fought in the interests of their homeland and, as a result, became injured and disabled. Epstein quickly points out, however, that the “ordinary” disabled – civilians harmed by attacks from either side, persons who suffered from lack of adequate health care, or persons for whom

disability issues were exacerbated by conflict and poverty, are often overlooked in national discourse. Thankfully, Epstein notes policy approaches in Israel and community-based interventions in Palestine that hold promise for reversing ableist and veteran-centric cultural practices.

Across the Atlantic, Barile, Fichten, Ferraro, and Judd use survey methods to better understand the effects of an ice storm in Canada. The authors found that 70% of their sample had no electricity for two or more days following the 1998 Montreal ice storm. Lack of electricity is an inconvenience (and could possibly be a safety issue) for non-disabled populations. For persons who depend on electricity to power electric wheelchairs or respirators, however, electricity becomes a necessity for movement and the ability to breathe. Barile et al. also discovered through qualitative methods that most of their 15 research participants with disabilities were stuck in their houses throughout the entire ice storm (a notable exception to this was a woman who was dropped at a closed rehabilitation center and subsequently died from neglect). Others endured the discomfort of having to negotiate shelter environments that were inaccessible and over-crowded.

Shelters set up after disasters are not meant to be comfortable, luxurious, or spacious. By nature, they are temporary environments to meet people's most basic needs in the face of disaster. The accounts recalled in this special issue, however, demonstrate that there was little in the design and culture of shelters that indicates that shelters were disability-friendly. Barile et al.'s subjects reported orientation and movement issues within shelters. Barbara White also provides first-hand accounts of the social and informational exclusion experienced by D/deaf Louisianans in the face of Hurricane Katrina. White's on-the-ground report of the failure of shelter personnel to adequately meet the informational needs of D/deaf evacuees is riveting. It appears as if the only people who had any idea how to meet the most basic of needs for D/deaf consumers were deaf professionals, deaf church representatives, and sign language interpreters. Without the presence of these professionals and community representatives, otherwise capable evacuees would have been left uninformed about the storm's progress and unaware of how to obtain food and services at disaster-relief shelters.

White's frustration and exasperation with the bureaucracy of disaster relief were evident in her article. Her inability to travel quickly to the disaster region and her insistence that people with low-incidence disabilities are an important piece of the evacuation equation are noteworthy. For those who were not a part of the evacuation of Hurricane Katrina, it is easy to imagine the triage approach to evacuation and temporary shelter. Relief workers were forced to make difficult decisions and provide whatever they could to the people they could reach. The communication needs of D/deaf Louisianans may not have been the top priority of relief workers in the hurricane-affected area. To those affected by the disaster, however, communication is vital. The response of the Louisiana School for the Deaf, Gallaudet University, and the Woodhaven Baptist Deaf Church (in Texas) provided examples of how simply having ASL interpreters and captioned television available to evacuees is vital to their emotional and physical well-being.

The countless examples of "deaf helping deaf" found in White's articles provides readers with an epistemological reminder of the essence of Disability Studies (DS) as an academic endeavor. Disability Studies scholars frequently take the approach that learning about disability comes from the experts – persons with disabilities themselves (Epp, 2001). Indeed, when White exclaims that the most effective relief organizations for D/deaf Louisianans were Deaf Churches, Deaf Schools, and Deaf Universities, we are reminded of models of empowerment within other

disability communities (Fleisher & Zames, 2001). In these models, persons with disabilities take charge of needed services to produce needed outcomes. Indeed, the emic perspective of disability is one that appears to be missing from large disaster relief endeavors, but one that could improve outcomes.

### Disaster and Social Model of Disability

Viewing disaster relief from the lens of a social and empowerment model of disability provides important steps forward in our knowledge about disasters and related services. Lubet and Epstein both demonstrate that disability as a socially-constructed concept is not a contemporary invention. The seeds of modern civilization were sewn in the plains of Eastern Africa, the Indus Valley, the Americas, and the Middle East. From the Middle East came two historically-similar but contemporarily-contested cultures: Judaism and Islam. Lubet describes the heroes of war, the impaired musicians, and the tension between impairment and ability found in the Psalms and prayers of the Torah. The exodus of the Jews across the deserts of the Middle East was punctuated by stories of persons with a variety of impairments who were central characters in the development of a culture. Lubet's inspection of ancient texts helps us to better understand the meanings of disability across millennia in order to better understand meanings today.

Such meanings are further pondered by Epstein. The author's investigation into modern and historical interpretations of the Torah and Koran provided readers with perspective on a group often forgotten in modern cultural disputes – persons with disabilities. Epstein aptly points out that persons with disabilities have been viewed as heroes or helpless, have been exalted or ignored by both cultures historically – and continue to be today. It is only in recent years, according to Epstein, that Israel and Palestine – as societies – have broadened their views of social inclusion and empowerment to include people with disabilities who are not war or Intifada veterans.

Similar to those recently ignored in Israel and Palestine, Barile et al. note, that persons with disabilities were largely ignored in the Montreal Ice Storm. Likewise, White notes that when D/deaf populations were evacuated in the U.S. Gulf Region following Hurricane Katrina, the responses to the communication needs of D/deaf populations were largely inadequate. Responses from Montreal and New Orleans did not fall into the medical model vs. social model tension typically found in Disability Studies literature (see Ballan and Sormanti in this issue). Rather, in Barile et al. and White's accounts, there appears to be *no* model or awareness of disability. The needs of persons with a variety of impairments appear to be ignored in the face of a large-scale humanitarian crisis.

A social model of disability, then, may provide important information for model-building for disaster relief. Four articles in this issue describe, in detail, how a social model of disability may inform disaster relief services in the future. In the first article, Christensen, Collins, Holt, and Phillips provide an important discussion of the built environment and the ability of individuals with disabilities to exit in the case of disaster. Much of the research cited by Christensen et al. was “medical model” research (i.e., measuring the physical capabilities of persons with disabilities and, at times, pointing out deficiencies). The authors, however, take an interesting stand in their conclusion and find problems in environments – not people – as limitations for egress.

The authors never use the term “universal design,” but carefully lay out an argument for more universally-designed environments (Mace, 1998) that consider both the physical accessibility of persons entering and the ability of a person to exit, if needed, from that environment. The authors’ approach of taking environments to task is refreshing, and their review of the literature provides architects and building code policymakers ways of promoting maximal egress for persons with a wide variety of impairments. The authors focus on removing barriers illustrates an important point – that fires, tornadoes, hurricanes, and other disasters do happen. Environments set up so that egress is differential between persons with and without impairments are as egregious as those that set up differential access to those attempting to enter a structure.

Christensen et al.’s literature review provides important points about disasters – that proactive steps need to be taken before disasters occur and that such steps need to provide persons with disabilities the same opportunities as their non-disabled peers. The authors frame issues of egress as a policy concern, but note that important legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act has done little to push the egress research agenda forward.

Egress is one piece of a larger focus that human service agencies must consider when planning for disaster relief. In this issue, Hemmingway and Priestley use the tsunami in Southeast Asia and Hurricane Katrina to provide readers with broad-based suggestions on how to implement disaster relief from the perspective of a social model of disability. In their article, the authors challenge notions that persons with disabilities are vulnerable because of physical limitations. Rather, the authors note that “vulnerability” may be as much a social construction as disability itself.

To support this thesis, Hemmingway and Priestly cite social organization theory, which is grounded in the assumption that vulnerability is evident as a result of interactions between humans and their environments. According to the authors, vulnerability to natural disasters has as much to do with the environments humans live in, and present economic conditions, as the natural forces that bring about disasters. Specifically, Hemmingway and Priestly note that persons with disabilities are among the poorest people on earth. Eighty percent of people with disabilities live in low-income countries (Asian Development Bank, 2000), making disabled populations among the most affected by poverty in the world. Because of these and other factors, Hemmingway and Priestly aptly note that major climatic events are to disaster as impairment is to disability, i.e., according to social theories of disability, impairment only becomes disability when coupled with environmental barriers. Likewise, major climatic events such as hurricanes or tsunamis only become disasters when they interact with human settlement. Vulnerability to disaster is increased when one has little access to pre-disaster environments. In times of major natural disasters, the everyday environment is minimized, thus increasing barriers for persons with disabilities.

According to Hemmingway and Priestly, barriers to evacuation and shelter for persons with disabilities exist in a number of areas. One primary area of concern is in the immediate evacuation of persons with disabilities from disaster areas. In Southeast Asia, the accessibility of escape routes and evacuation planning for persons with disabilities were problematic. Eyewitness accounts reported by the authors alluded to people waiting in vain for help, some suffering tragic deaths by drowning. In New Orleans, access to electricity was a major barrier, causing people in electric wheelchairs and who use other electricity-powered devices to become immobile or even die (as was the case for people who needed dialysis machines).

Those who did find shelter faced a new set of barriers, from inaccessible information to inaccessible physical environments. By contrast, relief efforts led by persons with disabilities themselves (or allies in advocacy organizations) in both the United States and Southeast Asia appeared to be successful in assessing and providing evacuation and shelter efforts for persons with disabilities. This finding echoes White's first-hand account of deaf organizations' successes in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. In summary, Hemmingway and Priestly find that "for the people, by the people" (Werner, 1994) approaches may have relevance beyond matters of social justice and extend to practical endeavors such as disaster relief. The accounts of Disabled People's Organizations' ability to use formal and informal networks to meet the disaster relief needs of persons with a variety of impairments demonstrates that one plan does not fit all in times of crisis. Rather, as noted in Barile et al. and White's essays, the experts on disability and evacuation are those who are disabled and in need of evacuation. This socially-grounded approach appears to have been missing from the ethos of relief organizations worldwide.

### The Time Continuum of Disaster

For the purposes of this issue, many authors discuss disasters as *events* in time. Such perspectives are necessary from the practical position of planning and responding to climatic or human-caused disasters. Lubet, Epstein, and Behling, however, discuss disaster polytemporally, i.e. as ongoing events that encompass ancient, modern, and future times. From an ancient perspective, Lubet notes that Jewry has a long history of imposed and natural disasters for which music has been, alternately, an icon of memory or a means of catharsis. Such methodology has been largely more inclusive than other social institutions such as politics and leadership in temples.

Epstein as well points to the long history of violence in the Middle East that, sadly, appears to have no end in sight. This human disaster is an ongoing reminder that "disaster relief" as a field may be as much about mitigating human conflict as it is about levees and temporary shelters. Behling concurs, describing the tragic HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa, which is as much an indicator of social oppression in Southern Africa as it is a medical emergency.

Contributors to this special issue who focus on disaster as an event capture an important facet of disaster relief – the continuum of time from preparation to long-term grief recovery is also longer than the unitary event of disaster. Christensen et al. carefully lay out arguments for why preparation for disasters is essential, and why such preparation needs an explicit disability focus – not in the isolation of characteristics of impairments but in the close examination of built environments. Barile et al. and White use a snapshot approach to describe events immediately following major natural disasters. Their timely feedback on important issues such as shelter and communication provide food for thought for readers on important disaster relief issues. Hemmingway and Priestly expand upon these thoughts, contributing theoretical substance to the need for social model of disability perspectives in disaster relief efforts and a re-examination of the meaning of "vulnerability."

Long after the shelters have emptied and the media has gone home, however, the issues associated with the loss of home or loved ones endure. Authors Christ and Christ examine the grief patterns found in young children with learning disabilities who lost a father in the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center of New York City. Christ and Christ's theoretical positioning is sound. According to the authors, there is little understanding of how children with disabilities cope with the loss of a loved one. While there is ample literature on children's grief, the authors

are concerned that children with disabilities may have unique needs and coping strategies. In their article, Christ and Christ examine how children with learning disabilities cope with the loss of their firefighter fathers. The selection of children with learning disabilities as a subject matter was an interesting one for this journal. For scholars interested in K-12 education, the study of learning disabilities is particularly germane. This label, more than any other, is often seen as justification for special education services in K-12 schools (Education Week, 2004).

Christ and Christ are interested in the grief and mourning patterns of four children with learning disabilities in a post-9/11 counseling program. Their findings indicate that “helping professionals” were very helpful to the children. Despite Disability Studies and sociological critiques of the helping professions and their ineffectiveness, stigma-producing behavior, and sometimes egregious motivations (Goffman, 1963), Christ and Christ find that special education teachers were very helpful in catalyzing productive grief responses for the research subjects. Furthermore, the careful documentation of students’ academic progress and emotional well-being that was associated with the children’s special education services helped children to progress through stages of grief better than their non-disabled peers (whose manifestations of grief may have gone quietly unnoticed).

Christ and Christ’s final arguments are compelling. Their first argument is that schools as communities can be important in aiding the grief processes for survivors of disasters. The authors argue that schools can provide essential social and academic supports to students who are affected by disaster. It is important that this line of research continue in the current era, where students are expected to participate in high stakes assessments. The social supports provided by school personnel allowed students to carry forward with their academic and social lives.

In conclusion, Christ and Christ point out that their research only scratches the surface in understanding how children with disabilities move through the grief process. As noted by the authors, further research is needed in this area, and the long term healing processes of children with disabilities in areas such as Pakistan, Indonesia, New Orleans, and the Middle East are important places to start such research. Children with disabilities may be affected differentially than their non-disabled peers by natural disasters, war, and terrorism. An important factor to consider is how such children grieve in the long term, and how societal response either helps or exacerbates the grieving process.

Grief and psychological resilience are also the subject of Ballan and Sormanti’s article. In this article, the authors set forth a series of “best practices” based on research from a variety of fields designed to help persons with intellectual disabilities cope with loss. One of the most poignant recommendations that Ballan and Sormanti make is to avoid “diagnostic overshadowing.” This term refers to the practice of overlooking potentially significant mental health challenges in people with intellectual disabilities because it is assumed that behaviors are a result of a disability rather than emotional reactions to external events.

The authors relate their suggestions to the social model of disability. In this case, the social model is based on the process of dismantling barriers to valuable mental health services after disasters. The authors suggest several approaches to making services more inclusive, including accessible information. For persons with intellectual disabilities, accessibility includes simple language and pictorial representations of information. In addition, political organizing by people with intellectual disabilities may be important for making access to services more readily available to consumers. Finally, Ballan and Sormanti challenge mental health professionals to reassess their own attitudes about disability. According to the authors, two major barriers must be dismantled in order to provide persons with intellectual disabilities with appropriate post-

disaster services. First, professionals must examine their own perceptions about the assumed limited range of emotions that persons with intellectual disabilities may have. Second, traditional approaches to therapy must be examined for how worthwhile they are for persons with intellectual disabilities. The authors' points are relevant in a society that is heavily populated with service professionals. Ballan and Sormanti's call to service professionals to provide service for consumers' sake (rather than for the profession's sake) is grounded in disability theory and has implications beyond disaster relief.

### Societal Reactions to Disaster and Disaster Victims

The social model approaches that Epstein, White, Hemmingway and Priestly, and Ballan and Sormanti propose in this issue are direct responses to societal views of disability. Interpretations of disabled populations as vulnerable or helpless are the direct result of environments that are inaccessible (see Barile et al. and Christensen), communication practices that are not inclusive (see White) or societal misconceptions that place the "blame" of disability on the person with disability rather than society's inability to remove physical, communicative, or attitudinal barriers (see Ballan and Sormanti, Epstein, Hemmingway and Priestly, and Lubet).

Society's understanding of disability comes from a variety of sources, two of which are cultural texts and mass media. Lubet and Epstein demonstrate that disability (although not always with modern labeling) has been a perennial fixture in the ancient spiritual texts that guide two world religions. Our modern sensibilities of disability, consciously or unconsciously, have been borne in the texts that many hold sacred. Understandings of cure, helplessness, heroism, and inclusiveness are, for many, learned in the subtexts of Temple and Mosque.

In secular society, Behling critically examines how media images of the HIV/AIDS crisis in sub-Saharan Africa mirror images proffered by the current Bush administration in Washington. In an attempt to dismantle the "crippling metaphors" of the current administration's media briefings and policies, Behling challenges the idea that AIDS can be stopped via grand behavior modification plans for the people of Africa. Rather, the author notes that policies and programs that encourage abstinence over finding a cure are short-sighted and culturally irrelevant. Behling later explains that viewing the HIV/AIDS crisis as a "war" is equally troubling and is likely to be equally ineffectual. According to media sources that Behling cites, the Bush administration's hard-line "war on AIDS" is misguided and does not reflect the needs of persons living with HIV and AIDS in Africa. Rather, Behling suggests that the HIV/AIDS crisis is far more complicated than that which behavior modification and war metaphors can solve. Rather than simple, prescriptive approaches, Behling encourages readers to consider health care access, the status of women in HIV/AIDS-affected countries, the availability of treatment programs, the stigma attached to persons disclosing their HIV status, access to education (especially for women), and the availability of female-controlled prevention methods (microbicides and female condoms). In essence, Behling recommends a culturally-relevant social model approach to understanding and acting upon the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa.

### Conclusions

Both readers new to the area of disaster relief and readers who are familiar with the literature in this area have something to gain from the diversity of articles found in this special issue of the *Review of Disability Studies*. This issue provides readers with important

considerations to help understand the nature of disasters as they relate to humans with disabilities. Although the articles address a variety of issues, the lessons learned from this issue are broad-based, comprehensive, and enlightening. Three major themes emerge which may be useful for scholars, activists, professionals, and victims of disaster in the near future. We learn that, a) disasters are not fixed events in time (there is much activity that has been and can be taking place before disasters and both short- and long-term effects of disasters on victims, b) social models of disability that examine disability from a systems perspective are useful when thinking about disaster and vulnerability, and c) disaster response involves careful thinking about the needs of victims as well as the deployment of persons with disabilities as ambassadors, translators, and effective support personnel. Such a response is most helpful when it takes a polytemporal view of disaster.

### Disasters Are Not Unitary Events in Time

From the small sampling of articles found in this issue, we find that “disasters” are not events that we can speak of in isolation. Disaster is defined in various ways by our authors: Christ and Christ, Epstein, and Lubet describe the long and culturally-mediated disasters that human conflicts have caused; Barile et al., White, and Hemmingway and Priestly refer to climatic events that were relatively unexpected; Christensen et al. refer to disasters as any event that requires sudden and immediate egress from a built structure, and Behling examines media attention to a slow and consuming health crisis that spans an entire subcontinent.

From these different definitions of disaster comes a better understanding of disaster from a temporal framework. Lubet and Epstein describe disasters as, at times, ongoing. Hemmingway and Priestly describe “disaster” as an interaction between humans and a climatic event. According to Christensen et al., traumatic interactions may be greatly minimized if architects and city planners are dedicated to building for universal egress. In such a case, disaster thinking takes place long before an event typically categorized as a disaster takes place.

Barile et al., White, and Hemmingway and Priestly frame their articles in the time immediately following a major climatic event. In times such as these, human response is critical to the survival of those affected by climatic events. The authors point out that simply finding shelter for people with disabilities is not enough. Housing someone in a shelter that is physically inaccessible, without multiple modes of communication, and without emergency power supplies for wheelchairs or other medical devices is ineffective. The first few hours after a major climatic event are critical to people for addressing the external shock caused by the event. Disaster effects can be minimized when disability perspectives are considered.

Three articles focus on the immediate aftermath of disasters, and two focus on the long-term effects of disasters and associated grief. Christ and Christ and Ballan and Sormanti describe the grief process and how that process must be monitored for persons with disabilities. Christ and Christ describe the successful supports provided by schools for children with learning disabilities and Ballan and Sormanti propose ideas about how to support persons with cognitive disabilities in grief processes. Both articles remind readers that as long as a disaster is a part of a person’s memory and emotions, the effects of the disaster are still felt and the disaster is still a reality. Examining grief is an important lesson in understanding that disasters are not isolated events, but linger in the psyches of victims for years to come.

Finally, Behling and Epstein provide evidence of how disasters remain in the collective psyche of societies through media attention. Behling examines how disasters (such as the



HIV/AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa) are framed by government officials and reported in the media. Social model theorists spurn the idea of blaming an impairment on the impaired, and would prefer to focus on the interaction between a person with an impairment and the barriers they face in society. To this end, Behling points out the shortsightedness of policy statements and media reports about HIV/AIDS stemming from the Bush administration. Behling's critical, systems-oriented discourse reminds readers that disasters are complicated affairs, and have as much to do with the options available to affected persons as affected peoples' behavior choices.

Epstein describes how the sorting of persons with impairments into two categories – heroic war veterans and helpless others – is problematic for those who live with impairments that are likely related to long-standing conflict but not directly acquired in combat. The dismantling of disability hierarchies appears to be an important step in relief of centuries-old “disasters.”

### Social Model of Disability

Each of our authors addresses the social model of disability either directly or indirectly. In sum, this special issue leaves readers with a better understanding of the social model of disability within the context of disaster relief. From this issue we gain a better understanding of cultural understandings of disability (Epstein and Lubet), the disabling effects of environments (Christensen et al.), “one size fits all” disaster relief plans (Barile et al. and White), grief models (Ballan and Sormanti), and media portrayal of disasters (Behling). Our authors all carefully examine disability from a framework of interaction with built and social environments. Our authors each address disaster from the sophisticated worldview of understanding the challenges of having an impairment but deconstructing the myth that vulnerability falls squarely on the shoulders of a person with a disability. Rather, the thoughtful scholarship in each of the articles carefully documents the interaction of persons with impairments in (many cases) disabling environments, and our cultural understanding of disability. From there, White, Hemmingway and Priestly, Ballan and Sormanti, and Christ and Christ recommend further study and action related to framing short and long-term disaster relief in ways that are empowering and relevant to persons with disabilities.

### Disabled Populations in Disaster Relief Roles

Finally, Barile et al., Epstein, Hemmingway and Priestly, and White all discuss the importance of having people with disabilities on the front lines of disaster relief. Such activity is also happening in Africa related to the HIV/AIDS crisis (Kalinaki, 2002), but, as Behling notes, such information is not typically reported in the mainstream media. In planning for and thinking about future climatic and human disaster response, it appears evident that the participation of persons with disabilities is essential. Participation could include (but is not limited to): 1) participating in a critical cultural examination of longstanding beliefs about impairment (see Epstein); 2) advising on egress for built environments (see Christensen et al.); 3) advising and serving as front-line workers in temporary shelters (see Barile et al., Hemmingway and Priestly, and White); 4) participating in group grief counseling approaches and advising social service agencies on the interplay between grief, loss, and impairment (see Ballan and Sormanti and Christ and Christ); and 5) serving as media representatives (see Behling). Ballan and Sormanti, Barile et al., Epstein, and White demonstrate how disaster relief services are less effective when such perspectives are ignored. White and Hemmingway and Priestly, however, provide evidence

of successful relief approaches that involved persons with disabilities. It is evident that services organized by persons with disabilities themselves show great promise.

### Future Directions

We conclude this special issue by calling upon those in the disaster relief fields to assess their thinking about disability as a construct. Disability Studies, as a field, promotes the understanding of disability from a social perspective. Scholars in this field are concerned with empowerment, removing barriers, and the micro, mezzo, and macro-societal implications of impairment and ableism. Scholars contributing to this special issue present both encouraging and frightening evidence of when disability perspectives are (or are not) considered in disaster relief efforts. Based on the evidence in this special issue, we can clearly determine that Disability Studies perspectives (those of social critique, empowerment, accessible communication and environments, and expertise in the lived experience of disability) are not only relevant, but essential in the planning for disasters, the immediate relief thereafter, and long-term coping programs for people affected by disasters. The next disaster to occur in the world is unknown, but it is evident, based on the research in this issue, that putting DS (Disability Studies) perspectives into DS (disaster services) appears to be a promising approach and future direction.

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