

**Hurricane Andrew Through Women's Eyes:
Issues and Recommendations***

Betty Hearn Morrow

Elaine Enarson

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Florida International University
Miami, FL 33199

While gender is a central organizing principle in social systems, limited attention has been paid to differences in the disaster-related experiences of women and men. To address some gender-related issues we conducted a qualitative sociological analysis of women's experiences in the most heavily impacted areas of Dade County, Florida after Hurricane Andrew. Through interviews, focus groups, surveys, secondary data analysis, and fieldwork we document ways in which the private and public caregiving responsibilities of women expanded, often under very difficult and stressful circumstances. Being particularly interested in the intersection of gender with race/ethnicity and class, much of our work focused on minority groups having particular problems with recovery, including migrant workers, recent immigrants, single mothers, and battered women. The effects of household and community losses tended to be different for women and in many respects more profound. Being female was an important dimension which appeared to increase the negative effects of being a victim and to retard personal and family recovery, especially when compounded with poverty and minority status. Based on issues which emerged from the experiences of women victims and careproviders, we offer a series of recommendations to disaster planners to increase the involvement of women at every level of disaster response.

The unique experiences of female disaster victims, survivors, and rebuilders tend to be overlooked in disaster studies. Our work analyzes a major natural disaster through the eyes of women. Is this important? Clearly, women are central actors in the household, a social institution which is in turn central to community structure and process. They are also instrumental at every level of disaster response. Primary responsibility for

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the care of family members throughout the crisis period usually rests with them. Both as paid and volunteer workers, women also serve on the front lines directly interacting with victims throughout response and recovery. We argue that a better understanding of the diversity of their experiences as victims and as caregivers, in and beyond the family, promotes more effective disaster planning. We use the insights of women experiencing Hurricane Andrew in south Florida as the basis for a series of recommendations to disaster planners. A secondary goal is to illustrate the research potential of a gendered analysis for providing theoretical insights into the dynamics of household and community recovery.

Contributions of a Gendered Analysis

Most disaster work assumes a gender-neutral social system in spite of the growing body of research documenting the significance of gender and gender relations in social life (e.g., Hess and Ferree 1987; Epstein 1988; Anderson 1988). The complexities of social structure and culture typically result in different environments and world views for men and women. Thus, there is a gendered dimension to the effects and responses associated with any social event, particularly one of the magnitude of a disaster. Yet, it is important to avoid a simplistic bipolar view of gender as evidenced, for example, by merely comparing men's and women's survey responses. Following Contemporary gender studies, while emphasizing the unique experiences of women and men, reject a universalist analysis in order to explore the complex intersections of gender with other social dimensions such as race/ethnicity, culture, and class (e.g., Zinn and Dill 1994; Collins 1990; Peterson and Runyan 1993; Brydon and Chant 1989; Ward 1990).

To truly understand how households respond to disasters, we need to understand their patterns of domestic labor and decision-making. Without generalizing about women as a class, it remains the case that several basic arrangements persist across a wide diversity of societies and cultures. As mothers, partners, daughters, grandmothers, sisters, and aunts, women continue to do most of the household and family caregiving work (Abel and Nelson 1990; Finch and Groves 1983). An unequal division of domestic responsibility persists even when women participate in the formal labor force in post-industrial societies (Shelton 1992; Hochschild 1989). Paradoxically, a side effect of gender stratification and the devaluation of domestic work is that, even in the most patriarchal societies, males tend to leave many domestic decisions to women (Baber and Allen 1992; Godwin and Scanzoni 1989). And, throughout the world, the number of women bearing total responsibility for households has increased dramatically. In

the United States, for example, female-headed families and female-alone units now make up over 25 percent of all households (Ahlburg and DeVita 1992), and among minorities and the elderly, the proportion is even higher (O'Hare 1992). Thus, input from women is essential to any project dealing with the circumstances or welfare of households or families.

The formal and informal personal services provided outside the household are most often performed by women (Reskin and Padavic 1994). Yet, female subordination and the low status attributed to most caregiving activities extend to gender-based work forces with the result that women typically have limited influence into organizational and community decision-making (Acker 1991). Even in occupations dominated by women workers, such as health and social services, they rarely hold top management positions. The bottom line is, while women play crucial public and private roles, their voices have been largely absent in organizational and community policy-making, including decisions about disaster response and recovery.

The Neglect of Gender in Disaster Research

The effects of gender roles and relationships have been virtually ignored in most disaster research. In contrast, the dimensions of race and ethnicity, culture, and social class are increasingly recognized as influencing how households and communities experience and recover from disaster events (e.g., Phillips 1993; Peacock et al. 1993; Morrow and Peacock 1993; Perry and Lindell 1991; Bolin and Bolton 1986; Lindell and Perry 1992; Drabek and Key 1983; Peacock and Bates 1982). Examples of this awareness include a new multicultural training requirement for American Red Cross volunteers and better representation of minorities on many community disaster planning groups (Morrow et al. 1994; Phillips 1993). Ways in which gender roles and relationships combine with other factors to shape family and community response and recovery are rarely considered, however. Even in the highly gendered household realm, research lacks a comprehensive consideration of this dimension. Attempts to quantify household recovery by measuring domestic assets (Bates and Peacock 1992), for example, usually neglect the human resource of domestic labor, such as the amount of time available for household and family recovery activities.

There are some notable exceptions. In his classic analysis of the Buffalo Creek flood, Erikson (1976) related aspects of cultural and gender identity to disaster response and recovery. Shaw (1989) reported on the extent to which relief efforts after flooding in Bangladesh had different consequences

for men and women. Schroeder (1987) provides an important illustration of patriarchal stratification resulting in greater disaster-related vulnerability for women. Several studies imply that reactions to a crisis may follow traditional gender roles which can limit the effectiveness of these responses (Hill and Hansen 1962; Drabek 1986). While the results have been mixed, some work indicates that wives may more frequently consult with relatives and friends before deciding whether to evacuate (Drabek and Boggs 1968), be more apt to believe a warning (Turner et al. 1981), and to respond (Neal et al. 1982). Women may be more likely to receive kin assistance after a disaster (Drabek et al. 1975). During the recovery period after the Oakland Berkeley firestorm, Hoffman (1993) describes how even highly educated, relatively egalitarian couples displayed a tendency to retreat into more traditional roles, with women doing most of the household-related tasks. Neal and Phillips (1990) document the high degree to which women are active in the community organizations which emerge around disaster issues. Leavitt (1992) describes the efforts of a group of women living in public housing to improve their neighborhood in the aftermath of the Los Angeles riots. The experiences and contributions of women and women's organizations after the 1985 Mexico City earthquake have been well documented (Massolo and Scheingart 1987; de Barbieri and Guzman 1986; Rabell and Teran 1986). With these notable exceptions, however, gender rarely appears even as a variable of analysis in disaster studies and a gendered perspective is almost totally absent from the literature.

Research Design and Methodology

To help address these concerns we conducted a qualitative sociological analysis of women's experiences in the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew in the southern part of Florida. We focused on the implications of gender and the roles of women in preparation, relief, and recovery efforts at both the household and community levels. Data were collected through interviews and focus groups with victims and service providers, observations in the tent cities used for temporary housing, service centers, provider organizations, and at meetings of emergent community groups. We also drew from other projects of the Florida International University Disaster Research Team including over 50 interviews in the tent cities and more than 40 interviews with agency caseworkers. Secondary data sources included agency reports and documents, research reports, and articles appearing in local newspapers. It was not our goal to represent women as a group or to speak for *most* women, but rather to study selected segments of the victim population whose circumstances and experiences add important perspec-

tives on the intersection of gender with other factors. We interviewed immigrant and migrant women from Haiti, Cuba, Mexico and Central America, African-American single mothers and grandmothers, women construction workers, business owners, farmworkers, teachers, social workers, battered and homeless women. This exploratory study was intended to identify important gender-related issues requiring further investigation and policy consideration.

We present a brief overview of the main emergent issues, along with examples of the data on which they are based. While men were affected by many of the same issues, we argue that the impact on women tended to be different and was less likely to be addressed. Our purpose was not only to better understand the circumstances surrounding the daily lives of women victims and providers, but to use their voices to inform ongoing rebuilding efforts, as well as future disaster responses. Therefore, we make several recommendations to disaster planners about how these salient topics might be addressed.

Issues Emerging from Women's Experiences

The family caregiving roles of women expanded dramatically at all stages of disaster response. Most of the women we interviewed prepared their family for the approaching hurricane, including stocking supplies and getting the household ready. Male household members, if present, were more likely to have focused on preparing the outside of the house and property. We found many women who had tried to heed the storm warnings, but lacked necessary resources such as money for supplies, transportation to the store or shelter, or sufficient physical strength to put window coverings in place. We heard one story of the fruitless attempt of several single mothers to protect their public housing apartments. When they couldn't reach the housing authorities, they carried plywood from a nearby construction site and attempted to cover their windows. Fortunately, right before the storm began they walked with their children to the nearest highway and hitched a ride out of the evacuation zone, saving themselves but not their homes and possessions.

Hurricane Andrew resulted in the loss of over 47,000 housing units and the dislocation of 100,000 persons (Metropolitan Dade County 1993). Women were instrumental in relocating these households and resettling family members into new homes and communities—often repeatedly as they moved from one temporary location to another. The stressful, overcrowded living conditions in tents, trailers, temporary rentals, and partially destroyed homes were reported as a major factor in increased family conflict

and health problems such as hypertension and depression. Particularly hard on children and adolescents were the losses of friends, recreational facilities, privacy and personal space, and previously taken-for-granted belongings, conveniences, and neighborhoods. A teacher talked about the fallout effects on parents when teenagers have absolutely no recreational facilities. Over a year after the storm, there were still no movies, bowling alleys, skating rinks, or other recreational facilities within 20 miles of her school. She also commented on the stress produced in her own family because of living in a small recreational vehicle while their house was being rebuilt. *"The lack of privacy really gets on my nerves. We can't get undressed. It's hard to close the door and there's no room to hang up clothes. My son's bed is in the living area so he can't go to bed until we do."*

Loss of the ability to take care of their family was difficult for many husbands and fathers, particularly those with more traditional role norms. Said one social worker, *"Because of their perception of themselves as the protector of the family, this really took a toll on men who had a personal commitment to their family."* Many men, however, seemed unable or unwilling to deal with the hardships of coping in south Florida after Andrew. We heard many stories of desertion or neglect of wives, children, or elderly parents. One social service agency reported numerous crises involving elderly mothers who were forced to live with families who didn't want them or couldn't cope with them. In one case a 77-year-old woman with a heart condition and diabetes was forced to spend the night at a nearby service station after her family had put her out. Another woman was left on the agency's doorstep when her son used their FEMA money to move his family up north, leaving her behind. Funds which were intended to replace the destroyed possessions of women and children were sometimes used, often by men, to buy cars, plane tickets, or personal items instead. Activists in the immigrant communities told of men sending relief monies back home rather than using them to support the recovery of their families here. Some fathers who had formerly been good providers appeared to be immobilized by their losses. One migrant worker linked many related factors in a compelling though bleak portrait of male response as she observed it within her community:

You find the children can't deal with what happened because the father and the mother ... couldn't protect [them]. That role was taken away from them during this hurricane ... So when the children react to this, it's always the mother that has to be there nurturing this child back. The father is buying a few [beers] and trying to forget it. And the mother has to worry about whether

they're going to have a place to live, whether they're gonna have to apply for food stamps, ... whatever.

Women struggled to meet their families' emotional as well as physical needs. Community activists, agency heads, and victims spoke to this point. To quote one relief worker: "*It's been the woman that pulled the family through. And it's the woman that continues to hold it together.*"

Women emerged as the primary seekers of family assistance in the weeks and months after the storm. They took family and friends in and out of shelters, relief stations, application centers, clinics, agencies, and schools. Mothers of young children were especially beleaguered as they sought supplies such as infant formula, supervised children in hazardous and unhealthy conditions and waited in long lines for help, often accompanied by young children. According to the providers we interviewed, men were very visible at disaster assistance centers right after the storm, but subsequent visits during the long application process were more likely to be made by a female household member.

Relief and recovery policies and practices often reflected a lack of understanding of, or respect for, the realities of minority and/or poor women's lives. The *head of household* policy of some assistance programs is based on a family model which ill suits the collective households common among poor and/or ethnic populations. Many women and children failed to receive assistance, either funds or housing, because programs are patterned around small, nuclear households. Our respondents reported that the first person from each address—often men with access to transportation and freedom from childcare responsibilities—received relief funds, sometimes leaving others from the household destitute. It was not uncommon for assistance checks to go to a household member who did not own the destroyed belongings or did not feel responsible for the others who were living at that address at the time of the hurricane.

The lack of buildings and infrastructure throughout south Dade made it very difficult for relief agencies to establish and maintain their operations. This often led to confusion among those seeking help, as well as those trying to assist them. One worker at a referral station described her difficulties in sending clients to the American Red Cross assistance center because it moved three times while she was working there. This constant state of flux was particularly hard on poor mothers who lacked access to transportation.

Even when agencies strive to effectively reach culturally diverse victims, there are many ways in which personnel can fail to provide the best services to victims who differ from them or whose circumstances they don't understand or respect. Gender bias serves to discount the experiences and

opinions of women and leads to policies which fail to recognize the realities of their lives. *"They hear you, but they don't hear you,"* one woman concluded. Many relief workers called to south Florida from distant regions and often unrelated jobs had little, if any, experience working with culturally diverse clients. At various times we heard workers make derogatory remarks about poor minority women's lack of English skills, large families, partners, personal habits, and appearance.

Sometimes fear—real or imagined—hampered the flow of assistance. One resident of a predominantly African-American public housing project described a government inspector who visited her home as being white, hurried, and frightened: *"The guy who came to my house—he didn't stay there ten minutes ... That man, he was just shakin'—and I says, 'sir, are you all right?'"* Fear was also a barrier for some victims. Recent immigrants, especially those who had fled political oppression, were often reluctant to seek public assistance. One Haitian social worker noted that a cultural expectation of female deference, combined with weak English skills and lack of access to mainstream media served to keep many recently immigrated women from seeking disaster assistance. Some mainstream provider agencies were notorious for referring all immigrant victims to migrant agencies with little to offer them.

Women who reached beyond the boundaries of their own homes were crucial to response efforts. They often helped elderly neighbors and friends, either directly or by connecting them with community services. Family daycare providers are an interesting case study. One provider recalled how, just one day after the storm, parents arrived at the doorstep of her partially destroyed home with their children. Her services were the crucial factor in whether they could return to jobs they could not afford to jeopardize. Informal foster parents and caregivers of children and the elderly provide an essential service which is rarely visible and, thus, their post-disaster needs are not likely to be addressed.

It was not uncommon for groups of women to band together to share domestic tasks. We heard an interesting story about a group of Mexican women cooking over open fires for hundreds camped in a remote area. When the military eventually arrived they insisted on taking over the feeding operation. After a "cook-off" in which the people were given the choice of military rations or the ethnic food, the officers reluctantly relinquished their mobile kitchen to the women. Not only did these community feeding efforts provide nourishment, they helped create community bonds to support the draining work of emergency response.

The labor of women as community workers, paid and volunteer, was critical to the recovery. Neighborhood groups initiated by women worked to restore recreational programs and re-landscape public spaces and acted as informal information and support systems. They planned programs to help adults, as well as children, come to terms with their losses and begin to rebuild their sense of social community. For example, in the midst of all the destruction, Haitian women in the Homestead/Florida City area organized a spring cultural celebration to combat the sense of community isolation and despair.

Many social service providers were also victims who returned to work as soon as physically possible after the storm. These workers were most often women with primary homemaking responsibilities who—between the pressures of work and going home to crowded, damaged homes—experienced long, stressful days. One woman who played a crucial role in a migrant advocacy program described how her days typically ended:

And then it's 12:30, 1:00, and you're struggling to find out where your bed is. And then my son is also sleeping in our bedroom ... living in my house are my sister-in-law, my mother, and my niece and my nephew, and my other two brothers and their wives and kids. And I'm like—oh, Lord.

Dade County schools opened just two weeks after the hurricane. Still lacking electrical power or running water and living in partially destroyed homes or temporary shelters, thousands of teachers returned to water-damaged facilities, ruined or lost supplies, and traumatized students and colleagues. The situation was especially acute in the lower grades where female teachers predominate. A daughter described her parents' daily struggle:

My father's ill. He lost his business. My mom's still trying to teach, and they're trying to rebuild their house ... And they've been trying to live in this house with all these little [grand] babies, and she's trying to teach. It's really stressful on her because she has to come home—there's no carpet or anything, of course, the windows were blown out, roof gone, and they're trying to live in one room... [Teachers] are trying to go home and cook and clean and rebuild, and then come to school.

Women victims were especially vulnerable to exploitation and fraud during the recovery period. The struggle for access to recovery assistance and fair treatment from landlords over repairs to substandard or condemned housing was particularly difficult for poor women. An advocate in the

Haitian community told this story of a young mother's plight seven months after the hurricane:

Well, even if you got a [FEMA temporary housing] check where are you going to go? Now a lot of them, what they did—they make deals with the landlord. OK, we stay, we pay you rent, if you fix. So the landlords are getting the money, but they're not fixing. [She had] no electricity, no lights, and she had her 14-day-old baby, and she was paying \$260 rent every month.

Women of all classes were vulnerable. A construction worker we interviewed reported that it was a common practice for unscrupulous contractors to target non-English-speaking female homeowners. While their partners and family members shared many of these problems, the need for advocacy and legal assistance was particularly evident among the women we studied.

The personal safety and security of women and their children became an important concern. We heard many reports of women who felt unsafe in their homes and neighborhoods because of the lack of lighting, accumulation of trash and debris, transient populations, increased crime, and armed and fearful neighbors. Most of the danger came from within their own households, however. While it was impossible to compare reported incidents before and after the storm due to the extent of population dislocation and changes in law enforcement resources and priorities, there was a strong feeling among providers that family violence had increased. Informants described increasingly violent relationships as couples endured month after month in tents, cars, and half-repaired homes. Money, including the dispensation of assistance checks, became a constant source of conflict in many households. The young woman quoted below moved to Miami with her husband just weeks before the hurricane. She describes the increasing stress that led to an explosive physical attack that left her hospitalized:

...the shock of just losing things that got broke in the hurricane—my husband went crazy. He couldn't take the pressure, being used to everything, and then coming down to no eating because we could not find food ... And then he was beating me up ... He really went crazy.

Of the thousands who lost their jobs after the hurricane, women were not as likely to find substitute work related to clean-up and reconstruction activities. Most women hold low-wage jobs with working conditions which allow little job security (Matthaei 1982; Amott and Matthaei 1991), making them particularly vulnerable after a disaster. While a few were able to find work related to the recovery, in general it was much harder for women to find replacement employment. It should be noted,

however, that many local men who were not young, healthy, white, and skilled in the construction trades also had trouble finding good jobs due to the influx of outside labor. Several women reported pressure from their partners to take any available work from while these same men waited for illusive construction jobs. Easily overlooked in the aftermath of a natural disaster are the jobs lost by women employed in the informal or underground economy (e.g., house-cleaning, laundry, child care, the neighborhood selling of produce, housewares, and cosmetics). Many lost work when the homes of their employers were damaged or destroyed. Most women-owned businesses are small enterprises, an unstable sector of the economy in the best of times and particularly vulnerable to disaster loss.

Formal response efforts failed to effectively utilize the expertise and leadership of women and their networks. Even women in traditional relationships tend to define their domestic role as extending beyond their households when necessary to further their families' interests. While women are usually very active in disaster-related emergent groups, their leadership roles tend to be limited, particularly in urban communities (Neal and Phillips 1990). In spite of the community activism and expertise of women in the metropolitan south Florida area, their voices were practically excluded from *We Will Rebuild*, the local organization created to manage the allocation of millions of dollars in private donations and public funds. In protest, a group of community women formed *Women Will Rebuild*, a multicultural alliance which eventually represented more than 50 local women's groups and drew attention to the need to move recovery efforts beyond economic redevelopment in order to address the most pressing needs of south Dade families.

Households headed by poor, minority women have tended to be the last to recover. Low-income neighborhoods and homes tend to sustain the most damage during a disaster (Perry and Lindell 1991; Bolin and Bolton 1986; Phillips 1993) and Hurricane Andrew was no exception (Peacock et al. 1993). Two years later the poorest areas are far from recovered, and thousands of families are still living in damaged, crowded, and/or substandard temporary housing. Every public and assisted housing project in south Dade County was either severely damaged or destroyed—in all nearly 21,000 units were lost (Metropolitan Dade County 1994). There continues to be a dire shortage of low-income housing, particularly for large families. Of the more than 4,000 families provided government trailers and mobile homes, about 20 percent are still living in them (FEMA 1994). According to personnel from the public and private agencies working to help victims

find housing, the families who are left in the trailers tend to be the poorest of the poor, most of whom are minority women.

We have described some recurring themes which emerged from our work after Hurricane Andrew. As a result of this disaster, the private and public caregiving responsibilities of women expanded, often under very difficult and stressful circumstances. The effects of household and community losses tended to be different and more profound for women. Gender was also an important dimension, especially when compounded with poverty and minority status, serving to increase household recovery problems. We acknowledge that men shared many of these same experiences, but argue that their voices were more likely to be heard and that they were better able to move beyond the situation. From the issues which emerged in our work, we offer several recommendations to disaster planners.

Policy Recommendations

1. *Engage women fully in disaster planning and response programs.*

Across economic, ethnic, and generational lines, women are primarily responsible for organizing household resources and, thus, their input should be maximized at every level of disaster planning. Women's expanded and new roles can best be anticipated, acknowledged, and supported when women themselves are active as advocates or participants at every level of disaster planning and response.

2. *Seek ways to more effectively inform women concerning disaster preparation and available relief and recovery services.*

Aggressive campaigns should be mounted to target female audiences for educational materials and information, both before and after disasters. Women's social and church groups are effective forums for programs on mitigation and preparation, insurance, building codes, the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords, and other disaster-related issues. In order to reach the less mobile segments of the population, innovative means are needed to bring information and services into neighborhoods. The effectiveness of the mass media in disaster response has been proven and more programs should be developed to target limited-access populations. A good example our research uncovered was the issuance of portable radios in some Haitian and Mexican communities in south Dade right after Andrew, followed by broadcasts in Creole and Spanish. Hurricane supply lists are routinely printed on shopping bags when the season begins and public education along these lines could also inform families about available post-disaster services.

3. *Anticipate ways in which women will be particularly vulnerable and plan response and recovery programs to address their special needs.*

Disaster planners make special provision for the ill or disabled, the frail elderly, and group home residents. We argue that women, in general, are also more vulnerable to the effects of a natural disaster. And the challenges normally associated with being female in most societies are compounded when combined with poverty, responsibility for young, elderly, ill, or handicapped family members, single parenthood, domestic abuse, noncitizenship status, and/or language barriers. In order to effectively promote community recovery, the special needs of the most vulnerable segments of the population must be clearly understood and addressed. Included among the suggestions we received were drop-in care centers for children and the elderly while their caregivers are involved in cleanup and assistance application activities, shelters for the battered and/or deserted, and larger temporary shelter units for extended households.

4. *Take action to eliminate gender bias from agency policies and practices.*

Many organizations are currently reviewing their programs to more effectively reach minority citizens. We believe it is equally important that they be reviewed for gender bias. Aggressive actions are needed to eliminate formal and informal practices which discriminate against women. In particular, the circumstances of poor and minority women need to be better understood. Such factors as family and household structure, gender domestic relations, and gender differences in circumstances and access to services should be considered when planning qualification and assistance programs. Workers should receive training, on-site briefings, and close supervision to ensure that female victims and their families, regardless of class or race/ethnicity, are treated with respect and receive equitable assistance.

5. *Anticipate the need to supplement or replace services normally provided by community nonprofit agencies and volunteers.*

A heavily impacted community can anticipate the loss of financial support and services provided by its normal volunteer base. Women activists are particularly apt to cease or diminish their volunteer activities because of family recovery responsibilities. When disaster funds are targeted and priorities set, alternative ways need to be sought to replace these important community-building services. Communities, particularly those in disaster-prone areas, need to plan in advance for the utilization of the resources of national organizations to assist impacted chapters. The development of a strong Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) group which is representative of the wide spectrum of community interests is an important step in facilitating the replacement of community volunteers

with supralocal resources. The private agency and government grants typically available to replace lost community services after a disaster should be accessible to local neighborhood groups as well as larger mainstream ones.

6. *Identify and fully utilize the resources of women leaders and their informal and formal networks in the recovery process.*

The private and public roles of women are instrumental in identifying and meeting household and community recovery needs. Women's networks are crucial to the social fabric of every community, yet are likely to be underutilized or discounted. Emergency management programs should facilitate the development of small neighborhood networks which could also be very useful to recovery. At the community level, women's leadership provides a crucial, often unique, dimension which is likely to be ignored if the management of recovery resources is limited to traditional power structures such as business and commercial interests.

Summary

Women do not experience natural disaster uniformly. Clearly, gender is not the only factor influencing victims' experiences. While they typically lack resources and relative power, women are not equally disadvantaged. Low-income women and affluent women did not recover in identical ways. Difficult as they were, the contacts Anglo women had with relief agencies, insurance companies, contractors, and others were less likely to have been complicated by racial or ethnic bias. These patterns of commonality and difference are important topics for disaster researchers to explore.

Our analysis focuses on the circumstances of those most hard-hit and, hence, those most likely to have been negatively impacted. Paradoxically, Hurricane Andrew also brought new opportunities to some women. This, too, is an important topic for future research. We learned, for example, of women earning equitable construction wages, developing new employment skills, and using relief monies to leave violent relationships. The region hardest hit by Andrew had historically been grossly lacking in public and private social services. As a consequence of the hurricane, many poor women and children are currently receiving more and better integrated services. Hundreds of houses for low-income families are being built by organizations such as Habitat for Humanity and new daycare centers and recreational facilities are in operation. Many struggling community action groups and social service agencies have received grants to increase their staff and services. Women have forged new friendships and found new

common ground as they struggled to rebuild their homes, neighborhoods, and communities.

Though less visible than trees, houses, and roads, families and communities also take direct hits when natural disasters strike. While the social component of disasters is well-recognized, we argue that the "gender lens" through which we view the world shapes the experiences of victims and responders in complex ways. Increased attention to this dimension and to the unique experiences of women can help the field at several levels. Following the typology used by Quarantelli (1993), it can provide a neglected theoretical perspective to help conceptualize the social dynamics of disaster response. From a practical standpoint, a better understanding of the circumstances of those most impacted, both as survivors and providers, is of obvious utility to policymakers and disaster managers. Finally, a gendered perspective holds the promise of adding legitimacy to the voices of women and promoting their representation at every stage of disaster response.

Note

1. Represented were the American Red Cross, FEMA, Alliance for Aging, YWCA, VISTA, Catholic Services, Salvation Army, Lutheran Ministries, National Association of Women's Business Organizations, Florida Health and Rehabilitation Services, Interfaith Coalition, Christian Community Service Agency, United Methodist Disaster Response, Metropolitan Dade County Emergency Management, Coalition of Farmworkers' Associations, Centro Campesino, South Dade Immigration Services, Haitian Women's Coalition, Switchboard of Miami, Women and Children First, Legal Services of Miami, Women's Emergency Network, SafeSpace, Parent Resource Center, and the South Dade Family Coalition. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and, when necessary, translated from Spanish or Creole.

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