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QUEER DOMICIDE

LGBT Displacement and Home Loss in Natural Disaster Impact, Response, and Recovery

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ABSTRACT This article examines lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBT) experiences of displacement, home loss, and rebuilding in the face of natural disasters. LGBT vulnerability and resilience are little studied in disaster research; this article begins to fill this gap, focusing on LGBT domicile—how LGBT homes are “unmade” in disasters. To do this, we critically read a range of non-government, scholarly, and media commentaries on LGBT experiences of natural disasters in various settings over 2004–12, including South Asia, the USA, Haiti, and Japan. Additionally, we utilize preliminary data from pilot work on LGBT experiences of 2011 disasters in Brisbane,

Australia, and Christchurch, New Zealand. We find that disaster impacts are the first stage of ongoing problems for sexual and gender minorities. Disaster impacts destroy LGBT residences and neighborhoods, but response and recovery strategies favor assistance for heterosexual nuclear families and elide the concerns and needs of LGBT survivors. Disaster impact, response, and recovery “unmakes” LGBT home and belonging, or inhibits homemaking, at multiple scales, from the residence to the neighborhood. We focus on three scales or sites: first, destruction of individual residences, and problems with displacement and rebuilding; second, concerns about privacy and discrimination for individuals and families in temporary shelters; and third, loss and rebuilding of LGBT neighborhoods and community infrastructure (e.g. leisure venues and organizational facilities).

KEYWORDS: LGBT, disasters, domicide, home, home loss, shelter, rebuilding

INTRODUCTION



This article examines lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBT) experiences of displacement, home loss, and rebuilding in the face of natural disasters. There is little scholarly discussion of LGBT experiences of disasters (Dominey-Howes *et al.* 2013) and the current analysis advances emerging research. The small body of extant literature stresses that “the marginalisation of LGBT people is heightened during disasters, as existing inequalities are magnified” (Balgos *et al.* 2012: 338). This heightened marginalization is precisely why consideration of LGBT displacement, home loss, and rebuilding is important for scholarship, policy, and emergency management. For LGBT people in a range of locations in both the Global North and Global South, the making of home—at both scales of the house and neighborhood—operates as a site, source, and process of resilience in heteronormative societies that are routinely discriminatory and potentially violent (Gorman-Murray 2007a; Waitt and Gorman-Murray 2007). While acknowledging that residential dwellings, for instance, are porous spaces and not outside the surveillance and discipline of social and cultural mores, they often offer one of the most immediate spaces of security and identity-support for LGBT individuals and families (Gorman-Murray 2008).

Our contention is that the “unmaking” of LGBT homes and neighborhoods—their disruption and/or destruction—by disasters enhances

the specific vulnerabilities of these populations in ways little investigated in disaster research, which can arguably be characterized as “domicide” (Porteous and Smith 2001). The impacts of natural hazards are the first stage of ongoing problems for sexual and gender minorities, which are compounded by social peripheralization and policy neglect. Natural disasters not only destroy residential dwellings but also a range of neighborhood structures that provide a broader sense of home and belonging to LGBT populations, including commercial venues and community facilities. Simultaneously, heteronormative response and recovery policies often elide the needs of LGBT individuals, families, and communities, thus impacting on means of resilience (Dominey-Howes *et al.* 2013). The omission of LGBT sites and concerns suggests this practice can be denoted “domicide.” We argue that government, non-government, emergency management, and information and communication organizations must consider LGBT populations when developing disaster response policies. This article thus seeks to extend scholarly knowledge about, and prompt policy uptake of, the role of homes and home losses in LGBT vulnerabilities and adaptive capacities in disaster settings.

The substantive discussion of this article is divided into three sections, each of which relates to a scale or site at which disaster impact, response and recovery “unmakes” LGBT home and belonging, or inhibits homemaking: first, destruction of residential homes, and problems with displacement and rebuilding; second, troubling discriminatory experiences for individuals and families in emergency shelters and temporary housing; and third, loss and rebuilding of LGBT neighborhoods and “homelike” (Gorman-Murray 2006) community infrastructure (e.g. leisure venues and organizational facilities). At each of these sites, we examine both the enhanced vulnerabilities experienced by LGBT people and the means of resilience by which they seek to cope with natural disaster impacts and “remake” home. First, we discuss the key concepts underpinning this exploratory discussion and give an overview of the data sources.

HOME, DISASTER, AND LGBT EXPERIENCES: THEORETICAL FRAMING AND CONTRIBUTION

This article draws together two areas of literature—work on home and disasters—that provide key terminology and theoretical framing. They come together through a focus on LGBT people, and this population helps further understanding of the significance of home and the social construction of natural disasters and their impacts. We use the Western acronym “LGBT,” but this is used inclusively of sexual and gender minorities, including intersex and queer individuals not identifying as LGBT, and those outside the West using local terminologies (some of whom are introduced below). We use LGBT to denote sexual and gender minorities across the world. We use queer, however, as term to disrupt normative social imaginaries, including those of home

and disaster impact and response. Both home and disaster might be experienced “differently” by LGBT people, in ways unaccounted in disaster relief and recovery policies. “Queering” domicile thus contests the meaning of “domicide,” which typically excludes natural disaster impacts and foregrounds the destruction of home by human agents (Porteous and Smith 2001). This, however, belies the fact that natural disasters are a social construct where the existing social order means different populations are made more or less vulnerable, and where disaster response and recovery policies can exacerbate the marginalization of some social groups. We discuss this further in the following subsection, where we outline notions of disaster, vulnerability, and resilience.

“Natural” Disasters: Vulnerability and Resilience

“Natural disasters” are thoroughly social phenomena (Brun 2009). An event triggered by natural hazards is designated a disaster when the cumulative material, human, and environmental losses exceed “the capacity of the affected society to cope with its own resources” (Ginige *et al.* 2009: 23). Natural hazards may be rapid onset (earthquakes, tsunamis, etc.) or slow onset (drought, tropical cyclones, etc.), but “the overall damage due to natural hazards is the result of both natural events that act as ‘triggers’, and a series of societal factors” (Weichselgartner 2001: 86). A disaster, then, is an event that “occurs within society and not within nature” (Weichselgartner 2001: 86), and damages both society’s physical fabric, including housing and infrastructure, and human fabric, including communities and social relations.

Deleterious effects are not experienced uniformly across society but affect various social groups in different ways. Gaillard (2011: 121) indicates that “marginalized groups within society may be more vulnerable than others because they are deprived access to resources which are available to others with more power.” While the meaning of vulnerability is debated (Weichselgartner 2001), it can be defined as the conditions (physical, social, cultural, economic, political) that affect the ability of individuals, families, households, communities, and countries to respond to or recover from disasters (Ariyabandu and Wickramasinghe 2003; McEntire 2001). Differential socioeconomic means are significant in increasing vulnerability, but so are differences based on ethnicity, race, disability, age, gender, and sexuality (Cutter *et al.* 2003; Finch *et al.* 2010; McEntire 2005). Despite acknowledgment of these inequities within scholarship, policies designed to reduce disaster risk often fail to include marginalized populations (Brun 2009; Gaillard 2011; Wisner 1998). Since disasters combine a natural event and a set of societal vulnerabilities (McEntire 2001, 2005), disaster management and risk reduction policies must seek to address the vulnerabilities of all social groups, and consequently there is a need for scholarly

and policy research to examine the needs of marginalized groups. The vulnerabilities of LGBT populations are little studied—a gap this article addresses by investigating natural disaster impacts on LGBT home and belonging.

LGBT populations have specific vulnerabilities, summarized by Dominey-Howes *et al.* (2013) in their review of the limited extant non-government and academic research on LGBT disaster experiences. Right-wing religious groups assert disasters as divine retribution for “sinners” and their supporters (Richards 2010)—claiming disasters as acts of God against sexual “transgression”—which stigmatizes and incites violence against LGBT people (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission/SEROVie 2011). Loss of personal and communal spaces—homes and community centers—exposes LGBT people to harassment (Caldwell 2006; International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission/SEROVie 2011). Moreover, disaster response agencies enact heteronormative assumptions in policies and processes, which marginalize LGBT people from aid (Balgos *et al.* 2012; Leap *et al.* 2007). In government and organizational policies, “family” often means an opposite-sex couple with children, while emergency relief practices deploy binary (male/female) concepts of gender (D’Ooge 2008; Pincha 2008). Emergency shelters, for example, are problematic for LGBT people, especially same-sex couples, “effeminate” males, trans folk, and other gender minorities (Gaillard 2011; International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission/SEROVie 2011; Yamashita 2012). In some instances, sexual and gender minorities have been denied access to emergency shelters and aid (food, finance) as they could not be accommodated in relief policies that framed evacuees as “nuclear families,” or as “male” and “female” individuals.

While these vulnerabilities are experienced at multiple societal levels, from individual safety to political organization, this article addresses displacement and loss of home, including domestic dwellings and residential neighborhoods. Displacement and loss of home is a traumatic experience that affects emotional health and well-being, which has been highlighted in research on vulnerability (Brun and Lund 2008). A sense of home, and breaches to that attachment, are foregrounded in recent research, which has found that individual and social identities are tied to localized places, and that when these locations are disrupted, so too are place identities and attachments (Fraser 2006; Hawkins and Maurer 2011; Morrice 2013). Damage to or loss of home and neighborhood ruptures the routine and reliability of one’s social and material environment, disrupting ontological security, with consequences for mental and emotional health, especially in marginal groups (Chamlee-Wright and Storr 2009). For LGBT populations, the loss of residences, meaningful places, and community infrastructure exacerbates vulnerabilities from social stigma and policy neglect.

But while loss of home intensifies LGBT vulnerabilities, simultaneously LGBT people frequently enact means of resilience in protecting, rebuilding, remaking, or returning home (Gaillard 2011). Resilience is a concept intrinsically linked to vulnerability, which denotes the ability of individuals, communities, or countries to maintain relatively stable psychological and social functioning in highly disruptive events (Bonanno *et al.* 2007; Miller *et al.* 2010). According to the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, resilience is the extent to which a community “has the necessary resources and is capable of organizing itself both prior to and during times of need” (United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction 2009). It is possible for a single disaster event to simultaneously trigger experiences of vulnerability *and* resilience, and this is seen in LGBT responses to disasters. In terms of LGBT populations, resilience may be seen in the capacity of LGBT individuals, media, or community organizations to counter the inequities of response and recovery policies, and introduce strategies aiming to meet the needs of their own community (Balgos *et al.* 2012; Gorman-Murray *et al.*, under review). LGBT people may find ways of retaining or reforging a sense of home, place, and belonging that supports individual and community well-being (Leap *et al.* 2007). We now turn to the concept of home.

Home: Making and Unmaking

What can a consideration of home add to disaster literature, especially regarding LGBT vulnerability and resilience? While housing is a critical concern in disaster recovery (Katz 2008; Thanurjan and Seneviratne 2009), the notion of home is a recent addition to the literature (Brun and Lund 2008; Chamlee-Wright and Storr 2009; Hawkins and Maurer 2011). As Morrice (2013: 33) indicates, “there has been a notable absence in geographic literature concerning the connection between disasters and the concept of ‘home.’” We find utility in several concepts about home, drawing on Blunt and Dowling’s (2006) and Brickell’s (2012) work on the critical geography of home. Brickell (2012: 225), notably, calls attention to “domestic injustice” and the effects of “negative experiences of home.”

First, home is both material and imaginative; both a physical location and an emotional locus. While housing literature focuses on the provision of shelter, home is more than a physical shell—home is a material structure embedded with emotion, meaning, and memory (Blunt and Dowling 2006). Consequently, considering disaster impact and response, Brun and Lund (2008: 278) contend that “when exploring the relationship between housing and homemaking in recovery processes, ‘house’ becomes something that is both material and imaginative (symbolic) and at the same time an articulation of identity and power.” Thus, a home is seen to provide not just shelter and location but ontological security (Somerville 1992)—a safe place that secures and underpins a sense of self-identity and agency (Dupuis

and Thorns 1998). Such ontological security might be heightened for LGBT people given wider social sanctions (Gorman-Murray 2008), but this psychological function of home is not well-incorporated in disaster literature and policy (Brun and Lund 2008; Chamlee-Wright and Storr 2009).

Second, home is not static, materially or meaningfully, but is a process. Home and its meaning are made in everyday activities and routines. But just as home is made, it can be “*unmade*,” with consequences for meaning, ontological security, and well-being. While homemaking is predicated on the agency of occupants, sometimes home is disrupted or destroyed by external forces. Domicide is one example. Porteous and Smith (2001: 12) define domicile as “the deliberate destruction of home by human agency in pursuit of specified goals, which causes suffering to the victims,” including political, bureaucratic, and corporate agendas and projects. While they exclude natural disasters from causes of domicile, Blunt and Dowling (2006) suggest that the collusion of natural disasters and social injustice—as in Hurricane Katrina’s aftermath in New Orleans—could be characterized as domicile. We agree. Given that natural disasters are social constructs with differential social impacts, marginal populations can experience home loss as domicile through uneven preparedness, response, and recovery in disaster policy. The omission of LGBT populations from such policies across the world (Cianfarani 2012; Dominey-Howes *et al.* 2013) thus produces conditions conducive to “queer domicile” through the oversight and failure of human agency.

This indicates, third, that the link between home and identity is mediated by external or public social and political power. As Brun and Lund (2008: 278–9) state, home is “a contested territory: a meeting point between geopolitics and identity politics. [...] ‘House’ and ‘home’ are porous intersections of social relations and emotions, simultaneously public and private.” The agency and privacy of home can be mitigated by dominant meanings and mores, surveillance, and government agendas. For LGBT people, homes are not inherently private but exposed to external sanctions; rather, privacy and safety at home are *made* and incursions continuously monitored (Gorman-Murray 2012). This investment in homemaking in turn gives many LGBT people an important protected space beyond the public sphere for self-affirmation and identity-support (Gorman-Murray 2007a; Kentlyn 2008). This space comes under renewed external pressure during disasters, where policies, often by necessity to distribute scarce resources, ignore marginal populations and their meanings of home. For LGBT people, this is often manifested in policies favoring assistance for heterosexual nuclear family households, homes, and neighborhoods (Leap *et al.* 2007; Richards 2010). “Non-normative” households, including single-person, single-parent, and same-sex households, and non-family neighborhoods and suburbs, are often omitted from policy consideration (Cianfarani 2012; Katz 2008; Wisner 1998).

Finally, but as we have alluded to throughout, home is multiscalar. A house can be a home, but home can register at different scales and sites—streets, neighborhoods, public spaces, cities, and nations, for example. Often a sense of home or meaningful dwelling involves the residential house and neighborhood simultaneously (Hawkins and Maurer 2011). The activities that make a home stretch beyond the house and incorporate the extra-domestic—neighboring, shopping, home-financing, family and friendship networks (Moss 1997). Neighborhood is often vital for making a home: literature shows that attachment to neighborhood—or place-attachment and place-identity—is often part of homemaking and provision of ontological security (Dupuis and Thorns 1998). This needs consideration in post-disaster planning and rebuilding. Even if one’s house survives a disaster, the neighborhood might not, and this equally disrupts a sense of home, self, and security, as shown in various literature on post-Katrina New Orleans (Chamlee-Wright and Storr 2009; Hawkins and Maurer 2011; Li *et al.* 2010). Before discussing LGBT home loss and rebuilding at various scales, we outline the methods and data used.

DATA AND METHODS

This article is based on research that informs a wider project on LGBT experiences of vulnerability and resilience in disasters. The present discussion combines secondary data from various sources. First, the analysis draws on a literature review of existing publications on LGBT experiences in natural disasters, including non-government organization (NGO) reports and scholarly articles discussing the impacts of natural disasters on LGBT populations in New Orleans (D’Ooge 2008; Leap *et al.* 2007; Richards 2010), Haiti (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission/SEROVie 2011), India (Pincha 2008; Pincha and Krishna 2008), Indonesia (Balgos *et al.* 2012), the Philippines (Gaillard 2011), and Japan (Ozawa 2012; Yamashita 2012) over 2004–12 (Figure 1). We also identified and used online media reports from the USA relating to the impacts of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans in August 2005 (e.g. Caldwell 2006; Fisher 2006). We analyzed these media, academic, and NGO publications for information on LGBT experiences of displacement, home loss, return, and rebuilding. Second, we utilized data from pilot work on LGBT experiences of the January 2011 floods in Brisbane, Australia, and the February 2011 earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand. This comprised a review of LGBT and mainstream online and print media reporting the effects of these natural disasters on LGBT communities and individuals, which included New Zealand articles over 2011–12 relating to the Christchurch earthquake and Australian reports over 2011–12 regarding the Brisbane floods.

All sources were combined and subject to a critical reading. This textual analysis extracted key themes about LGBT experiences of home loss and rebuilding as a result of natural disasters, interrogating



Figure 1

Sites of extant work on LGBT disaster experiences. Brisbane and Christchurch are the sites of our ongoing work.

descriptions of “displacement,” “home,” and “return,” and examining how they were linked to themes of vulnerability and resilience. Media and non-government reporting of these events often highlighted a relationship between vulnerability and resilience. The LGBT media often reported vulnerabilities experienced by LGBT populations and then either described or developed options by which to overcome them to some extent. Further, the LGBT media arguably acted as a means of resilience by giving voice to LGBT narratives of home, which were largely absent from the mainstream media. Thus, the LGBT media operated at times to identify vulnerability and to further identify, develop, and enact resilience in relation to home and home loss.

Applying our conceptual frame, this analysis of home and loss incorporates not only houses or domiciles but also neighborhood or community space comprised of other LGBT residents, community organizations, and commercial leisure venues. For LGBT people, home is often a place of relative privacy in which sexual and/or gender identities can be performed, with careful management of the public/private boundary and vigilance about public intrusions (Gorman-Murray 2007a, 2012). Natural disasters cause the loss of this space and thus trouble the safe performance of identity among a cautiously included/

excluded public. Temporary shelters and housing can be especially problematic. The return home becomes, in this respect, not only a return to a physical space but to a means of enabling the performance of LGBT identities. The following discussion is thus arranged around three sites or scales of “*unmaking*” and “*remaking*” home: first, disruption to residential homes, displacement, and rebuilding experiences; second, troubling experiences for individuals and families in temporary shelters; and third, loss and rebuilding of neighborhoods and community infrastructure that underpin a sense of home and belonging.

THE HOUSE-AS-HOME

Applying a critical reading of home as both physical and affective, we can understand that the loss of individual domestic residences—or the house-as-home, including houses, apartments, and other domiciles—in disasters has impacts that are both material (destruction or damage of physical structures) and emotional (place attachment and a sense of belonging). As Morrice (2013: 34–5) argues, “[t]hose who are displaced by these extreme events are forced to leave behind the familiar and head towards the unknown, in a journey that is consumed with varying levels and types of emotions.” In this section we examine and discuss the ways in which the *unmaking* of the house-as-home through disaster can exacerbate LGBT vulnerabilities in terms of both physical and emotional well-being. For LGBT people, loss of home restricts the ability to manage intrusion by, or the impacts of, discrimination from broader society. The effects may be both physical (exposing LGBT individuals to the risk of physical violence) and/or emotional (loss of feelings of agency, security, community, and belonging). We also investigate some differences of gender, race, and class within these impacts, as well as means of resilience enacted by LGBT populations in attempting to return or remake home.

Housing Loss, Home Loss, and LGBT Vulnerabilities

While recognizing the ever-present interpenetration of public and private worlds and the need to manage this imbrication, scholarship nevertheless shows that the house-as-home can provide a safe space in which LGBT identities can be performed and developed in an atmosphere somewhat sheltered from a potentially disapproving and sometimes violent world (Gorman-Murray 2007a, 2012; Kentlyn 2008). As Gorman-Murray (2006: 53) suggests, “homes are important sites of resistance to heteronormative socialization, fostering difference, affirming and sustaining gay identity and desire in the context of wider disapproval.” The ability to create a space in which intrusions are managed—and where relationships, friendships, and community can be developed—constitutes a specific means of resilience enacted by LGBT populations in protecting themselves and their families from the impacts of discrimination and harassment (Gorman-Murray 2007b).

Consequently, the loss of houses and residential spaces in disasters can place the benefits of home at risk, thus enhancing vulnerabilities and, at times, placing LGBT populations at risk of physical violence and abuse. For example, according to a report from the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), prior to the 2010 Haitian earthquake the physical shelter and structure afforded by domestic spaces provided local LGBT populations with a “sense of security” by acting as sanctuaries and barriers against homophobic and transphobic violence (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission/SEROVie 2011: 4). The earthquake “destroyed the doors, windows and walls that had previously provided some measure of safety” (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission/SEROVie 2011: 4). According to the IGLHRC, many lesbians and gay men left homeless by the earthquake subsequently reported experiences of physical and sexual abuse. LGBT populations were thus not only forced to cope with the same home loss experienced by the broader population, but the further threat of anti-LGBT violence and abuse.

As well as a place of security for LGBT subjects and their identity work, media reporting of disasters suggests that the house-as-home is a vital location for the maintenance of same-sex relationships—tellingly denoted “domestic partnerships”—given constraints against their performance in public. Reports in the New Zealand LGBT media following the 2011 Christchurch earthquake positioned home as embodying a loving relationship as well as a physical structure. The need to ensure the safety of a same-sex partner and provide solace to each other during the emergency was often framed as the primary impetus for returning home during the ongoing disaster. For example, in two reports in the publication *GayNZ*, disaster narratives described gay couples who were separated when the earthquake struck, with one partner at home and the other away from home. In each case, the individual away from home is depicted as desperate to return. One report states, “Bruce suddenly realised Grant, his partner through thick and thin for many years, was home alone. ‘I had to get home to find Grant’” (Bennie 2011: n.p.). Another article reports that during the disaster, “The pair couldn’t connect. ‘Texts out of New Zealand, from Christchurch at least, never made it. The first time John was able to communicate with me was several days later, by phone’” (Stanford 2011: n.p.). The disaster breached both homes and their constituent domestic partnerships.

Our analysis of New Zealand media reports about the Christchurch earthquake found that narratives inclusive of LGBT households were absent from mainstream (non-LGBT) publications (Gorman-Murray *et al.* 2013). The invisibility of LGBT households indicates a heteronormative understanding of home and domestic life, and of the potential impacts of disaster on home and domesticity. This is surprising in New Zealand, a nation that legislates for same-sex marriage

and the protection of LGBT rights. In this context of marginalization, LGBT media reporting can instead operate as a means of resilience by which the LGBT community renders itself visible. Via this visibility, the home is in some ways queered and remade as a place of LGBT identity, support, and family in defiance of the broader narratives that leave such homes outside the normative sphere.

Gender, Race, and Class Differences within LGBT Communities

As noted earlier, disaster impacts are experienced differently across populations and often have greater impacts on marginalized groups (Gaillard 2011). Uneven levels of impact are thus experienced *within* LGBT populations just as they are across the broader society. Evidence from multiple locations suggests that, in some instances, the interests of white, middle-class gay men may be better served by official policies and by the media than are the interests of, for example, lesbians and/or LGBT people of color. Efforts to return to or remake home may be unevenly reported in the media or may be directly hindered by the discriminatory priorities of government agencies.

For example, D'Ooge (2008) reports that recovery and rebuilding policies in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina have specifically targeted localities likely to encourage the return of tourism to the city, with implications for different LGBT rebuilding efforts. This policy may have been implemented to support the local economy, but it fails to support lower-income residential neighborhoods. D'Ooge (2008: 23) argues that neighborhoods with notable gay male populations, such as the French Quarter, have been targeted as important for rebuilding efforts, in order to “reclaim its gay tourist industry,” “while rendering invisible the suffering of LGBT New Orleanians living elsewhere, consisting predominantly of lesbians and African Americans.”

This invisibility may be reflected—indeed, exacerbated—by the absence of such subgroups in media reports. Although we argue for the importance of LGBT media in expanding understandings of home, domesticity, and household to include LGBT narratives, it is also true that such narratives may also be uneven across LGBT communities. For example, our analysis of reporting in the Christchurch LGBT media found that, in the vast majority of cases, the sexual/gender identity of informants in stories related to the earthquake was gay male (85 percent) (Gorman-Murray *et al.* 2013). Thus, while the LGBT media can play a vital role in illuminating disaster impacts on LGBT homes and households, that role may be disproportionately significant for gay men vis-à-vis other segments of the LGBT community.

TEMPORARY SHELTERS AND HOUSING

During and immediately after disasters, temporary shelters—established by emergency services or NGOs—can provide accommodation to those forced to flee their homes, which may last for the

length of the disaster (e.g. during weather events) or for extended periods if damage to homes prevents safe return. Albeit temporary, these shelters potentially replicate some attributes of home, such as security, comfort, and conviviality (Blunt and Dowling 2006). For example, Datta (2005) documents how homeless families tried to achieve some psychological and symbolic qualities of home, engaging and working with the material characteristics and spatial constraints of emergency shelters. However, for vulnerable LGBT populations, the safety of these spaces can be compromised by fear of abuse. Access can also be prevented due to discriminatory policies or actions by official agents or other residents. Vulnerability is exacerbated by binary-gender emergency management policies that exclude the needs of trans or intersex individuals. As a result, LGBT people often avoid official shelters and seek safe housing elsewhere.

Discrimination, Violence, and Abuse in Emergency Shelters

Given that the house-as-home often acts as safe space for the performance of LGBT identity, where intrusions are managed, its loss seriously troubles that safety. During disasters, LGBT people face the same risks that force other people to seek emergency shelter, but shelters also bear specific risks for LGBT individuals and families. The agency that having a home of one's own allows, to exclude those who would discriminate, is lost in such accommodation, as is the ability to choose when to be visible or not. This exposes individuals to a range of discrimination, including verbal and physical abuse.

For example, Pincha (2008) shows that “third gender” minorities in India were exposed to physical harm in shelters during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The *aravanis* of Tamil Nadu are a group who “may be born intersex or apparently male, dress in feminine clothes and generally see themselves as neither women nor men” (Pincha and Krishna 2008: 42). Often living in poverty and subject to discrimination, the vulnerability of this group was heightened by the disaster. Some *aravanis* who accessed shelters reported harassment and physical and sexual abuse. The necessity to find shelter in temporary accommodation mitigated the ability of *aravanis* to manage their own privacy, and as a result many were placed at risk of significant danger, and experienced physical and psychological harm.¹ Yamashita (2012) reports similar inhibited privacy and heightened harassment experienced by transwomen at emergency shelters in Japan following the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. One woman “refrained from using a shower at an emergency shelter for privacy reasons” and another was called a “cross-dressing deviant fag” by a volunteer (Yamashita 2012: n.p.).

LGBT people also experienced abuse in shelters following the 2010 Haitian earthquake. Lesbians, bisexual women, and trans and intersex people suffered gender-based violence and “corrective

rape.” Gay and bisexual men also reported forced “sexual relations with straight-identified men for food or money” (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission/SEROVie 2011: 4). Consequently, some men took on a “more masculine demeanor” to avoid abuse and reduce the chance of “being denied access to emergency housing, healthcare, and/or enrolment in food-for-work programs” on the basis of appearing “effeminate” (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission/SEROVie 2011: 4–5).

Discriminatory Disaster Management Policies and Enhanced Vulnerabilities

In providing emergency accommodation, it is thus crucial that government agencies and NGOs ensure safe access to, and experiences in, accommodation for all social groups. Unfortunately, evidence from a range of locations suggests that policies frequently—in effect, if not by design—prevent LGBT populations from accessing shelters and other forms of assistance. This suggests the need for greater awareness among government agencies and NGOs about the consequences for LGBT individuals and families of policies designed with only heterosexual and gender-normative populations in mind. Heteronormative policies that assert particular definitions of “couple” or “family,” for example, may exclude those whose relationships or families do not fit “conventional” models. Equally, policies working on the basis of a male/female gender binary exclude or fail to recognize those whose gender identity sits outside a binary definition.

Evidence suggests a pattern of discrimination affects gender minorities over various regions. Policies exclusively designed for gender-normative populations heighten the vulnerability of groups already facing discrimination and marginalization. As reported by Balgos *et al.* (2012), the *warias* of Central Java were placed at risk in a disaster by gendered emergency management policies.² Official policy guidelines listed evacuees in that region only as “women, men, boys or girls” (Balgos *et al.* 2012: 341). Because the gender identity of *warias* is outside these definitions, they were unable to be classified and thus unable to access shelter or aid. Similarly, while many *aravanis* in Tamil Nadu experienced discrimination in shelters, others were excluded from accessing temporary accommodation because they could not be placed in either “male” or “female” residences (Pincha and Krishna 2008).

Even when able to access shelters, trans or other gender minorities may find themselves subject to discrimination as a result of policies operating on a male/female binary (Gaillard 2011). Reports from post-Katrina New Orleans highlighted the heightened vulnerabilities of trans and intersex individuals in temporary shelters created by official policies. Strict gender protocols divided access to facilities within emergency shelters, which was problematic for those whose physical appearance suggested a gender other than that with which they iden-

tified. In one instance, a transwoman was arrested because she used facilities designated for women only and subsequently spent four days in prison for “the simple act of taking a shower” (D’Ooge 2008: 23). A facility that should be taken for granted as part of the temporary housing provided by the government’s emergency agency became a source of trauma for one individual due to the heteronormative policies of that agency.

Signs of Resilience: LGBT Temporary Housing

These documented experiences of discrimination reveal significant vulnerabilities, but they do not reveal the steps taken by LGBT people to avoid shelters because of perceived risks. Again, across regions there is evidence that LGBT people are reluctant to place themselves in situations in which they are unable to manage the disclosure of their identities (Ozawa 2012; Yamashita 2012). Actual experiences of discrimination in disasters are unnecessary to prompt reluctance, nor is awareness of government or NGO policies. The everyday experiences of making home, managing boundaries, and risk containment is enough to disincline LGBT people to place either themselves or their families within such an environment.

In response, LGBT communities display means of resilience in establishing and providing temporary accommodations in which they hope to feel safe or make other members of the community feel safe. LGBT communities in Brisbane, Australia, and Christchurch, New Zealand, established databases of accommodation for individuals, families, and couples reluctant to make use of “official” shelters. During the Brisbane floods, large numbers of residents were forced to evacuate. In calling for offers of accommodation to house LGBT evacuees, LGBT publication *QNews* announced on its website: “It is not easy for couples in our community to stay together during this crisis and many of the emergency shelters often run by conservative groups are not so welcoming to gay, lesbian, and trans couples etc.” (*QNews* 2011). This quote conveys concern for other members of the community leading to action whereby the community will support itself through a crisis. It also shows awareness that emergency shelters may not provide even a temporary sense of home and that alternatives may be necessary.

Similarly, the need for LGBT-friendly accommodation in the months following Hurricane Katrina was proffered in an article in *Houston Voice*. A gay male Houston resident, John Szewczyk, stated, “We need to take care of our own” (Fisher 2006: n.p.). Hoping to establish an accommodation database for New Orleanians evacuated to Houston, Szewczyk argued:

Being a gay person housed in a tent city with a bunch of rednecks is not going to be that much fun ... When you’ve lost everything,

you don't need to worry about your sexual orientation or your HIV status being revealed.

In using the word "revealed," Szewczyk makes clear the requirement to hide one's sexual identity or HIV status, at times, to remain safe. This is the kind of privacy and maintenance of disclosure made possible by having a home. With that privacy gone, discovery may lead to harassment. In seeking to protect LGBT New Orleanians from that situation, Szewczyk suggests resilience that may come from identification with a LGBT community: the community may be able to protect itself when necessary.

NEIGHBORHOOD, COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE, AND BELONGING

Disasters exacerbate LGBT vulnerability by limiting or removing access to community infrastructure and commercial spaces that contribute to a sense of home, belonging, and ontological security. Home is multiscalar, constituted by spaces beyond the domestic or residential. Facilities established by LGBT community organizations and commercial leisure venues catering to LGBT clientele also provide opportunities to safely perform their identities and manage intrusions. For some individuals, these spaces may provide a greater sense of safety and home than residential spaces. Young LGBT people, for example, may face hostility within the parental home and find possibilities for self-expression elsewhere. Holt and Griffin (2003: 406) suggest the "scene" is "a space in which to be authentic" for many young gay men and lesbians, and "may come to be imbued with special significance as a kind of home" (2003: 409).

However, it is important to note that inequitable access plays out within LGBT spaces and that any sense of "home" may operate differently across the population. As Doan (2007: 62) argues, although trans individuals may find some level of safety in gay spaces, they may also face difficulty as "in most overtly gay spaces there is little to no visible gender queerness or any indication that such variance is tolerated." Nevertheless, trans people sometimes do create or locate spaces for themselves (Nash 2011). As we argue below, a sense of home is often developed in both commercial venues or within the premises of LGBT community organizations. Loss of such spaces in natural disasters places individuals at risk and inhibits ontological security.

Commercial Infrastructure and a Sense of Belonging

Commercial leisure venues, such as bars, clubs, and even sex-on-premises venues, have the capacity to encourage a sense of community, home, and belonging both within the venues and in the neighborhood where they are located. Analysis of reports in the LGBT media suggests that damage to, or loss of, these venues as a result of

disasters is a significant concern to LGBT populations. Loss of these spaces enhances vulnerabilities by removing opportunities to gather as a community and locate safe spaces for the performance of collective identities. The reopening or relocation of these venues indicates a return to pre-disaster normalcy and re-establishment of a sense of home and belonging made possible by these venues.

For example, in coverage of the Christchurch earthquake, the local LGBT media focused on damage to, and attempts to repair or re-establish, commercial spaces such as nightclubs and sex-on-premises venues. Analysis of reports in the New Zealand LGBT media identified different forms of vulnerability experienced by local LGBT populations during the 2011 earthquake. In our analysis, vulnerabilities were classified under the themes “material” (damage to infrastructure and buildings), “individual” (physical, psychological, or emotional impacts on LGBT residents) and “discrimination” (homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic experiences), with various subcategories beneath. Damage to commercial venues—bars, nightclubs, cafes, and sex-on-premises venues—was the most frequently reported form of vulnerability (Figure 2). Moreover, the potential that venues might

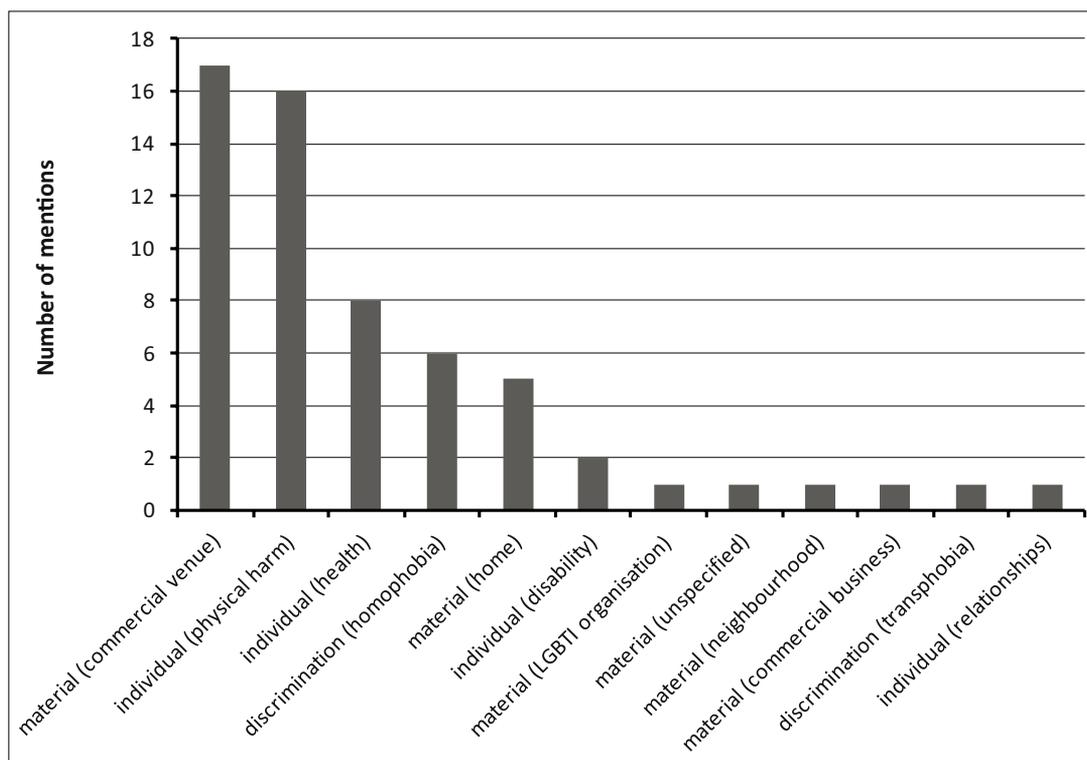


Figure 2
Forms of vulnerability reported in New Zealand LGBT media in relation to the Christchurch earthquake (number of articles = 41).

be damaged beyond repair and unable to reopen/relocate was seen as damaging to the LGBT community. Accordingly, attempts by owners to re-establish their businesses were reported by the media in the months subsequent to the disaster, reflecting a belief that the survival of these venues was critical to the survival of the local LGBT community. Thus, commercial leisure venues were positioned as vital to the community's resilience and their potential loss highlighted the community's vulnerability.

It is important to note, however, that the venues reported by the New Zealand LGBT media predominantly catered to gay male clientele. The venues most frequently discussed were a nightclub called Cruz (described often in media reports as "gay," not "lesbian and gay" or "LGBT") and a sex-on-premises venue called Menfriends (exclusively male clientele). There are perhaps two factors at work. First, this may indicate greater access to public spaces for gay men than other members of the LGBT community. Further research is necessary to develop a greater understanding of access to public space in Christchurch prior to, during, and subsequent to the earthquake (cf. Brown 2000). Second, this indicates a predominance of gay male voices and interests in the LGBT media. What is made clear is that both the venues and the media that reports on them may reflect the interests of LGBT populations in different ways and to differing extents.

Community Organizations and a Sense of Belonging

Premises of community organizations catering to LGBT populations are also important indicators of vulnerability and resilience in many disaster contexts. Across locations, media and NGO reports indicated that a sense of home and belonging is enacted within these spaces by LGBT people, and is equally *unmade* by disasters. The premises of LGBT rights, community support and health organizations often provide vital spaces to LGBT communities and contribute to the sense of home that disasters impair. During and subsequent to disasters, the loss of these spaces has the potential to heighten LGBT vulnerability. However, such spaces also, at times, become examples of resilience, as they are places where the community can support itself by providing shelter and safety to those forced to leave their residences.

For example, a community center established by the Haitian health organization SEROVie was an important venue for LGBT individuals (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission/SEROVie 2011). In a society where LGBT individuals are frequent victims of violence and abuse, this space provided "a place where LGBT people can come and relax, build community and find acceptance" (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission/SEROVie 2011: 3). So when the center was destroyed during the earthquake, its patrons were placed at great risk in the post-disaster context. With the loss of this space, local LGBT populations were forced to contend both with a lack of domestic spaces—since many houses were destroyed—and

with the absence of another safe space in which to shelter from harassment.

While not drawing the same media attention as commercial venues, loss of community facilities was highlighted as a specific vulnerability by the LGBT media on Christchurch (Figure 2). In particular, the offices of community health organizations were attributed with significance in both catering to health needs (particularly sexual health needs) during disasters and as indicators of a return to pre-disaster normalcy. Damage to facilities was framed as an indicator of vulnerability likely to enhance the risk of health problems, particularly for HIV+ individuals. The rebuilding or relocation of these facilities in the months after the earthquake was seen as a sign of a resilient community able to re-establish itself and cater for its own needs. For example, in reporting on a new permanent location of the offices of the New Zealand AIDS Foundation (NZAF) in January 2012, *Gay Express* announced that along with providing public health services, the venue contained spaces for meetings and events and was “expected to become a hub for community members” (*GayExpress* 2012: n.p.). This highlights the importance of NZAF not only as a provider of services but also of a place that offers a physical home for the community.

Remaking “Home”: A Return to Pre-Disaster Community

Media reports on disasters in various locations also note the importance of a visible LGBT *residential* community in providing a sense of home to LGBT people. As argued above, the reopening of LGBT businesses and organizations in the months after a disaster is central to the return to pre-disaster normalcy, reliability, and ontological security—and therefore, to a sense of returning “home.” But the return of other members of the LGBT community, such as friends, family, and neighbors, is equally vital. Among individuals who may have returned to their residences following a period of relocation to temporary accommodations, a desire is often expressed to see other LGBT people return to the neighborhood. There is a sense that the return home requires not only return to a particular house but also to the particular “neighborhood” community that existed prior to the disaster event.

Reporting on experiences of LGBT populations in post-Katrina New Orleans, for example, Caldwell (2006) stressed the difficulties many experienced in returning home. He noted that those individuals who had re-established their lives in New Orleans yearned to see greater numbers of former LGBT residents, and thus the LGBT community, return. One gay man stated, “The best feeling in the world is when you see someone you haven’t seen since the hurricane come walking back in and say they’re moving back” (Caldwell 2006: n.p.). A “complete” return home is indicated not only by reoccupying domestic spaces but also by witnessing the return of others to the neighborhood. This suggests that the vulnerabilities and losses enacted by the

natural disaster can only be overcome once the community has fully re-established itself to its pre-disaster form (or “built back better”).

Similar sentiments were highlighted by the Christchurch LGBT media. Local publication *Gay Express*, for example, interviewed three gay men five months after the earthquake (Banks 2011). The article highlighted their decision to stay in Christchurch as well as their experiences of witnessing LGBT friends and family leave and, at times, return. One interviewee stated, “The earthquake has brought everybody closer together, and I think people are starting to come back now. Some have had a few months break and are now thinking—this is my home, this is where I belong” (Banks 2011: n.p.). This indicates the multiscale nature of LGBT home and belonging, which relies on significant relations beyond domestic space, stretching into neighborhood locales. For many LGBT individuals, the home *unmade* by disaster is finally remade with the inclusion of a range of material and emotional factors provided by the wider LGBT community *in situ*.

CONCLUSION

The concerns and needs of LGBT people in natural disasters are largely absent from government, emergency management, and NGO policies and processes, and from the mainstream media. This absence has had specific effects on the ability of LGBT individuals and families to remain safe and secure during disasters, and to manage returning and remaking home in their wake. Combined with the disruption of LGBT homes and domestic life from natural disasters, the omission of LGBT households and homes in disaster recovery policy and practice constitutes a form of queer domicile. Social peripheralization and policy absence exacerbates and multiplies the ways in which LGBT homes are “*unmade*” in disasters across a range of location in both the Global North and Global South. In order to ensure equitable treatment for LGBT communities it is necessary to understand the specific meanings and uses of home developed by LGBT individuals and families in these settings. In doing so, we must consider how LGBT experiences are differentiated by intersections with gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic means, and geographic location.

Our aim in this article has been to take early steps in addressing these issues, and thus prompt scholarly and policy consideration. By examining the vulnerability and resilience of LGBT populations during natural disasters, we highlight the heteronormativity of policies and responses that fail to accommodate LGBT concerns about home, displacement, and rebuilding. For LGBT individuals and families, home may operate in multiple ways, at multiple scales, and across a broad range of locations to provide security and safety and to enable the performance and development of identities, relationships, and households. Disasters impact on LGBT homes in potentially devastating ways that often remain invisible to broader populations, policy-makers, and emergency services, but which need to be illuminated

and accommodated in policy and practice. The present discussion aims to prompt such thinking.

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