

Problems and Possibilities on the Margins: LGBT Experiences in the 2011 Queensland Floods

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Abstract

Vulnerability to disasters is not inherent to particular social groups but results from existing marginality. Marginalisation from social, political and economic resources and recognition underpins vulnerability and impedes recovery. Yet concurrently, disasters can reveal the resilient capacities of some marginal groups, who often develop specific means of coping with marginality. This article applies these perspectives to the experiences of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans) people during the 2011 disaster in Queensland, Australia, which resulted from catastrophic flooding of Brisbane and South-East Queensland. The findings come from a survey conducted by the Queensland Association for Healthy Communities (QAHC) a year after the floods, which sought to understand LGBT experiences, resources and needs. An agreement was established between QAHC and university researchers to facilitate data analysis. This article analyses some key findings using the concept of marginality to understand both vulnerability and resilience. This framework helps grasp the particular issues facing LGBT people. The data reveal vulnerability due to social and political marginality, including discrimination and inhibited access to assistance, but simultaneously examples of resilience borne by self-reliance and coping strategies developed in a context of marginality. Understanding LGBT marginality, vulnerability and resilience helps contribute to inclusive and effective disaster preparation, response and recovery.

Key words: LGBT community; disaster; Queensland floods; marginality; vulnerability; resilience.

Vulnerability to disasters is not an inherent characteristic of social groups but a product of existing societal marginality. Certain groups are marginalised from social, political and economic resources and recognition, which underpins their vulnerability to disasters and impedes recovery. Disaster research and management must consider not only vulnerabilities made evident during a disaster, but account for extant processes of marginalisation that permit vulnerability and heighten adversity during a disaster.¹ Simultaneously, such situations can also reveal the unexpected resilient capacities of marginal populations, since these individuals and groups often develop specific ways of dealing with experiences of marginality. The concept of marginality is useful for understanding the socially differentiated impacts of disasters and assisting the efficacy of emergency management and disaster response and recovery.

This article applies these ideas about marginality, vulnerability and resilience to the experiences of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans) people during and after the 2011 Queensland floods. LGBT populations are socially and politically marginalised in most societies, although this varies between and within nation-states according to prevailing laws, politics and social mores. Even in twenty-first century Australia, LGBT people continue to experience marginalisation and discrimination (Flood and Hamilton 2007), and globally there is little work on LGBT experiences during disasters (Dominey-Howes, Gorman-Murray and McKinnon 2014). We thus seek to contribute to research on marginality and disasters. In early 2011, particularly 10-24 January, two-thirds of the state of Queensland, Australia, was subject to serious flooding following record rainfall, with a ‘state of emergency’ then ‘disaster’ declared. Some of the most severe flooding occurred in the Brisbane River Catchment, and large areas of Brisbane, the capital city, with over two million residents, were

affected, resulting in extensive infrastructure damage and residential displacement. This article discusses some LGBT experiences during the floods in South-East Queensland (SEQ).

The findings come from a survey conducted a year after the floods by the Queensland Association for Healthy Communities (QAHC). The survey – ‘The LGBT Community and their Experience of Natural Disasters’ – sought to understand the experiences, resources and needs of LGBT people. While not designed by professional researchers, the survey offers valuable information on LGBT experiences of disasters given lack of research on this population. An agreement was created between QAHC and university researchers to facilitate analysis of the material, social, emotional and mental health impacts on fractions of the Queensland LGBT population. In this article, we analyse and discuss some of the key findings using the concepts of marginality, vulnerability and resilience; this framework helps us to understand the particular issues facing LGBT people and in turn contribute to inclusive disaster preparation, response and recovery. The data show LGBT vulnerability due to social and political marginality, including discrimination and inhibited access to assistance, but simultaneously examples of LGBT resilience borne by individual and collective coping strategies developed in a context of marginalisation. We begin by expanding on these concepts and then apply them to the case study.

Marginality, vulnerability and resilience

Our analytical framework contends that marginality is a concept – *and a lived reality* – that links experiences of vulnerability and resilience for ‘peripheral’ populations like LGBT communities. We discuss these three concepts in turn, drawing their interconnectivity.

Vulnerability

During the 1970s, disaster research shifted from a ‘hazard paradigm’ to a ‘vulnerability paradigm’, which stressed that disasters, as societal events, occur due to people’s

vulnerability in the face of natural hazards (e.g. cyclones, tsunami) or technological hazards (e.g. terrorism, nuclear accident) (Gaillard 2010; Steckley and Doberstein 2011). In this sense, a disaster is a process that ‘occurs within society and not within nature’, and vulnerability is central in ascertaining the effects of hazards (Weichelsgartner 2001, 86). The meaning of vulnerability continues to be debated but can be broadly defined as the structural conditions – including physical, social, cultural, economic and political systems – that render people and communities susceptible to the impacts of hazards (Wisner 2009), and which make it possible for a hazard to become a disaster (Cannon 1994).

The concept of vulnerability arguably focuses on structural adversity and a compromised ability to withstand hazard impacts (Gaillard 2010). However, vulnerability is not just about a lack of access to economic or material resources – resulting from, for instance, poverty or limited socioeconomic means – but also draws attention to how social and cultural positions and subjectivities contribute to incapacity. Vulnerability is equally underpinned by social inequality (Phillips and Fordham 2009). As Wisner (2009, 177) contends, ‘persons at the same level of income do not suffer equally in disaster situations nor do they encounter the same handicaps during the period of recovery’. Lack of political rights and social recognition, and differences based on ethnicity, age, health, disability, gender and sexuality, all play into individual and community tendencies to vulnerability in disasters.

Wisner (1998) also argues that social stigmatisation is likely to increase vulnerability by intensifying separation and isolation from ‘mainstream’ society, which is the focus of planning with respect to hazards. His discussion refers to stigmas ‘attached to disability, homelessness, mental illness, and even to frail old age’ (Wisner 1998, 31), but we can readily add non-normative sexual and gender identities (i.e. LGBT people) to this list (cf. Gilbert and Barkun 1981; Enarson 2010; Urbatsch 2015). While vulnerability is unevenly distributed across a given society, policies concerning disaster risk reduction, or emergency management

and disaster response and recovery, rarely take specific account of the needs of individual social groups, even if certain social groups are recognised as ‘more vulnerable’ (e.g. the elderly, women, diverse language groups and so on.) (Finch, Emrich and Cutter 2010; Gaillard and Mercer 2012).

Resilience

Resilience is also a debated and broad-ranging concept (Aldrich 2012). A fundamental definition posits resilience as the positive flipside of vulnerability, or at least as those components of individual, group and social functioning that might reduce susceptibility to hazards, resist damage and change to an extent, absorb disruption, and/or foster recovery and rebuilding (Zhou et al. 2010). Accordingly, resilience is understood as the ability of people and communities to maintain relatively stable psychological and social functioning in highly disruptive events, and ‘bounce back’ – or even ‘rebuild better’ – in a timely manner (Bonnano et al. 2007; UNISDR 2009). In this way, resilience is linked to agency, or what is called, in the hazards and disaster nomenclature, ‘capacity’ in the face of hazards (Gaillard 2010; Brown and Westaway 2011).

While vulnerability highlights the exogenous structural conditions that expose different social groups to adverse effects from hazards, capacity draws attention to the existing knowledge, resources, skills and networks of solidarity that are endogenous to these social groups or communities, and which are mobilised as coping strategies during times of crisis (Gaillard 2010). Capacity is the accumulated and ongoing social learning of individuals, groups or communities that might become a source of resilience, realised through agency and the ability to make decisions in and during disaster events (Brown and Westaway 2011). Drawing on these notions of capacity, resilience is determined by the ways in which a community is equipped to anticipate, cope with and recover from the uncertainty and change

wrought by disaster. But this certainly does not mean a given social group or community should be left to its own devices in and through policy and planning. As Brown and Westaway (2011) indicate, capacity is inhibited by structural constraints and can be enabled and enhanced by the provision of resources by governments, authorities and organisations. Thus, 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’ (UNISDR 2009, n.p.).

Resilience and vulnerability are linked and often interconnected concepts – respectively concerned with capacity and incapacity in the face of hazards, for instance – but they should not be understood as sitting along a shifting holistic spectrum from incapacity to capacity. Rather, a single hazard can trigger experiences of vulnerability and resilience *simultaneously* in the same society or community, *dispersed in different* ways across the population according to social, cultural and economic resources, and geographical location relative to the physical impact of the hazard (Miller et al. 2010; Aldrich 2012). This connection between vulnerability and resilience brings us to the final concept, which we develop as a lynchpin that not only highlights problems of vulnerability but also suggests possibilities for resilience.

Marginality

Marginality refers to the peripheralisation of certain people and groups within a society, which may be materialised in different ways (Cullen and Pretes 2000). These may be economic, social, cultural, political or physical – relating to poverty, socioeconomic means, social or cultural minority status, lack of political access or geographical location (Gaillard 2010). It need not be intrinsically related to susceptibility to disaster, and this is what makes it a useful concept when thinking about the human impact of hazards (Gaillard and Kelman

2012; Hewitt and Mehta 2012). Marginality draws attention to groups *already* inherently vulnerable in a society, which are made *more* susceptible to hazards within a given population. As Gaillard (2011, 121) indicates, ‘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’.

In this way, marginality might be seen as synonymous with vulnerability – in terms of classic hazard and disaster paradigms – but we also think it offers a different framework for examining social functioning in disasters. Rather than synonymy with vulnerability, marginality allows us to consider how peripheral groups, already marginal in a society, might develop *inbuilt* coping strategies and capacities to ‘get by’ in normal societal circumstances (Cody and Welch 1997; Christman 2012). These capacities and strategies might then be activated and drawn upon in different ways to provide resilience during a disaster (Balgos, Gaillard and Sanz 2012; Kelly and Smith 2012; Gorman-Murray 2014). In this way, marginality, as a concept, might be a way of linking paradoxical experiences of both vulnerability and resilience. Of course this will not be the case for all marginalised groups, but will be for some, such as some LGBT communities in some places.

Feminist writing clarifies the paradox of marginality: as bell hooks (1991, 208) argues, the ‘margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance’ for peripheral groups. Drawing on hooks (1991), we suggest that feminist thinking elucidates and expands our understanding of vulnerability and resilience in relation to hazard impacts. In hazards and disaster literature, vulnerability is often linked to marginality (see reviews in Wisner 1998; Gurung and Kollmair 2005; Gaillard 2010), but for hooks marginality is also a source of empowerment, capacity and resilience. She contends that:

It is not a ‘safe’ place. One is always at risk. [But] marginality ... is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance ... a central location for the production of a

counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. (1991, 206)

While hooks (1991) is referring to Black women's experiences of sexism and racism, her contention is transferrable to LGBT experiences of heterosexism and transphobia (Elwood 2000). Thinking about lived experience, she suggests that 'understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people' (207). Seen this way, marginality facilitates possibility, creativity and solidarity, as a place that 'sustains our subjectivity ... and sense of the world' (209). It is this paradoxical sense of marginality – as a location of both repression and resistance – that we take forward in this article in order to understand, interpret and conceptualise LGBT experiences of disaster.

LGBT experiences in disasters globally

To flesh out these linkages between marginality, vulnerability and resilience, it is informative to review extant work on LGBT experiences of disasters. Research on LGBT disaster experiences are an expanding field, with a number of non-government and academic publications drawn from these contexts: Tamil Nadu, India, following the 2004 tsunami (Pincha 2008; Pincha and Krishna 2008); New Orleans, USA, following Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Leap, Lewin and Wilson 2007; D'Ooge 2008; Richards 2010); southern Nepal, following the 2008 floods (Knight and Welton-Smith 2013); Haiti, following the 2010 earthquake (IGLHRC and SEROVie 2012); central Java, Indonesia, following the 2010 eruption of Mt. Merapi (Balgos, Gaillard and Sanz 2012); Irosin, the Philippines, following persistent weather and flood hazards (Gaillard 2011; McSherry et al. 2015); and Japan, following the 2011 earthquake and tsunami (Ozawa 2012; Yamashita 2012) (Figure 1). Collectively, this work highlights a number of vulnerabilities based on existing social marginalisation (sometimes differing across and sometimes transcending specific contexts).

Stigmatisation from right-wing religious groups in the USA and Haiti, who asserted disasters as divine retribution for ‘sinners’ and their supporters, drew on derogatory stereotypes, exacerbated vulnerabilities and even incited violence against sexual and gender minorities (IGLHRC and SEROVie 2012). Similarly, loss of personal and communal spaces – i.e. homes and community centres – exposed sexual and gender minorities to harassment and violence in the USA, Haiti and Nepal (Caldwell 2006; IGLHRC and SEROVie 2012; Knight and Welton-Smith 2013).

Figure 1: Locations of extant work on LGBT experiences of disasters. Brisbane, Christchurch and the Blue Mountains are included to indicate the case study sites for our work. Brisbane is the focus of the present discussion.



The research also underscores the effect of heteronormative assumptions about individuals, couples and families by governmental and non-governmental agencies charged

with disaster risk reduction (DRR) and relief and recovery. In many official and organisational policies, ‘family’ invoked an opposite-sex couple with children, while emergency practices deployed binary (male/female) concepts of gender (Knight and Welton-Smith 2013). In New Orleans, for example, same-sex families were not recognised in Louisianan legislation, and thus excluded from support and sometimes separated in resettlement (D’Ooge 2008). Experiences of emergency shelters were found to be particularly problematic for sexual and gender minorities over a number of sites, exacerbating LGBT vulnerabilities (Gorman-Murray, McKinnon and Dominey-Howes 2014). Notably, trans, intersex and other gender minorities had difficulties in shelters, where workers and evacuees questioned their gender identities. In the post-Katrina aftermath, a woman was arrested for using the ‘wrong’ bathroom; similarly, in Japan, a woman was called a ‘cross-dressing deviant fag’ by a volunteer worker (Yamashita 2012, n.p.).

In India, Indonesia and the Philippines, different ‘third gender’ groups – *aravanis* in Tamil Nadu (Pincha and Krishna 2008), *warias* in Java (Balgos, Gaillard and Sanz 2012) and *baklas* in Irosin (Gaillard 2011; McSherry et al. 2015) – had difficulty accessing emergency shelters because evacuees were recorded as ‘male’ or ‘female’ only. Furthermore, if they did access shelters, *aravanis* were denied food and suffered verbal and/or physical abuse, while *baklas* assigned to ‘male’ accommodation were harassed. Reports from Haiti, meanwhile, indicate difficulties in evacuation shelters across sexual and gender difference. Lesbians, bisexual women, trans and intersex people were subject to gender-based violence and ‘corrective rape’, while gay and bisexual men also recounted forced ‘sexual relations with straight-identified men for food or money’ (IGLHRC and SEROVie 2011, 4-5). Some men adopted 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 ‘effeminacy’.

As well as vulnerabilities based on heteronormativity, experiences of marginality (and consequent group identity and communal self-reliance) at times enabled social strength and capacity-building. Already used to dealing with heteronormative assumptions and policies by both government and other organisations, some sexual and gender minorities creatively invented means to sustain their wellbeing and community in the face of both the ‘natural’ disaster and exclusion from official assistance. In New Orleans, friendship networks – families-of-choice – were used to establish an alternative ‘network of information exchange about sources of housing, food, and medical care, availability of social services, and whether friends had survived and if so, their current addresses’ (Leap, Lewin and Wilson 2007, 13). In Indonesia, likewise, rather than seeking out evacuation sites and risking discrimination, many *warias* sought help from among friendship networks.

Both *warias* and *baklas*, moreover, enacted ways of assisting other populations to cope with disaster impacts, such as collecting relief goods, initiating clean-up and providing personal grooming services. Gaillard (2011, 122) argued that *baklas* are known for ‘their sense of initiative and leadership’ and are thus ‘crucial resource persons within their communities when confronted with natural hazards’. A dialogue between *baklas* and the wider community was initiated, which incorporated and acknowledged the contributions of *baklas* in disaster response programs. This ‘helps in reducing discrimination and mockery during disasters’ (Gaillard 2011, 124). These studies from the USA, Haiti, Japan, India, Nepal, Indonesia and the Philippines thus show how social marginality based on sexual and gender identity exacerbates vulnerability during disasters, in terms of health, wellbeing and social and material losses, and also suggest how marginality can, in some instances, build capacities and inform strategies for resilience. With these ideas in mind, we turn to LGBT experiences of the 2011 Queensland floods.

The LGBT community, marginality and the 2011 Queensland floods

Record rainfall from December 2010 to early January 2011 resulted in flooding in almost every river catchment in Queensland south of the Tropic of Capricorn in January 2011 (Queensland Floods Commission 2011). The most severe flooding occurred in the Lockyer Creek and Bremer River, major tributaries of the Brisbane River (van den Honert and McAneney 2011). In Brisbane, flooding peaked on 13 January, with 14,100 properties affected. Across SEQ, flooding over 10-24 January resulted in 22 deaths; over 200,000 people were affected and 28,000 homes needed rebuilding (van den Honert and McAneney 2011).

Data about LGBT experiences during and after the 2011 Queensland floods are from a survey by QAHC, a community NGO whose mission is to ‘promote the health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Queenslanders’ (QAHC n.d.). The organisation was formed in 1984 as the Queensland AIDS Council, originally focusing on HIV/AIDS and other gay men’s health issues. In 2004, QAHC expanded its remit to be inclusive of the health and wellbeing of the whole LGBT community, prompting a name change.² To serve this remit, the QAHC survey sought information on LGBT experiences during and after the floods. In total, 48 people completed the survey, which was disseminated online via QAHC’s emailing lists and social media networks. While a small-scale survey and not representative of the Queensland LGBT community, the data nevertheless provide valuable detail about the disaster experiences of at least some LGBT people. The survey included closed questions (yes/no; Likert scale) and open questions (descriptive responses of 1-3 sentences); several closed questions allowed participants to provide additional detail in an open response. Answers to closed questions enabled quantitative measures of some LGBT disaster experiences (e.g. ease of access to emergency services and disaster relief), while open responses gave detail about encounters and emotions (e.g. feelings associated with

accessing emergency services and disaster relief). Open responses were coded inductively, with careful reading and sensitivity to themes of marginality, vulnerability and resilience.

The majority of respondents – 79% – were living in Brisbane, and the other 21% in regional cities and towns in SEQ. The results thus record impacts on LGBT communities in Brisbane and SEQ. In terms of gender identity, 44% of respondents identified as female, 33% as male and 23% as trans (MtF [male-to-female] and FtM [female-to-male]) or genderqueer. In terms of sexual identity, 53% identified as lesbian, 33% as gay and 14% as queer. 50% of respondents were in a same-sex relationship during the disasters; responses suggest that being in a same-sex relationship can inflect LGBT experiences and wellbeing during disasters.³ Before discussing some key findings from the survey, we give some background on the social and political context of LGBT people and rights in Queensland.

LGBT acceptance and rights have progressed across Australia, but various States evince different trajectories. Queensland is amongst the most conservative jurisdictions, particularly outside the State capital. Two recent surveys identified Queensland as the least gay-friendly State. Flood and Hamilton's (2007) 'Mapping Homophobia' survey found that 38% of Queensland respondents considered homosexuality immoral, the highest proportion of any State, with over 50% holding this belief in some regions; a 2010 Roy Morgan poll concurred, finding 33% of Queenslanders considered homosexuality immoral, again higher than any other State (Trenwith 2010). Social repudiation is matched by policy volatility and rollbacks in State politics. In 2011 a Labor government legalised same-sex civil unions, but in 2012 a newly elected conservative LNP government repealed the legislation. This same government also cut a significant proportion of QAHC's funding, alleging the organisation was too political (Calligeros 2012). These public attitudes and policy manoeuvres suggest that LGBT people remain a socially and politically marginalised community in Queensland.

It is in this context that we now turn to LGBT experiences of the Queensland floods in relation to marginality, vulnerability and resilience.

Marginality and post-disaster mental health

We begin with some discussion of post-disaster LGBT mental health and wellbeing. Health studies indicate that LGBT Australians have an above average incidence of mental health indicators, that is, stress, anxiety, fear and depression, which is attributed to variables related to marginality, such as ongoing social disapproval and ingrained interpersonal vigilance (Leonard et al. 2012). Redressing these mental and emotional health issues is part of QAHC's remit. Post-disaster mental health outcomes reflect situational psychological and emotional pressures typical across affected populations, but are often heightened in marginal groups. Making an effort to ascertain such outcomes, the survey asked respondents to indicate if they experienced *heightened* fear, stress, anxiety and depression as a *direct* result of the floods. Unfortunately, the survey did not ask respondents to rate their usual mental and emotional wellbeing, and nor could the survey, targeted at the LGBT community, generate comparison against the wider population. Nevertheless, the self-assessment of heightened mental health issues following the floods is instructive about perceived and experienced mental and emotional impacts: in each case the majority of respondents experienced elevated fear, stress, anxiety and depression, and indicated a high or significant impact on wellbeing. Table 1 summarises the results, with representative qualitative responses.

Table 1: LGBT self-assessment of mental health impacts of the 2011 Queensland floods

Fear	69.2% experienced fear: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> [The flood was] pretty damn traumatic, I was terrified. I just never want to see it again.
Stress	80% experienced stress:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Going to and from work on the train – through flood affected areas was stressful – seeing people throwing out a houseful of destroyed furniture was devastating. Working with and for other people directly affected by the disasters post flooding was also challenging and quite emotional.
Anxiety	<p>72.5% experienced anxiety:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [I still have] some panic attacks ... having problems which require my medication to be increased above normal. • We experienced strong feelings of guilt and this year I have experienced anxiety and depression. Because of the work I do, this has compounded the problem.
Depression	<p>71.8% experienced depression:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt very alone and depressed. I wanted to suicide but had no courage to do so. • I'm very depressed and need to let my feelings out but I look horrible and can't face anyone.

These adverse mental health outcomes, as noted earlier, are in line with experiences common across populations in post-disaster contexts; however, they arguably have a more serious impact on marginalised groups who often already evidence higher fear, stress, anxiety and depression in day-to-day life due to their more limited access to social capital and political inclusion, and who are then further sidelined in disasters. Indeed, Balgos, Gaillard and Sanz (2012, 338) contend that ‘the marginalisation of LGBT people is heightened during disasters, as existing inequalities are magnified’. As a result of this ‘double’ marginalisation in both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances, many respondents described further place-based emotional and psychological impacts that were particular to their lives as sexual and gender minorities, reflecting existing marginality and inciting inbuilt vulnerabilities.

Problems on the margins: prejudice, apprehension and displacement

The particularity of living as a sexual and/or gender minority, with certain experiences, concerns and needs, exacerbated emotional and mental health issues in the post-disaster context, at least as self-reported by most respondents. These outcomes were in turn linked to apprehension and negative encounters within particular *social and spatial settings*.

Thinking first about the wide(r) scale of the local community, neighbourhood, suburb or town in which LGBT people were living, respondents were asked if they were fearful of experiencing discrimination, prejudice or abuse on the basis of their LGBT identity during the disaster or in the immediate recovery phase. Overall, *two-thirds* of the respondents were fearful of heterosexist, homophobic and/or transphobic prejudice and/or abuse. 43% indicated they were fearful in *all* public places (streets, buildings, parks, evacuation centres) at *all* times during the floods and the recovery, while 23% indicated they were fearful *sometimes* and/or in *some* places. Respondents described some of their fears and experiences of abuse and intimidation:

While videoing flooding in Maryborough, I was accused of being a paedophile.

People were targeting groups of gay people in town as our 'behaviour' had brought this upon the community as a whole. So I was told on many occasions.

Wisner (1998, 31) argues that 'marginal people are, by definition, those whose existence troubles and upsets their neighbours', and consequently they are often stigmatised as abnormal, or even deviant and immoral. The encounters described here clearly reflect and dredge up emotionally damaging, derogatory stereotypes about LGBT people as socially deviant and morally impure. The first respondent was subject to verbal abuse based on the disproven and offensive linking of homosexuality with paedophilia; the second quote shows that homophobic 'divine retribution' rhetoric – often issued by fundamentalist Christian churches in the USA, such as Westboro Baptist Church – was also evident in Queensland

during and after the 2011 floods. This revives a long history in the Western Christian tradition, from the eighteenth century, of linking same-sex acts, sin and disasters ('Acts-of-God') (Gilbert and Barkun 1981). Thus, the repressive marginality of the LGBT community was enhanced during the floods by being excluded from, and then blamed for the impacts experienced by, the 'mainstream'.

This, in turn, had a specific effect on exacerbating LGBT vulnerability: the apprehension and, at times, experience of prejudice in community environments was translated into *particular* spaces and settings as well. It is especially troubling, in this context, that many LGBT people were reluctant to access mainstream emergency relief and recovery services supplied by the government directly or under contract – services and resources designed to enhance societal resilience in disasters – due to fears about heterosexist, homophobic and/or transphobic discrimination and abuse. Respondents were asked to assess if a range of emergency relief and recovery services were safe, accessible and welcoming to them as LGBT individuals, couples or families, why or why not, and if they did access these services. The results show that over half of the respondents did not even attempt to access a range of mainstream emergency services as they felt anxious and stressed about how they would be received, and thus uncertain about potential interactions with workers and evacuees. These findings are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Levels of LGBT reticence about mainstream disaster relief and recovery services

- 55.3% were unsure about their safety with **volunteer relief groups and workers**.
- 55.2% were unsure about the accessibility and safety of **emergency evacuation shelters**.
- 50% were unsure about the accessibility of the **Community Recovery and Referral Centres** (established by Queensland Department of Communities).
- 42.1% were unsure about the accessibility of **disaster relief payments** (from Centrelink, the Federal social security program and agency, managed by the Australian Department

of Human Services).

The qualitative responses highlighted that these fears and stresses were based on existing anxieties about the safety and inclusiveness of mainstream services:

Discrimination when accessing mainstream services is always an issue – you never know if you will be treated properly and with respect.

I would have been concerned my relationship may not have been accepted in mainstream support services.

I was concerned that if I needed direct contact assistance that I would have been either judged or misidentified concerning my gender.

I wasn't fully out at this time so I already had to hide things.

Moreover, some respondents expressed concerned that prejudice might be exacerbated due to the uneven and edgy emotional climate of the post-disaster context:

I was concerned that LGBT individuals may not be comfortable in accessing mainstream services, especially when they were vulnerable.

If I was in a position to access [emergency support services] I would have been fearful given the general emotions being carried so high during this time.

I didn't want the possible added pressure.

These quotes show that everyday experiences of repressive marginality are carried into the disaster context. The survey results thus suggest that societal prejudices are not set aside during a disaster, but frame the experience of disaster and its aftermath for marginalised groups. In this case, the vulnerability of some LGBT people was exacerbated.

Housing, home and shelter are key concerns during and after disaster events (Datta 2005; Brun and Lund 2008; Gorman-Murray, McKinnon and Dominey-Howes 2014).

Disruption to home environments during and after the Queensland disasters generated a 'flood' of different emotions for LGBT people, given these are the sites where individuals, couples and families live, maintain meaningful possessions, build interpersonal relationships

and invest a sense of self. Homes are definitively emotive places that take on heightened importance for sexual and gender minorities: despite ever-present management of public surveillance, they are often one space where LGBT people can ‘be themselves’. Homes provide a semblance of ontological security – a security of ‘self’ – and thus disruptions to residence and living arrangements were a cause for concern in a number of ways (cf. Hawkins and Maurer 2011). The potential need to evacuate home and access an emergency shelter raised stress and anxiety about safety, as with other mainstream support services:

I would have been very worried to explain my circumstances to strangers if I had to evacuate.

I can’t blend in and don’t necessarily advertise.

Even without evacuation, having relief workers in one’s home was also a concern for some:

My house wasn’t damaged inside but downstairs was. ... If it was inside the house I would have been less comfortable with strangers.

For the sizeable minority of respondents (22.5%) who had to evacuate their homes, most sought shelter with their families-of-origin rather than in emergency shelters (some sought shelter with friends). This was an important, and necessary, form of social and spatial support during the disaster, and for many it helped improve their relationships with family:

My house was flooded and eventually destroyed due to structural damage. My family provided important assistance and support to me at this time. I stayed with them during and after the flood until I found a new house.

For others, however, returning to the family home – a space that many had to leave in order to ‘come out’ – induced anxiety and stress. Some had to ‘closet’ their LGBT identity while staying with family, ‘shutting off’ a basic part of their sense of self:

I went home and was stuck in the house all week with my family because I can't drive and there was no public transport. ... My family were not aware at the time that I was dating anyone – and it wasn't something I was going to disclose – so it wasn't something I could talk about.

I stayed with my cousins, who were quite conservative. ... I had to shut off some part of my identity for a little while.

For these respondents, evacuation exacerbated both social and spatial marginality together.

Possibilities on the margins: solidarities, capacities and barriers

So far we have examined particular post-disaster vulnerabilities linked to LGBT marginality. This is still not comprehensive: for instance, we could discuss same-sex couples' relationship stress: 41% of people in couples indicated an impact on their relationship wellbeing, often related to finances; for example:

My girlfriend had to financially support myself and our mortgage for this period of time with only basic Centrelink⁴ contributions. This affected our relationship and both emotional states.

We acknowledge there is more to say about vulnerabilities, but we want to turn to examples of resilience in the face of disaster, which are also informed by marginality, coping strategies and everyday experiences in times of 'normal' societal functioning. Connections with biological family – as noted above – were an important form of resilience that 68% of respondents accessed (not just shelter – emotional support, food, money, and assistance with repairs). We want to underscore, however, that the survey revealed that there was significant emotional and material support and solidarity from LGBT friendships networks and community groups – as well as some barriers to that support.

When prompted by the survey, 87.5% of respondents indicated they had existing networks of LGBT friends and familiars that they could draw on for some emotional and material support. To this we can add a range of LGBT organisations that gave – or at least

tried to give – various types of support for the LGBT community. Such organisations included QAHC itself (a significant source of support) and *QNews*, the local LGBT newspaper (print and online), which provided information and referral services (McKinnon, Gorman-Murray and Dominey-Howes In press). Both friendship and organisational support – and both emotional and material forms of support – are highlighted in the following response:

Some angels [unknown volunteer helpers] came by and cleaned out our home, which made me emotional. We did lose power but some neighbours came by with food and friends came to hang out. I don't know who cleaned out my garage but they were ANGELS. And QAHC gave me some money.

Overall, 44% of respondents received *direct* support from LGBT friends, networks or organisations. Some qualitative examples include:

I was rescued to a friend's house just before our roads got flooded ... I was going to be alone and if I hadn't left I would have been trapped in!
I wasn't going to leave my place but my LGBT friends (that live 10 houses away) woke me in the middle of the night to inform me both ends of our road had flooded in. We ended up getting my car out, through back yard access and knocking down a fence.
I think QAHC did well in having FB [Facebook] messages about the floods and offering help.

Even so, this response rate – 44% – is half the number who indicated they had LGBT support networks. There are various reasons for this discrepancy. For some, especially in inner-city suburbs inundated by the Brisbane River, their friends also required assistance with evacuation and were unable to stretch their own capacities once the flood waters hit. Others simply could not access LGBT networks or community groups because their suburb or region was not well serviced by such organisations and their friends were outside the area. This was reported by respondents in Ipswich, a suburban region in Brisbane's west, which was inundated by the Bremer River:

There was little to no information about evacuation procedures in many Ipswich suburbs. Once power was out (even before, for a lot of people) there was no information available. ... I think as a whole, in Ipswich, there needed to be more information etc. Although, as a LGBT person, I would have been more comfortable accessing LGBT support services during that time.

More LGBT people would have preferred to access support from LGBT people or groups, but could not. In this way, fundamental geographical contingencies and physical barriers, such as location, distance and accessibility, sometimes disabled LGBT support networks.

Moreover, 37% of respondents preferred to offer support to LGBT people because they felt LGBT people would be vulnerable in mainstream facilities. Yet the circumstances produced social and spatial barriers that made it difficult to determine how to direct support to LGBT people:

I was mindful of the fact that LGBT people might need extra help but it was difficult to know how to target help toward LGBT people.

Some thus found it difficult to provide *direct* emotional and material assistance to LGBT people, but others provided *indirect* support by donating money to QAHC to assist their disaster relief work with the LGBT community. Others also registered with the *QNews* Billeting Program, which enabled LGBT people to provide temporary accommodation specifically to other LGBT people who were displaced by the flood and who felt unsafe or unwelcome either in evacuation centres or staying with their families (thus resolving some of the issues of vulnerability in emergency shelters). Some made further suggestions about how the LGBT community could provide material support and resilience to its own. One person suggested using LGBT commercial venues as community referral (and possibly evacuation) centres:

It would have been really nice if we organised a queer clean-up to help out members of our community. This information could have been controlled through Twitter or

Facebook and run out of either the ‘Sporties’ or the Wickham [gay pubs in inner-city Brisbane]. Also it would have been nice if the Wickham or ‘Sporties’ turned into a community hub during the disaster.

There are, then, specific spaces, networks, solidarities, resources and capacities that were utilised within the LGBT community, and which could be further developed. It is imperative to note, however, that the LGBT community were not self-segregating (and if so, it was to access pre-existing networks of resilience and offer support to vulnerable community members if possible) but also offered support to the wider Brisbane and Queensland communities. 63% of respondents stated that it didn’t matter whether their support went to LGBT or wider communities, and 92% did offer support to ‘unknown’ community members. For some, the floods facilitated a coming together of the wider community for mutual support, suggesting opportunities for social inclusion across difference:

I helped in any way I could – helping family friends, strangers, ‘friends of friends’ and offering help to my own friends.

[It] made me feel part of the whole Brisbane community.

We were all going through the same thing. Sexuality really didn’t seem important – community did.

More research is needed to see if this connectivity is, in fact, a long-term possibility. One respondent thought not, citing the existing social and political marginality of LGBT people in Queensland:

It makes me angry that many LGBT people helped with the clean-up, etc. but we still don’t get treated all that well by a lot of Queenslanders.

Despite LGBT resilience and the desire many evinced to assist the wider community, marginality, vulnerability and societal prejudice is not necessarily overcome in the post-disaster context.

Conclusion

Given the incipient nature of this research, we do not want to offer extensive conclusions. We have tried to outline some examples of the geographies of LGBT vulnerability and resilience in the face of a particular disaster – the 2011 Queensland floods. The results, while imperfect, are nevertheless instructive. The concept of marginality usefully links LGBT vulnerabilities and resilience: both the susceptibility and capacity of LGBT people and communities rest on extant marginality. This extends current understandings of marginality, opening possibilities for not only redressing perceptible vulnerabilities but also identifying and utilising resilient capacities built in experiences of marginality (hooks 1991). Everyday peripheralisation and discrimination mean LGBT people are already vulnerable to the adverse impacts of disasters, which are exacerbated during and after the event through prejudice, displacement, problems with mainstream services and evacuation centres, and disruptions to home environments. Simultaneously, creative patterns of coping and community building can provide capabilities for withstanding and bouncing back (and forward) from adversity – through LGBT friendships, networks and solidarities. Respondents suggested ways this self-reliance could be enhanced, at the same time intimating it was important for LGBT people to offer support to the wider community, regardless of whether this resulted in better relations. Recognition and incorporation of capacities could therefore contribute to emergency management practices, DRR and relief and recovery policies. As Wisner (1998, 25) argues, integrating marginal groups into ‘disaster planning would tap new knowledge, new coping mechanisms, and enrich the entire planning process’.

Our next step in this project is our own data collection, which involves a careful, detailed survey and semi-structured interviews.⁵ In this we hope to overcome some of the limitations of – and build on – this community data. Importantly, we acknowledge that the LGBT community is not singular, and we want to be able to breakdown the responses by

sexual and gender identity to understand differences within the community. We also want to factor in cross-tabulations by ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, income and education, amongst others. These are important not only for understanding the diversity of vulnerabilities and capacities within the LGBT community, but have also been shown to be significant in patterns of vulnerability and resilience in disasters across populations generally. In this way we hope to keep building research and knowledge of LGBT experiences of disasters – to date a little studied area of scholarly and policy development.

Notes

1. This argument is facilitated by Brian Cook and JC Gaillard's session at the 2013 Institute of Australian Geographers Conference, 'Marginality, human development and vulnerability to disasters'. We are grateful for their insight and inspiration.
2. In 2013 the organisation returned to its former name, the Queensland AIDS Council.
3. One reviewer asked if the QAHC survey results included data on socioeconomic status (SES), age and other social markers. These data would help us drill into divergent marginality, vulnerability and resilience *within* the LGBT community. Unfortunately, the survey did not request SES details (income, employment, education). Aside from sexuality, gender identity and relationship status, the only demographic detail collected was age, but regrettably the data were not collated and delivered to us in a format that enabled cross-tabulation and comparison of any social markers.
4. Centrelink is the Federal program, managed by the Australian Department of Human Services, which delivers social security services and payments.
5. The project includes case studies on Brisbane (2011 floods), Christchurch (2011 earthquake) and the NSW Blue Mountains (2013 bushfires). Interviews and surveys are completed; analysis is underway.

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