

Disasters, Queer Narratives, and the News: How Are LGBTI Disaster Experiences Reported by the Mainstream and LGBTI Media?

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ABSTRACT

The media plays a significant role in constructing the public meanings of disasters and influencing disaster management policy. In this article, we investigate how the mainstream and LGBTI media reported—or failed to report—the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) populations during disasters in Brisbane, Australia and Christchurch, New Zealand. The implications of our work lie within recent disasters research suggesting that marginalized populations—including LGBTI peoples—may experience a range of specific vulnerabilities during disasters on the basis of their social marginality. In this article, we argue that LGBTI experiences were largely absent from mainstream media reporting of the Brisbane floods and Christchurch earthquake of 2011. Media produced by and about the LGBTI community did take steps to redress this imbalance, although with uneven results in terms of inclusivity across that community. We conclude by raising the possibility that the exclusion or absence of queer disaster narratives may contribute to marginality through the media's construction of disasters as experienced exclusively by heterosexual family groups.

KEYWORDS

Australia; disasters; media; New Zealand; resilience; sexuality; vulnerability

Disasters may cause significant material, social, and psychological damage; destroy homes and infrastructure; cause loss of life or serious injury; and inflict trauma and disruption at multiple scales and levels across society (UNISDR, 2009). The damage caused by a disaster may not, however, be experienced equally. Marginalized populations may be more vulnerable to the impacts of a disaster and may be less resilient in their capacity to recover (Cianfarani, 2012). In this article, we investigate ways in which the news media reported the experiences of disaster for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) populations in Australia and New Zealand. Specifically, we investigate mainstream and LGBTI reporting of

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the Brisbane floods of January 2011 in Australia and the Christchurch earthquake of February 2011 in New Zealand. We contemplate how this reporting may have reduced or exacerbated the marginalization of LGBTI people.

The media has the ability to construct and report experiences of disasters in a number of ways (Ploughman, 1995). During and after disasters, critical information is supplied by the media, who are therefore capable of enhancing individual and community capacities for survival and recovery. By making choices on how to report on disasters and which experiences to highlight as newsworthy, the media also constructs and shapes public perceptions of a disaster. The inadvertent or deliberate absence or silencing of particular narratives in media reporting may result in a broader lack of understanding of how disasters are experienced differently by a range of marginalized groups. Research into how the media has reported disasters—and which voices are included or excluded in media reporting—is critical to understanding how the media positions particular populations in disasters, thereby contributing to either the vulnerability or resilience of such groups.

Our data include local mainstream newspapers as well as online LGBTI media publications (Hanson & Pratt, 2003). Using quantitative and qualitative analysis, we have reviewed a broad selection of news articles to better understand the role of the media in constructing public perceptions and LGBTI experiences of these disasters. Such an analysis is novel, and it contributes to scholarship by examining the ways in which LGBTI communities and their needs are framed and reported in—or excluded from—the media.

The related concepts of vulnerability and resilience are critical to understanding experiences of disaster impacts and frame the arguments of this article. Although definitions remain contested, vulnerability can be broadly defined as the physical, social, cultural, economic, and political conditions that affect the ability of individuals and groups to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters (Ariyabandu & Wickramasinghe, 2003; McEntire, 2001, 2005). The interconnected concept of resilience denotes the ability of individuals or groups (ranging from the family, to communities, to countries) to maintain stable social and psychological functioning and to recover in a timely manner (Bonanno, Galea, Bucciarelli, & Vlahov, 2007; UNISDR, 2009).

The research for this article straddles three areas of scholarship that include: (1) the construction of natural disasters in and by media reporting; (2) the place of LGBTI populations in media discourses, including both the LGBTI and mainstream media; and (3) research into vulnerability and resilience as experienced by LGBTI populations in disasters. Here, we

position this article in scholarly contexts by outlining some of the relevant recent research in each of these areas.

Media constructions of disasters

The ways in which disasters are discussed and understood are determined largely by the media (Dominey-Howes, 2013; Miles & Morse, 2006; Ploughman, 1995). The choices of what to report; the prominence given to various populations impacted by the event, the informants chosen as authoritative voices, and the types and locations of damage to highlight are decisions made by the media that form and frame the place and vision of a disaster in the public imagination.

In its reporting of disasters, the news media encourages specific readings of disaster events that may leave other readings invisible or precluded from public discussion. Miles and Morse (2006), for example, have argued that the news media emphasizes the impacts of natural hazards on built, human, and social environments, deemphasizing impacts on the natural environment. Linked to this are arguments made by Ploughman (1995) that the media emphasize the causes of disaster as “natural,” an emphasis that elides the importance of human or social factors in creating disasters. This may lead to refusal to consider factors such as human-induced climate change in increasing the frequency and intensity of weather-related disasters, as well as the role of social marginality and inequality in determining disaster impacts.

Public understandings of disaster are also framed by the informants selected as sources for disaster-related stories. Sood, Stockdale, and Rogers (1987) have argued that the sources from which the media seeks its information are generally “authoritative sources” providing an “official view,” including emergency management organizations (Sood et al., 1987, p. 34). Disaster narratives of individuals living in disaster-affected areas may remain invisible or limited in such reporting. Ploughman has encouraged the news media to draw on sources beyond “official and established newsmakers” in order to draw a more complete picture of disaster causes and impacts (Ploughman, 1997, p. 134).

For those impacted by a disaster, the media can play an important role, including *pre-event* community education and awareness raising; *during-event* preparation and action, status updates, evacuation warning, and notice; and *post-event* response and recovery actions to follow, including advice on where to gain aid and support (Dominey-Howes, 2013). News reporting may also encourage a sense of community and shared experience, removing or ameliorating feelings of isolation or abandonment. Perez-Lugo argued that during the impact of a hurricane, “the media-audience relationship was motivated more by the people’s need for emotional support, companionship, and community ties, than for their need for official information” (Perez-

Lugo, 2004, p. 219). Listening to the radio or watching television while a hurricane was in progress allowed individuals to feel a continued connection to community, reducing feelings of fear and isolation.

In the days and months following a disaster, the media also provides a forum for debate and post-event analysis and reflection and acts as a mechanism to hold decision-makers to account (Dominey-Howes, 2013). This may include examination of who—if anyone—might be to blame for losses sustained during catastrophes, potentially operating as a powerful conduit for driving sociocultural, behavioral, and policy change.

LGBTI populations in media discourses

Critical to the position of LGBTI populations in the mainstream news media are the issues of, first, inclusion and, second, representation (Gross, 2001). LGBTI marginality is potentially exacerbated by either the failure to include LGBTI informants or narratives within media reporting or by inclusion that represents LGBTI people only in discriminatory or pejorative ways. The critical importance of these factors is due to the capacity of the media to shape public understanding of an event (such as a disaster) or a minority group (such as LGBTI populations).

As argued by Kelly, “News journalism remains the primary, if imperfect, source of information for most people about the public sphere and spotlights issues for political debate and further action” (Kelly, 2011, p. 185). The news media performs a public policy pedagogical role that is critically influential in determining the “public’s sense of self and other” (Kelly, 2011, p. 185). An absence of news media reports that highlight the specific needs of LGBTI populations may, therefore, mean that the broader public is unaware that these needs exist or may position the LGBTI community as an unknown “other” that does not require consideration in the development of public policy.

Media reporting is critical to LGBTI resilience, therefore, because it has the potential to contribute to social equality and to enable political power by increasing visibility and reversing what Gross (1994) has labeled the “symbolic annihilation” of media exclusion. The gay and lesbian movement has specifically targeted media organizations because of an awareness that exclusion will prevent LGBTI groups from achieving equality (Landau, 2009). In Australia, the success of this movement has seen media representation of LGBTI lives increase to the point where reporting of an event such as the annual Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Street Parade now receives more coverage over the course of a month than did all reporting of LGBTI life in any year of the 1950s (Willett, 1992).

This value of media inclusion in improving social equality is determined, however, by the forms of representation in media reports (Gross, 2001).

Homophobic or transphobic reporting of LGBTI lives may lead to the assumption that non-heterosexual and non-cisgendered groups do not deserve or have no right to consideration in public policy. Opinion columns in the print media may be used to push back against increasing LGBTI visibility and to assert heterosexuality and cisgender identity as normative (Brickell, 2000).

Equally critical is whether or not LGBTI voices are included in stories that are not specifically about LGBTI life. Heteronormative reporting, which assumes the heterosexuality of both media subjects and readership, positions LGBTI lives as the absent or marginalized “other.” An event such as Mardi Gras may draw significant, and largely positive, coverage in Australia, but this is an event to which the centrality of homosexual life is obvious. How then, if at all, do the media seek out non-heterosexual or non-cisgendered informants in stories where the significance of LGBTI issues is less obvious?

Heterosexist reporting may lead to exclusion of LGBTI voices from such reports or to the reading of LGBTI lives through a heteronormative or cisnormative lens. Media representations of same-sex parents and their children in the American print media, for example, often assess the ability of LGBTI parents to mimic a limited imagination of the heteronormative family rather than focusing on the specific needs of those parents (Landau, 2009). Heterosexism has also played a role in the reporting of HIV/AIDS-related news, with informants drawn from “official” sources rather than from HIV-positive individuals themselves (Hallett & Cannella, 1997). A concentration on official sources and an absence of “human interest” reports drawing on the voice of LGBTI people has also been identified in reporting of the same-sex marriage debate (Moscowitz, 2010; Rodriguez & Blumell, 2014).

Content analysis of reporting about gay and lesbian lives in American newspaper lifestyle sections has shown that, although a surprising number of stories may be present, they tend to relate to gay or lesbian characters in popular entertainment, with little or no reporting of “lifestyle issues of concern specifically to gays or lesbians” (Gibson, 2004, p. 93). The mainstream media may increase LGBTI marginality by failing to seek out LGBTI informants; by failing to examine the specific concerns of LGBTI people in issues not directly or predominantly concerned with homosexuality or minority gender status; or by reporting on LGBTI lives only in ways that place heterosexuality as the norm.

The research described above concentrates specifically on representations in the mainstream media. Equally important to our research is reporting in the LGBTI media. The LGBTI media plays a potentially important role in creating a sense of community for LGBTI people; framing and forming identities; and publicly responding to homophobia in the mainstream press (Cover, 2005; O’Donnell, 2004; Robinson, 2007, 2008). In the words of Rob Cover, “through the process of reading the community press the reader

recognizes that he or she is being ‘hailed’ and comes to negotiate his or her self-identity (in process towards a sexual self) as a component of group identity” (Cover, 2005, p. 124). The LGBTI media may create a sense of community by providing a media space that reverses heteronormativity and assumes the minority sexual or gender identity of the reader. Any sense of community drawn from these sources may be troubled, however, by the dominance of gay White male voices or experiences (Paceley & Flynn, 2012; Robinson, 2007). Analysis of the LGBTI media in Queensland, for example, has found a range of inequities in the forms of representation included in these publications, which focus “on gay men, to the detriment of lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer readers” (Robinson, 2007, p. 65).

LGBTI vulnerability and resilience in disasters

In many ways, the term *natural disasters* is misleading. Although used to describe events such as earthquakes, floods, and hurricanes, which originate with meteorological or earth systems events, the human impacts of disasters are determined largely by social, rather than “natural,” factors. An individual’s or group’s social position as defined by issues such as race, class, gender, or sexual identity will impact or define their experiences of disasters (Finch, Emrich, & Cutter, 2010; Giovanni et al., 2012; Ray-Bennett, 2009; Seager, 2006). Socioeconomic status, for example, may leave individuals without adequate shelter or without the necessary resources to recover from disaster impacts (Wisner, 1998). Equally, the social marginality of racial or ethnic minorities may increase their vulnerability during disaster events and may limit their capacity to recover (Shelton & Coleman, 2009).

The impacts of disasters on LGBTI populations remain underexplored (Dominey-Howes, Gorman-Murray, & McKinnon, 2013; Gorman-Murray, McKinnon, & Dominey-Howes, 2014a). Investigations into disaster impacts on specific populations have, however, highlighted some of the needs and vulnerabilities of these populations, while pointing toward the need for further research and policy development. Below, we review the current literature in this field, including both scholarly research and policy work commissioned by human rights NGOs. We do not aim to provide extensive details of the relevant disaster events, but rather to highlight the most significant issues for sexual and gender minorities in each case.

Specifically noted by research to date have been disaster impacts on non-normative or “third gender” minorities in several regions. The *aravanis* of Tamil Nadu, India (Pincha, 2008; Pincha & Krishna, 2008), *warias* of Indonesia (Balgos, Gaillard, & Sanz, 2012), and *baklas* of the Philippines (Gaillard, 2011) are groups that identify as neither male nor female, generally dress in “feminine” clothing, and experience significant discrimination and stigmatization. Disaster management policies that cater only for binary

gender populations have exacerbated the vulnerabilities of each of these groups during disasters. Some *aravanis*, for example, were denied disaster-related shelter and aid because they could not be officially recorded as either male or female (Pincha, 2008). Many who did access shelters experienced harassment and abuse, including physical and sexual abuse. Official policy guidelines that listed evacuees as “women, men, boys, or girls” similarly left *warias* invisible during the impact of a volcanic eruption in 2010 (Balgos et al., 2012), while *baklas* also reported discrimination and abuse in emergency shelters during a disaster (Gaillard, 2011). Thus socially marginalized groups were made more vulnerable by agencies charged with providing assistance. Spaces designated as providing safety were experienced as spaces of vulnerability and risk.

The LGBTI populations of New Orleans during and in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 have also been the subject of significant investigation (Richards, 2010). D’Ooge (2008), for example, has noted that rebuilding efforts in the city have been most heavily concentrated in areas likely to draw tourists and that, “although lesbians, trans women, and queer women of colour were disparately affected by the flooding, this fact is often ignored as New Orleans tries to reclaim its gay tourist industry” (D’Ooge, 2008, p. 23). This research highlights the need to consider issues of ethnicity/race, socio-economic status, and gender as intersecting with sexual and gender identity to exacerbate the vulnerabilities of LGBTI populations. The lack of legal recognition for same-sex relationships also placed an added burden on same-sex couples struggling with insurance claims and applications for government assistance (D’Ooge, 2008). Without such recognition, same-sex couples were excluded from accessing support provided to heterosexual couples.

Research by human rights organizations has highlighted the impact of the January 2010 earthquake on the LGBTI people of Haiti (IGHLRC and SEROVie, 2011). Although the impacts on some marginalized groups were at least partially addressed by the Haitian government, UN officials, and local NGOs, the incorrect assumption that LGBTI populations face no greater vulnerabilities than other members of Haitian society, or that these populations are undeserving of specific attention, greatly exacerbated the vulnerabilities of already vulnerable individuals. For example, lesbians, bisexual women, and transgender and intersex people were subject to gender-based violence and “corrective rape” in emergency shelters, while gay and bisexual men were reportedly forced into sexual relations with straight-identified men to obtain food and money.

In Australia, everyday experiences of marginalization or peripheralization have been found to impact LGBTI disaster experiences (Gorman-Murray, Morris, Keppel, McKinnon, & Dominey-Howes, 2014b). LGBTI residents of Brisbane, for example, reported their reluctance to access government or

charity-based assistance following the 2011 floods because of fears of discrimination, with statements including “I would have been concerned my relationship may not have been accepted in mainstream support services” and “I was concerned that if I needed direct contact assistance that I would have been either judged or misidentified concerning my gender” (Gorman-Murray et al., 2014b, p. 13). Feelings of marginalization or past experiences of abuse or discrimination feed in to disaster experiences, leading LGBTI populations to avoid circumstances in which further discrimination may occur. This potentially increased vulnerability for individuals not benefiting from support services available to the broader population.

These studies point toward ways in which government or NGO disaster management policies and practices may exclude or negatively impact on LGBTI populations. Thus policies and processes intended to assist populations affected by a natural disaster frequently cater to the specific needs of heterosexual or normative-gendered populations rather than the society as a whole. That LGBTI populations are not considered in emergency management policies and remain apparently voiceless in public discussions about disaster risk reduction (DRR) ultimately leaves these populations vulnerable. Further research is necessary to more completely understand these impacts and to investigate ways in which policies can be developed to enhance resilience among LGBTI groups (Dominey-Howes et al., 2013; Gorman-Murray et al., 2014a).

What each of these three areas of scholarship leads us toward is an understanding that the media plays a critical role in constructing public understandings and experiences of disasters; that the media plays a central role in LGBTI marginality by including or excluding LGBTI experiences within broader social or cultural narratives; and that LGBTI populations experience disaster impacts in ways other than—or in addition to—the heterosexual mainstream. In this article, we take these arguments as a starting point in seeking to understand how the media influences, frames, and ultimately constructs the experience of disasters by LGBTI populations and how those experiences are understood, if at all, by the broader society.

In asking the question “How are LGBTI disaster experiences reported by the mainstream and LGBTI media?” our aims, therefore, are (1) to investigate the sexual or gender identities of informants chosen by the mainstream media and hence to understand the inclusion or exclusion of LGBTI disaster narratives; (2) to investigate the interest of the LGBTI media in reporting on disasters and the degree to which that reporting reflected the diversity of the LGBTI community; and (3) to consider limitations and raise questions for further research.

The disaster event case studies

Brisbane floods, Queensland, Australia

In December 2010, the Australian state of Queensland experienced its highest rainfall on record (Queensland Floods Commission, 2011, p. 24). With further heavy rainfall into January 2011, catchments were unable to absorb excess rain. The excessive rainfall over the period from December to the first half of January resulted in almost every river in Queensland south of the Tropic of Capricorn and east of Longreach (central Queensland) recording major flood levels at some stage during this period (van den Honert & McAneney, 2011). This resulted in flooding across large areas of the state. In the Queensland capital city of Brisbane, the flood gauge of the city exceeded its major flood level on January 12, 2011 (Queensland Floods Commission, 2011, p. 27). The flood peaked at 2:43 a.m. local time on January 13, reaching its highest level since 1974. At that point, 14,100 properties were affected, and 1,203 houses were inundated.

On January 17, 600 people in Brisbane were accommodated in the RNA Showgrounds and QEII Stadium (Cubby & Murdoch, 2011). Altogether, over 200,000 people were affected. Approximately 3,570 business premises were inundated, and commercial losses of approximately \$4 billion were reported across the mining, agriculture and tourism sectors (van den Honert & McAneney, 2011).

Christchurch earthquake, Canterbury, New Zealand

On the September 4, 2010 at 4:36 a.m. local time, a magnitude M_w 7.1 earthquake occurred on the Greendale Fault near Darfield (the so-called Darfield Earthquake) on the Canterbury Plains, near Christchurch, South Island, New Zealand. This event was followed by a series of aftershocks in the months after. The largest aftershock, with a magnitude of M_w 6.2, occurred at the eastern end of the aftershock zone at 12:51 p.m. on February 22, 2011. This earthquake triggered unusually violent ground motion that devastated Christchurch. Aftershocks from this event continued for months, with two very significant events occurring on June 13, 2011 (M_w 6.0) and on December 23, 2011 (M_w 5.9) (Berryman, 2012; Campbell, Pettinga, & Jongens, 2012; Kaiser et al., 2012). Collectively, this entire earthquake sequence has been referred to as the “Canterbury Earthquake Sequence of 2010–2011” (Berryman, 2012). However, it is the event of February 22, 2011 that is noteworthy since it was the deadliest and costliest disaster to have affected New Zealand since World War II.

The earthquake resulted in the deaths of 185 people. Just over 6,500 people were injured and required medical assistance. Thousands of buildings in the city center were either partially or severely damaged, and over 50% would

eventually be demolished (McSaveney, 2013). Damage occurred to many significant and iconic cultural locations including the city cathedral. Christchurch CBD remained a “no-go” red zone as late as June 2013. Very extensive liquefaction occurred across the city, and large areas have been rezoned as locations that can no longer be built upon—including significant former residential areas.

Methods

The material analyzed for this article can be divided into two categories: first, we have analyzed reports in mainstream newspapers to identify the sexual or gender identities of informants chosen by the mainstream media. Second, we have analyzed reports from LGBTI media to understand the inclusion of disaster events as news items, the continued reporting of the impacts of those disasters across time, and the level of inclusivity of the various identities that comprise the LGBTI acronym.

In the mainstream media, we concentrated our research on the major local newspaper for each of the locations of interest. In Brisbane, the newspaper was the tabloid *Courier Mail*. In Christchurch, it was the broadsheet *The Press*. In each of these publications, we initially conducted keyword searches of online full-text databases to locate reporting of either the flood or earthquake. We then combined those results with keywords *gay*, *lesbian*, *transgender*, *bisexual*, *intersex*, *LGBTI*, or *LGBT*. Our timeframe for these results was from the date the disaster occurred until November 2012. The limited number of articles located by those searches formed the initial material for analysis.

On the basis that the sexual identity of informants may also be revealed by their relationship status or family composition, we then performed keyword searches for *flood* or *earthquake* and combined those results with keywords *couple* or *family*. Due to the large number of results located by those searches, we used a more limited timeframe, restricting results to the month of the disaster and the month following the disaster—for Brisbane, January and February 2011, and for Christchurch, February and March 2011. From those results, one of us conducted discourse analysis to select articles that directly related to the impacts of the disaster on particular informants. We did not include statements from politicians or other official sources, instead concentrating on reports in which residents or business owners in either Brisbane or Christchurch were interviewed or wrote about their experiences. Also included were stories in which biographical descriptions were given of those who died in these disaster events. We classified informants according to their relationship status or household composition.

In our investigation of the LGBTI media, keyword searches were undertaken of the online versions of LGBTI publications in order to locate all

reports referring to floods (Brisbane) or earthquakes (Christchurch). With reference to the Brisbane floods, we have drawn on local (Queensland) and national (Australian) online sources, all of which would have been readily available to readers in Brisbane. The publications included were *QNews*, *Gay News Network*, *Star Observer*, and *Lesbians on the Loose (LOTL)*. Reports were included across the time period from the original event through to the conducting of that research in September 2012.

With reference to the Christchurch earthquakes, we have drawn on local (Christchurch) and national (New Zealand) online media sources available to readers in Christchurch. The publications included were *GayNZ.com*, *AaronandAndy.com*, and *GayExpress*. The date range of articles included was from the time of the original event through to September 2012.

Analysis was also conducted to assess the gender and sexual identity of those positioned as informants in LGBTI media reports. This quantitative analysis leads toward an understanding of the dominant voices in LGBTI media and the success of that media in representing the diversity of the community. Although the acronym *LGBTI* suggests a community or coalition of communities with shared goals and concerns, it is important to note unequal power relations and uneven levels of vulnerability within that community as impacted by factors such as gender identity. The concerns of many cisgender gay men, for example, may not be shared by transgender individuals. By conducting a count of the gender and sexual identity of informants, we are able to examine the levels of representation within each subgroup.

Results and discussion

In this section, we present the results of our analysis and discuss the possible impacts of media disaster reporting on LGBTI communities and on the understanding of disasters by the broader or mainstream community. We have arranged the analysis according to the three research aims identified above.

(1) Aim: To investigate the sexual or gender identities of informants chosen by the mainstream media and hence to understand the inclusion or exclusion of LGBTI disaster narratives

Our initial research, covering articles from January 2011 to September 2012, identified no reporting in the *Courier Mail* of any informants who were identified as LGBTI or any reporting of the impacts of the 2011 floods on LGBTI community organizations or commercial venues in Brisbane.

This absence indicates the invisibility of LGBTI narratives in the Brisbane mainstream media. The specific impacts of a natural disaster on LGBTI populations were therefore absent from the construction of that event by the media. It is likely, then, that the Brisbane media played no role in

developing understandings of LGBTI vulnerabilities among the broader public or in influencing a discussion of LGBTI needs in DRR strategies or policies.

From the time of the disaster event until September 2012, six articles in *The Press* discussed the impacts of Christchurch earthquakes on the local LGBTI community. Two of these articles discussed impacts on a local gay nightclub. Two discussed the organization of a local gay Pride event. One article discussed experiences of homophobia by gay business owners forced to relocate by an earlier earthquake in September 2010. One article quoted the transgender son of a woman killed in the earthquake.

Although limited in number, these articles do go at least some way to including LGBTI narratives within stories of the disaster, as well as noting some of the specific impacts of the event on LGBTI populations. The destructive capacities of a disaster, for example, may remove or limit access to neighborhoods or community facilities that, for LGBTI people, offer a greater degree of safety or security in everyday life. Navigating life in a post-disaster city takes on an added layer of complexity for LGBTI populations. These reports in *The Press* made such impacts clear to readers. The gay male couple who had been forced to move their business—a bakery—to a new neighborhood, where they faced violence and abuse, are a specific example. The couple are quoted in the article as stating, “We thought we could be who we are, not need to hide in the wardrobe or anything”; however, they had faced homophobic verbal abuse, their customers had been abused, and the store windows had been smashed (Sachdeva, 2011). For these men, finding safety after the disaster meant not only moving to safer buildings in a less damaged area of the city but also finding a space of the city in which the LGBTI identity would be accepted.

These reports counter the “symbolic annihilation” (Gross, 1994) of heteronormative reporting and add LGBTI narratives to the ways in which the media has constructed the disaster. The differing levels of reporting between Brisbane and Christchurch also make clear how differing forms of media in a disaster-affected city will alter the possibilities of LGBTI inclusion. The *Courier-Mail* is the only daily print newspaper in Brisbane. Its treatment of LGBTI issues has, in recent years, sparked controversy. The murder of a local trans woman, Mayang Prasetyo, by her partner in 2014, for example, was reported under the front-page banner headline “The Chef and the She-Male” (Chamberlin & Brennin, 2014). Along with the use of transphobic labels “she-male” and “lady boy,” the report implied causal links between Prasetyo’s trans identity, her work as a sex worker, and her murder. This particular newspaper may be considered an unlikely source of inclusive and sympathetic responses to LGBTI marginality and vulnerability.

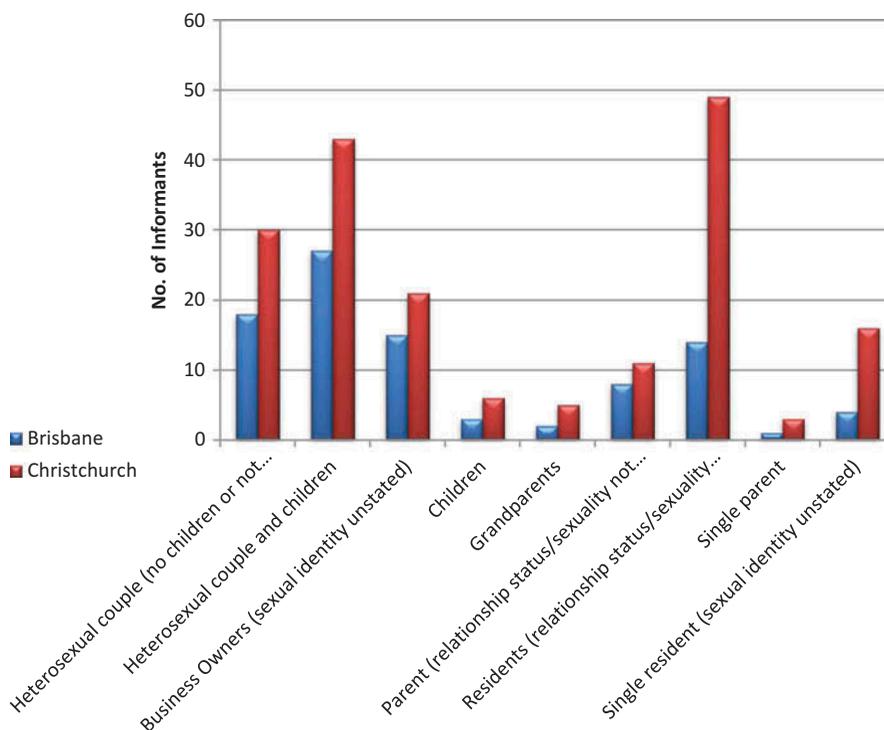


Figure 1. The relationship, family composition, and/or sexual identity of informants included in the Christchurch mainstream media sample.

Figure 1 shows the relationship or family identity contained in reports in the *Courier Mail* from January to February 2011 inclusive and in *The Press* from February to March 2011 inclusive. As shown by Figure 1, in Brisbane the predominant voices in this reporting were those of heterosexual couples, and particularly nuclear families. In Christchurch, the relationship status of informants was frequently unclear (representing 60% of included articles); however, heterosexual couples were again the dominant group among those identified.

Such predominance of one kind of voice reflects the heteronormative construction of a natural disaster by the news media. Voices other than those of heterosexual family groups remain absent and their experiences, consequently, remain invisible. As a result, within the media construction of a disaster, social impacts of the event are defined as being impacts on heterosexual family groups. Our concern is that this heterosexualization of the disaster has ongoing impacts on the development of DRR and emergency management policy and practice. Through media reporting, the needs of populations in disasters are defined as the needs of heterosexual family groups.

In many ways, the absence of LGBTI disaster narratives is unsurprising. As we noted above, the work of a range of researchers has identified an absence of LGBTI voices in media reporting generally. What Alwood has described as the “heterosexual assumption” (1996, p. 8) means that the mainstream media frequently assumes uniform heterosexuality among both news subjects and the reading audience. Unless a story relates directly to LGBTI life—the same-sex marriage debate being a recent, frequent example—the media are unlikely to specifically seek out the viewpoint of LGBTI informants. Disasters are unlikely to present themselves as events for which an LGBTI informant would be specifically sought out given the predominant media presentation of these events as objective realities defined by natural factors (Ploughman, 1995). Only through the prioritization of social or human factors as determining disaster impacts does the significance of social marginality become apparent.

LGBTI identity ultimately may lead some individuals, couples, or families to feel excluded from the heteronormative and cisnormative community the media presents. For those who experienced abuse or who were excluded from emergency support on the basis of their LGBTI identity, for example, the community formed by the media may represent exclusion rather than inclusion. Those not represented in media reporting may, therefore, fail to benefit from the feelings of community, belonging, and participation generated by that reporting.

As argued by Panit, Wahl-Jorgensen, and Cottle, “media today perform a leading role in the public constitution of disasters, conditioning how they become known, defined, responded to and politically aligned” (2012, p. 5). If disasters are understood only as “natural” events, or as events with uniform impacts on human populations, then political responses may also fail to incorporate relevant social factors. It is unlikely that the Christchurch or, more particularly, the Brisbane media played any role in encouraging discussion of LGBTI needs in public, political, or policy discussions related to disaster events. Indeed, the heteronormative and cisnormative nature of reporting may have contributed to the continued absence of such discussions.

(2) Aim: To investigate the interest of the LGBTI media in reporting on disasters and the degree to which that reporting reflected the diversity of the LGBTI community

Through quantitative analysis, we have examined the number of reports by date included in the LGBTI media related to each disaster (Figure 2). The results demonstrate, first, a variation in the relative number of articles published in the New Zealand LGBTI media on Christchurch and in the Australian LGBTI media on Brisbane. The New Zealand LGBTI media published 41 articles about the Christchurch earthquake, while the Australian LGBTI media published 21 articles about the Brisbane floods. This indicates a different intensity and

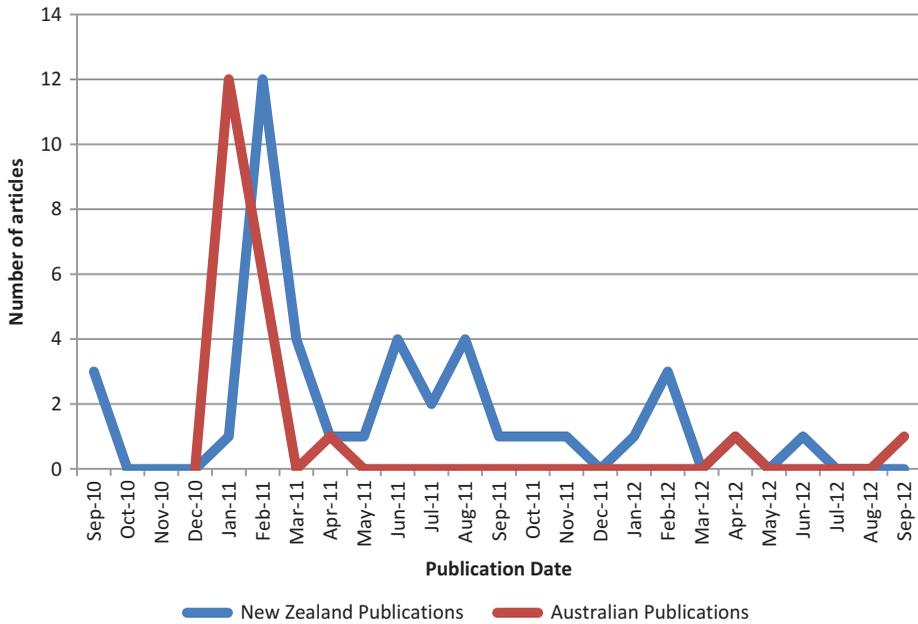


Figure 2. Timeline of Australian and New Zealand LGBTI media reporting on the Christchurch earthquake.

duration of reporting in the respective local LGBTI media. The LGBTI media in New Zealand covered the Christchurch disaster, its impact and aftermath, with greater frequency and over a longer time period than did the LGBTI media in Australia for the Brisbane floods (see Figure 2). This reflects the relative intensity of the event, which in Christchurch had a significantly higher rate of death and injury and a more extensive and extended period of recovery and rebuilding.

Also evident, second, is a rapid drop in published articles following each event. Although follow-up articles—which generally focused on recovery or relocation efforts—did appear in the months following each of the initial disasters (notably on 1-, 6-, and 12-month anniversaries), the LGBTI media was quick to move on to other stories.

The efforts of the LGBTI media to assist their readership to cope with disaster impacts were likely, therefore, to have been most effective in the days and weeks immediately after the initial event. Long-term assistance does not appear to have been a significant element of the support provided by LGBTI media. This suggests that, although LGBTI media may provide a sense of community and belonging for those experiencing disasters during their initial impacts and immediate recovery, that media does not participate in ongoing debates about emergency management policy and procedure. The LGBTI media did not, therefore, reduce LGBTI marginality in or exclusion from emergency management and disaster risk reduction debates.

Brisbane publication *QNews* did, however, use its online profile and reach to attempt to aid the local LGBTI community during the floods via the establishment of a register of LGBTI-friendly emergency accommodation. An online article stated, “People need your help, many are under water and they need somewhere safe to stay for a few days. Emergency shelters are not always welcoming to trans, gay and lesbians, especially couples” (QNews, 2011). In this instance, an LGBTI media organization was not only reporting on potential LGBTI vulnerabilities but also taking active steps to assist the vulnerable.

To examine the levels of inclusion of disparate identities included under the LGBTI acronym, we have conducted quantitative analysis of the sexual identity indicators of informants mentioned in articles in the New Zealand ($n = 41$) and Australian ($n = 21$) LGBTI media (Figure 3). What is clear is that *gay* was the predominant indicator used in both locations. In the press about Christchurch, 46% of references to sexual identity were to *gay*. By comparison, only 8% of references were to *lesbian*, whereas 16% were to a generic *LGBT* or *GLBT* (Figure 3a). In the press about Brisbane, in articles that quoted an informant, the sexual identity of the informant was either not stated (24%), identified as GLBTIQ (5%), or identified as *gay* (43%) (Figure 3b). Somewhat surprisingly, there were no other mentions of specific sexual identities—for example, *lesbian*.

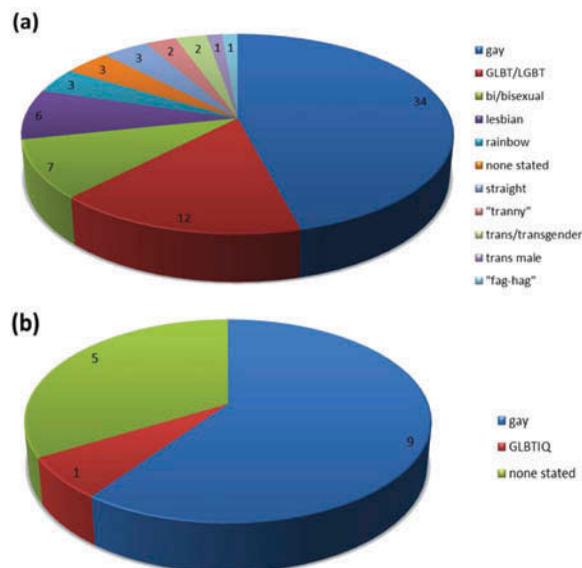


Figure 3. (a) Sexual identity of informants included in the New Zealand LGBTI media sample. (b) Sexual identity of informants included in the Australian LGBTI media sample. The numbers in Figures 4a and 4b reflect the fact that while some articles about the disaster did not include an informant, others included multiple informants. The category “none stated” indicates the inclusion of an informant whose sexual identity was not specifically stated in the article.

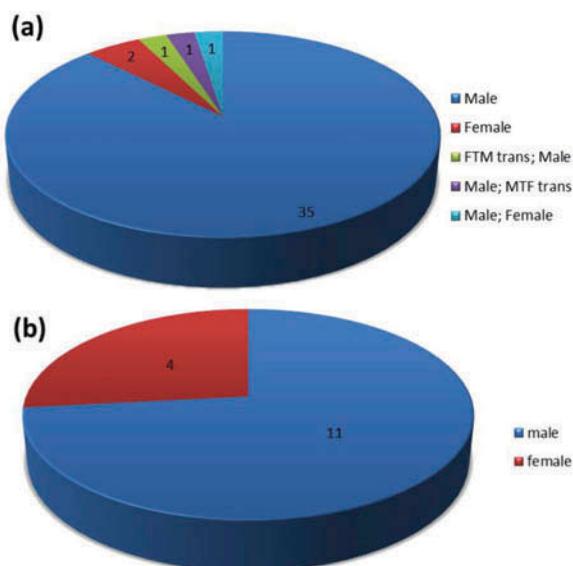


Figure 4. (a) Gender identity of informants included in the New Zealand LGBTI media sample. (b) Gender identity of informants included in the Australian LGBTI media sample. The numbers in Figure 4(a) and (b) reflect the fact that some articles about the disaster did not include an informant, while others included multiple informants.

This suggests that reports in the LGBTI media were heavily weighted toward stories involving gay men. It is important to note that, although *gay* may, at times, have been used to indicate the LGBTI community more broadly, we believe it is a term most frequently used in the Australian media to describe gay men specifically, a contention that is borne out in our analysis of gender representation below.

Our quantitative analysis also examined the gender identity of informants included in the LGBTI media sample. Again, these figures indicate the very predominant male voice—and most likely a gay male voice—in these publications, confirming our understanding of the identity label *gay* as referring to gay men rather than to gay men and lesbians. In fact, the figures about gender identity are even more persuasive than those for references to sexual identity given above. In the New Zealand LGBTI media, 85% of articles included an informant identified as male (Figure 4a). In the Australian LGBTI media, only four articles (19%) included a female informant (Figure 4b).

The overrepresentation of gay male voices accords with widespread critique by lesbian and trans researchers and community organizations, in particular, about the continued predominance of gay male voices, histories, and spaces in sexual and gender minority research and communities (Browne, 2007; Browne & Lim, 2010). Such reporting may leave significant proportions of the LGBTI community marginalized, with the benefits of community and belonging

derived from inclusion in disaster-related reporting perhaps enjoyed less by those unnamed or unseen. Also absent are the specific vulnerabilities experienced by lesbians and transgender individuals (for example, sexist or transphobic abuse or discrimination), which are not likely to be relevant to the experiences of gay men.

(3) Aim: To consider limitations and to raise questions for further research

This article represents early steps in a process that we hope will highlight the role of LGBTI identity or status in determining disaster impacts and will, in effect, lead to a queering of disaster narratives. Although our analysis highlights significant issues regarding media inclusivity and visibility, we acknowledge that limitations remain and that more work is needed to further this process. In this section, we consider these limitations, make suggestions for further research, and raise questions around the implications of our analysis. Most importantly, we believe that further research is necessary to better understand the development of government and NGO emergency management policies and practices and how they impact LGBTI populations; to understand experiences of disasters as reported by LGBTI individuals, couples, and families; and to understand how LGBTI populations make use of the media during and after disasters.

As our analysis shows, the mainstream media currently plays little or no role in improving knowledge of LGBTI vulnerabilities in disasters. If we accept that media reporting can influence political and policy discussion of disasters (Kelly, 2011), then we must also conclude that the media plays little or no role in encouraging policy developers to consider LGBTI issues in emergency management and disaster risk reduction policy. Although we call for more inclusive media reporting, we acknowledge that more work is necessary to develop sound understandings of LGBTI disaster experiences and to develop pathways toward greater inclusivity in policy development.

As we noted above, research into LGBTI disaster experiences to date has found significant vulnerabilities experienced in various global locations, including Australia. These research examples highlight the necessity of localized studies that take into account the geographically constituted nature of sexual and gender identities. Although our analysis of media reporting in Australia and New Zealand highlights the marginality of LGBTI populations in terms of public discussion of disasters, further research is needed to more fully understand LGBTI vulnerability and resilience in those locations. How, for example, do Australian and New Zealand laws recognizing same-sex relationships (including, in New Zealand, marriage) alter disaster experiences when compared to same-sex couples in locations that do not recognize those relationships? How do local antidiscrimination laws impact emergency management protocols? To what extent do the experiences of the range of identities within the LGBTI acronym differ in specific locations?

Further research is also necessary to better understand the ways in which LGBTI people make use of the media during disaster events. Although our analysis suggests that the LGBTI media have attempted to counter the absence of LGBTI narratives in mainstream reporting, the question remains as to whether or not readers turn to the LGBTI media as a source of disaster news. Do readers make use of LGBTI media during significant events such as disasters? During these events, does the LGBTI media hold greater value for some members of that community than for others? Do LGBTI individuals who have experienced disasters express concern about queer invisibility in mainstream reporting of these events? Our analysis has established levels of representation and possible areas of concern that we believe will benefit future research investigating reader responses and media uses.

Our interest in this article is in news media reporting, and we have specifically not investigated social media and other forms of participatory media engagement. Further research is also necessary to identify how LGBTI populations may make use of social media in disaster contexts. Does social media allow LGBTI populations to counter their absence from other media forms?

Conclusion

In addressing the question “How are LGBTI disaster experiences reported by the mainstream and LGBTI media?,” we ultimately find that LGBTI narratives were largely absent from mainstream disaster reporting in Brisbane, Australia and Christchurch, New Zealand. Heteronormative reporting of these events highlighted the experiences of heterosexual nuclear family groups and couples. This is problematic on a number of levels. First, public understandings of natural disasters are constructed largely by the news media (Miles & Morse, 2006). Those populations not included in media reporting may find their specific needs are not met in assistance efforts. The ways in which the public understands these events may also influence the development of emergency management policies, funding allocations, and the focus of DRR practices. Leaving LGBTI populations absent from these policies enhances the vulnerabilities of a marginalized group. Second, those affected by disasters rely on the media to provide support and to enhance resilience by offering a feeling of belonging during potentially isolating events (Perez-Lugo, 2004). Reporting that excludes minority populations may leave these populations further marginalized.

The influence of LGBTI identity on experiences of disaster may not be self-evident. An earthquake or flood cannot be said to care about the gender or sexual identity of the people in its way. It is only through examination of LGBTI disaster narratives and an acknowledgment of the importance of social factors in disaster impacts that the relevance of sexual or gender identity becomes clear. A transgender New Orleans woman who spent

4 days in prison because she used the women's shower facilities at an emergency evacuation center (D'Ooge, 2008); same-sex couples negotiating government support services, insurance claims, and emergency accommodation in jurisdictions that do not recognize their relationships as legitimate (D'Ooge, 2008; Leap, Lewin, & Wilson, 2007); lesbians in Haiti subject to abuse and "corrective" rape in evacuation centers following an earthquake (IGHLRC and SEROVie, 2011)—these examples make clear the centrality of minority sexual or gender identity to experiences of disaster for many people, but such issues may not enter the public discourse without media attention.

For some LGBTI readers in Brisbane and Christchurch, the LGBTI media did offer a degree of representation and perhaps encouraged a greater sense of belonging and shared experience than does the mainstream media. As our research has shown, the local LGBTI media of Brisbane and Christchurch did report on these events, particularly during the impact and immediate recovery phases. Reports in the LGBTI media also sought out LGBTI informants to discuss their experiences, thereby developing, for some, a community of shared experience around these events.

In this way, the LGBTI media ensured that queer voices were heard and that the specific experiences of sexual and gender minorities were provided with some level of media attention. That attention focused, however, largely on the experiences of gay men. This inequitable representation potentially creates deeper layers of marginalization and vulnerability within LGBTI communities.

Funding

This research was conducted as part of an Australian Research Council Discovery Project (DP130102658) on LGBT disaster experiences. Western Sydney University provided a research grant for pilot work.

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