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It is now a maxim among scholars and policy-makers alike that disaster preparedness needs to involve community-based approaches in order to be effective. These include not only neighbourhood-level strategies but also those involving households. Attending to the ways that members of a household respond to and prepare for disasters in their everyday practices reveals how 'preparedness' is constructed from the ground up (Heidenstrøm and Kvarnlöf 2018). But while the everyday performativity of preparedness is important so that we can draw on local experiences, we must also ask: what is a 'household'? In this paper, we explore how notions of 'preparedness' and 'household' are simultaneously produced in disaster preparedness policies and activities in Japan, the UK, and beyond. The questions driving the paper emerge from a transnational ethnographic research project that has looked at preparedness activities with children, their schools, and their families in Japan and Chile. In particular, many of the survival and resilience strategies in these activities focus on cultivating resourcefulness—that is, turning everyday objects into preparedness tools. Drawing on historical and cross-cultural analyses, we suggest that this mobilizes a gendered and racialized understanding of the household that has resonance with many preparedness and crisis management regimes (McEnaney 2000; Preston 2012). Ultimately, we suggest that as much as anthropologists and others have challenged essentialized and stable definitions of 'community' in disaster research (Barrios 2014), we must do the same for 'households' and other related terms such as 'family' and 'kinship'.

References

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Community response to crises and disasters: From preparedness to practices