

**The mediated visualization of shame and pride:**

**News images of same-sex marriage in the alternative and mainstream press of New Zealand**

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**Abstract**

On 19 April 2013, a bill to legalize same-sex marriage was passed by the New Zealand House of Representatives, which made the country the fifteenth in the world to give homosexuals the right to marry. This research examined the images accompanying 654 articles about gay marriage in *The New Zealand Herald*, a mainstream news outlet, and *GayNZ*, an alternative publication in the calendar year surrounding the bill's passage. All photographs were analysed through the framework of shame and pride, given the centrality of pride (and conversely, shame) to the gay and lesbian political movement worldwide. This study explored the connection of shame to the visual representation of marginalization, anonymity, othering, dependence, heteronormativity and sadness. Pride, in relation to same-sex marriage, was examined through the visual framework of collectivism, accountability, inclusivity, independence, homonormativity and happiness. None of the individual variables examined for this research would suggest a uniform visual representation of either emotional position. However, when all 654 images were examined in accordance to the host of variables constructed for this study, a pattern of visual representation emerged that suggested a continued heterosexist representation of gay shame.

**Key Words:**

Same-sex marriage, shame, pride, visual analysis, emotionality, alternative and mainstream news

## **The mediated visualization of shame and pride: News images of same-sex marriage in the mainstream and alternative New Zealand press**

On 19 April 2013, a bill to legalize same-sex marriage was passed by the New Zealand House of Representatives. New Zealand became the first country in Oceania and only the fifteenth in the world to allow same-sex marriage. This research explores whether the visual re-presentations of same-sex marriage in newspaper coverage during the months preceding the Parliamentary vote and after its passage, coalesced to form an 'image' of gay marriage in the minds of most New Zealanders. This study examines the images accompanying 654 articles about gay marriage in the mainstream, *New Zealand Herald*, and the alternative publication, *GayNZ*, through the framework of shame and pride, given the centrality of pride (and conversely, shame) to the gay and lesbian political movement worldwide. This research also asks if there is a difference in that re-presentation across 'alternative' and 'mainstream' news media outlets given that visual codes of reference have been suggested to shift within an alternative communicative space.

This study will first review the history of same-sex rights in New Zealand before exploring the dichotomous constructs of shame and pride in relation to the political struggle for gay and lesbian equality in marriage. This paper will then examine research in the related fields of visual analysis and media framing in an attempt to work towards a visual framing model for the emotions of shame and pride in news images about the gay and lesbian community. The visual manifestation of shame will be proposed as images of anonymity, marginalization, othering, dependence, heteronormativity and sadness. Pride, in relation to same-sex marriage, will be examined through the visual framework of collectivism, accountability, inclusivity, independence, homonormativity and happiness. The results of this study will be contrasted against other research in the field as well as advances made by the gay and lesbian community in New Zealand.

### **Same-sex rights in New Zealand**

While sex between women has never been illegal in New Zealand, homosexual male sex was explicitly criminalized when New Zealand joined the British Empire in 1840. The decriminalization of homosexual male sex occurred in stages over the next 140 years and culminated in 1986, when the Homosexual Law Reform Act, which decriminalised homosexuality and legalised gay sex, was passed by Parliament, 49 votes to 44 ("Homosexual Law Reform Act," 1986). This highly contested

act laid the groundwork for what would transpire eighteen years later. In December of 2004, the New Zealand Parliament passed the Civil Union Bill, which came into effect the following April. Rather than take the approach of Canada, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and South Africa, which had all legalised same-sex marriage, New Zealand appeared to frame equal rights for homosexual couples in the context of a secular civil union between homosexuals *and* heterosexuals. On 26 April 2005, The Civil Union Bill officially granted registered same-sex couples in New Zealand recognition and relationship rights that were equal to that of traditional marriage. Just a few months earlier, in February of 2005, the accompanying Relationships (Statutory References) Act was also passed. This bill removed all discrimination based on relationship status from all New Zealand laws and gave same-sex and opposite-sex couples the same rights and responsibilities as those in a heterosexual marriage. These companion bills also officially recognised same-sex marriages from Canada, South Africa, Spain and the Netherlands as civil unions in New Zealand.

In May of 2012, just seven years after the Civil Union Bill came into effect, Labour Party MP Louisa Wall submitted a private members bill titled The Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment. The bill was quickly drawn from the ballot and gave same-sex couples the right to marry. After three readings of the bill, the law was passed on 17 April 2103, by a conservative-led National government, 77 votes to 44. Immediately after the vote, supporters of the bill emotionally sang the traditional Maori love song Pokarekare Ana in the Parliament gallery. The tune is proudly sung in the indigenous Maori language and has been spontaneously used at patriotic athletic events, such as the 2000 Summer Olympics and the 2009 World Games.

### **Pride and shame in the political growth of gay and lesbian rights**

The concept of pride has been central to the expansion of gay and lesbian rights in the developed world (Rand, 2012). Pride developed, rather vociferously, as a construct for the gay and lesbian political movement after decades of what was perceived as a heteronormatively-driven shame. Pride stands at the oppositional end of shame, which is “at once its emotional antithesis and its political antagonist” (Halperin & Traub, 2009, p. 3). The distinction between this dichotomy can most easily be drawn by early ACT UP campaigns, such as “Silence = Death.” Whereas “shame played a significant role in the early years of the AIDS crisis” (Rand, 2012, p. 76), pride shook protest

spaces and quickly became the mediated framework for the expression and re-presentation of the gay and lesbian political movement.

'Gay pride' began to define the political narrative for gay and lesbian equality through a variety of visual and textual constructions, with the most obvious being the gay pride parade. In some corners of the world, such as Sydney Australia, these parades have moved from a marginalized, alternative expression of sexual identity to a corporate spectacle, branded and packaged for international travel and tourism (Waitt & Markwell, 2006). For quite some time, the Sydney Mardi Gras Parade celebrated the proud exclamation of gay identity through largely camp expressions on Australian free-to-air commercial television every year. Camp sensibilities have been historically used to convert "the serious into the frivolous" (Sontag, 1966, p. 276), but also serve as a confrontational and proud challenge to heteronormative assumptions about sexuality. A construction of camp sexual identity can represent a refusal of heterosexual rigidity, a proud embrace of sexualized difference, and a performative visual rejection of shame.

The parade as a performative space of pride has evolved as central to sexual politics (Thomsen & Markwell, 2009). The gay pride parade now proudly delineates a framework that is inherently subjective, sexualized and homonormative (Bell & Binnie, 2000). These staged events are collective and authentic expressions, which often purposefully problematize heterosexual culture (Johnston, 2005). Expressions of pride, within a political context, elicit supportive behaviour from majority group members when there is a perception that those in the minority group authentically deserve an intended or achieved accomplishment (Ratcliff, Miller, & Krolikowski, 2012). The performance of pride in regards to sexual politics, therefore involves an acknowledgement of deservedness that is created through an increased sense of unified collectivism and inclusiveness as well as a celebration of homosexual culture.

Much previous research examining emotionality in gay and lesbian media representations has looked at the gay pride parade. However, this research examines gay marriage as a performative space given that a wedding meticulously scripts each move by the central actors. As previous scholars have argued (i.e. Altman, 1997; Massey, 2005), a performative space is subjective and "entertains the possibility of the co-existence of a multiplicity of distinct narratives...depending on how an individual negotiates the possibility of every social moment" (Waitt & Stapel, 2011, p. 199). While pride has been central to the public construction of the gay and lesbian political movement toward

equality, each person witnessing and participating in that performative space might have a completely different set of experiences, with different purposes and affective outcomes, which – at the binary extreme – introduce feelings of shame. As such, the construction and deconstruction of these performative events do not operate in a closed network. Individuals bring multiple meanings to encode an event with meaning and also to decode their own affective responses. This ongoing process focuses each individual's attention on the shared, co-constructed hegemonic understandings of what is acceptable in society and what is rejected. Individuals come to understand the boundaries of their selves in relation to these resultant normative expressions of acceptability and rejection – of pride and shame (Probyn, 2003).

This shame/pride binary also works to create interconnections between the other and the self. Shame paradoxically unites individuals through a shared rejection of subjectivities, while simultaneously dividing these individuals from each other through the resultant emotion. Embedded within this process, is a recognition that any attempt to reverse normative discourses can also fold into the self in unpredictable ways (Munt, 2007). A political movement focused directly on prideful expressions of gay and lesbian sexuality can be encoded and/or decoded through a shameful lens (Halperin & Traub, 2009), even within the movement itself (Oveis, Horberg, & Keltner, 2010). This unpredictability may be rooted in historical efforts to connect pride with heteronormative expectations, that were largely concerned with the politics of respectability (Gould, 2009). Some research has argued that the gay and lesbian community has aligned their previously unique, and perhaps radical, aspirations with the mainstream, heteronormative middle class in their struggle for social equality (Crimp, 2002). These historical attempts at mainstream acceptance are readily apparent in “a type of homosexuality that has become so normalized, so commonplace, and so politically correct that it has practically been de-gayed” (Stepien, 2012, p. 144). In the pursuit of social acceptance, many within the gay and lesbian movement have also sought conformity within the mainstream heterosexual culture, which has exposed the continued tension between pride and shame. The reinforcement of heteronormative discourses of ‘respectability’ and ‘appropriate’ sexual behaviors conjure a volatile and rather uncertain sense of shame in a political community that is rhetorically constituted in narratives of pride. That proud narrative itself was politically born as a visible reaction against rigid constructions of shame deposited by a mainstream, heteronormative culture. This complex, historically-grounded, emotive exchange confirms “the capricious nature of deploying affect as a

political tactic” (Rand, 2012, p. 79). Shame surfaces when the “contagiousness of collective affects works to expose any breaches in the borders between self and other” (p. 328). As the “intimate proximity to others” (Probyn, 2004, p. 331) increases, the opportunities for shame to emerge rises exponentially. Shame is a response to the gaze, actions or perceived thoughts of others. The politics of both pride and shame have obvious “affects and are lived through gendered and sexualized bodies and spaces” (Johnston, 2007, p. 30). Shame as affect (Sedgwick, 2003) is “productive in that it brings the subject into being at the same time as the subject is isolated” (Johnston, 2007, p. 42). Shame occurs through marginalization – the sense of anonymity and unimportance against an omnipresent other.

While pride may be celebrated in the gay and lesbian movement, shame in the gay and lesbian community is perhaps most noticeable in the extremely high teenage suicide rate and the long-used metaphor of a ‘closet’ as the “defining structure for gay oppression” (Sedgwick, 1990). The performance of shame in regards to sexual politics, therefore involves an acknowledgement of undeservedness that is created through an increased sense of marginalization and anonymity. Shame would also be displayed through performative self-denigration, which in this case would be portrayed through the celebration of heteronormative culture. ‘Symbolic annihilation’ either wholly omits homosexual representation or reflects mainstream “biases and interests of those elites who define the public agenda, and these elites are (mostly) White, (mostly) middle-aged, (mostly) male, (mostly) middle and upper classes, and entirely heterosexual” (Gross, 1991, p. 21)

### **Visual Framing and Emotionality**

Framing theory, while commonly applied in communication research to written texts, has been unevenly implemented in the field (Entman, 2004). Carragee and Roefs (2004) argued that framing studies must begin to examine their results within the ‘contexts of the distribution of political and social power’ (p. 214). They build this argument upon previous research which broadly, yet directly, linked framing to power and ideology (Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1978). It is impossible to remove ideology from the visual framing of the gay and lesbian community – a group that has long been both intensely politicized and emotive. Journalists and news photographers (often, one and the same) have framed news content - and audiences have integrated these frames into their world view

– through an ideological lens (McQuail, 2005), which serves as the bridge between culture and cognition (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992, p. 384).

While this relationship is dynamic and multi-directional, it is predominately the elite, powerful, news media that shape how the public interprets issues and events (Sotirovic, 2000), rather than the other way around. Consequently, the public's main understanding of social issues derives from a framed construction provided by media over time and from a select perspective (i.e. Altheide, 1976; Gamson, 1992; Gitlin, 1980; Ryan, Carragee, & Schwerner, 1998; Tuchman, 1978). Gitlin (1980) long ago defined frames as “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organise discourse” (p. 7). A frame determines what is “relevant” (Hertog & McLeod, 1995, p. 4) and “suggests what the issue is” (Tankard Jr., Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, & Ghanem, 1991). Frames (both textual and visual) are “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (Reese, Gandy Jr., & Grant, 2001, p. 11).

This determination of relevance suggests an implicit evidentiary purpose to frames. How an issue is framed determines what and why something happened, but also confirms whether something happened at all. As such, the photographic image can be easily conscripted as ‘proof’ of an event occurring. “In order for social change to occur, there has to be evidence of the event” (Dansky, 2009). Echoing the important work of Susan Sontag, Dansky (2009) argues that photographs “make visible what is concealed and become evidence of reality” (para. 1). Although the importance of photographic images to our lived reality has been made clear (i.e. Blackwood, 1983; Zelizer, 2006), much work examining visual communication remains largely outside of the more professionally focused journalism and media journals – and less still examine emotionality in news photographs. This is surprising, given that within the research that does exist, there has been a wealth of compelling findings suggesting visual messages have a profound influence on how one thinks and feels about mediated content. For example, research has found that political images affect citizen's voting intentions (Barrett & Barrington, 2005) whereas strategic images affect the persuasiveness of arguments in advertising (Jeong, 2008). News images have been seen to be so powerful that in some instances they actually become “lived images” for audiences (Coonfield & Huxford, 2009, p. 457). Positive visual representations in televised media have been found to influence how individuals feel

toward marginalized groups (Levina, Waldo, & Fitzgerald, 2006) and can negate or counteract textual information in the mind of the viewer (Desmarais & Bruce, 2010).

While there are manifest elements that comprise an image, there are latent sociological, political, and cultural cues embedded within visual messages as well (Huxford, 2001), which all coalesce to expose the ideological constituency (Manovich, 2001; Reeves & Campbell, 1994) of those who created the media message. Visual communicators exist within a mutually inter-supported nexus that simultaneously reflects and perpetuates social contexts (Barnard, 2005; Julier, 2000). As such, visual frames must not be understood as manifestly or purely evidentiary. While visual images do offer an elemental proof of existence, visual frames need to also be contextualized within an ideological position, which is central to how we “make meaning, and communicate in the world around us” (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 1). Given that images are often the first items scanned within a mediated message (Miller, 1975), they also generally form the longest-lasting impressions on memory (Lester, 2003) and therefore, play a powerful role in the construction of social understandings.

Previous research exploring the visual framing of emotionality has found differences in the reporting of the same event across textual and visual media, suggesting that emotions are indeed purposefully used by reporters to construct reality (Cho et al., 2003). There has been research detecting gendered emotion in news wire photographs (Wanta & Leggett, 1989). Stereotypical portrayals of emotionality have also been found in news photos (Rodgers, Kenix, & Thorson, 2007). Yet, the focus on emotion in photographs has been relatively light considering that a clear benefit of visual communication is its ability to transcend textual imitations and convey emotions in addition to factual evidence (Lester, 2003). These studies examining emotionality have also done so through rather obvious framing categories of emotion: pleasure, happiness, sadness, calmness, and excitedness are typical emotions that have been measured.

This research attempts to examine a specific emotion, pride, and its counterpart, shame, which are both rather particular to a politicized grouping of people that have used the former emotion as a foundational principle for achieving equal rights. Previous research has suggested that “it is important to think of emotion broadly-both in terms of biology and culture- to gain a better sense of the social construction of emotion” (Rodgers et al., 2007, p. 121). This research attempts to do just that through the examination of how two emotions, transmuted upon a historical tradition of expression in in the gay and lesbian community, have been visually framed in New Zealand news

media. In an attempt to ascertain the visual framing of these emotions, there is a presumption that images have the ability and the power to make abstractions concrete (Cloud, 2004).

This research also asks if there is a difference in that re-presentation across ‘alternative’ and ‘mainstream’ news media outlets as visual codes of reference may shift when a traditionally marginalized group of people are speaking to each other within a shared, and somewhat closed, alternative communicative space. Mainstream and alternative news are two locations of meaning that have long been considered to be distinct (Curran & Couldry, 2003). One should be clear to note that the mainstream and alternative press also have a history of borrowing from one another (Kenix, 2011). However, scholars have maintained that a fundamental, cultural difference between alternative and mainstream media remains (Atton, 2004), which can produce an obvious distinctiveness in aesthetic form and approach (Atton, 2002). The difference has been attributed to a conceptual and practical deviance from the mainstream that is purposefully in “explicit opposition” (Downumt & Coyer, 2007, p. 1). The ubiquitously simultaneous and implicit imbrications of professionalism, power, visual communication, culture and ideology in the alternative and mainstream news media (Darts, 2004), would suggest divergently unique approaches to visual communication.

## **Methodology**

This research analysed mainstream and alternative news media news photographs during the calendar year of 2013. This encapsulates the 17 April vote by the New Zealand House of Representatives to pass same-sex marriage legislation and the 19 August date when same-sex marriage became legal in New Zealand society. All news photographs from *The New Zealand Herald* and *GayNZ* were located through a word search of “gay marriage.” Newspapers were chosen as they critically influence how people think of the world (May, 2003). The local gay and lesbian community publication, *GayNZ*, was also important for inclusion as such alternative sites of meaning may suggest a different or “particular understanding of gayness” (Markwell & Waitt, 2009, p. 148) that may not be as prevalent in mainstream publications. This intertextuality is important if research aims to better understand the wider network of re-presentations – how they intersect and how they diverge. The news photograph was the unit of analysis.

*The New Zealand Herald* is read by an average of 835,000 people on a typical day (The New Zealand Herald, 2013). Given that approximately 4.5 million people live in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2014), *The New Zealand Herald* readership constitutes a substantial portion of the

population. *GayNZ* was selected as the alternative news publication for examination. It is promoted as “New Zealand’s foremost information and resource website for the national gay, lesbian and transgender community” (GayNZ, 2014). The organization publishes online as *GayNZ* and in print through what is called the *Gig Guide* – a full colour publication distributed free to gay-friendly outlets. *GayNZ* boasts 90,000+ website visits per month and 3.2 million+ page views per month (GayNZ, 2014).

This research aimed to examine the news photographs available in connection with each newspaper article based on a constructionist approach that explores how repeated structures produce “authoritative accounts of the world” (Waitt, 2005, p. 168). This research moves away from essentialist approaches to uncover a more contextual, latent pattern of re-presentation that has perhaps not been examined to date. This is possible through a semiotic photographic analysis that explores the construction of an image in relation to culture (Wells, 2003). Each image was viewed as the result of social and cultural complexes (Flusser, 2000) that have powerful connotations for the viewing public. This Foucaultian critical analysis is laden with a responsibility to privilege the visual image as a purposeful moment in the normalization of culture. As Landau (2009) has argued, the photograph “functions hegemonically to reveal and construct dynamic power relationships and their sexual politics” (p. 84).

Deconstructing the visual markers of pride and shame is complex. These images are inherently ideological and laden with multiple meanings. However, the following variables were coded for each image found through a search of “gay marriage” in news content: homosexual person, celebrity or politician present; pro same-sex marriage protester, same-sex couple in a wedding ceremony, same-sex couple kissing, or same-sex couple standing side by side. Symbols and illustrations were also noted as well as heterosexual persons, celebrities or politicians, anti same-sex marriage protesters and religious leaders. All individuals were also coded according to perceived happiness/sadness and camp representations. Shame – as a relational construct to same-sex marriage - was operationalized through the coding of these specific variables toward a collective analysis of marginalization, anonymity, othering, dependence, heteronormativity and sadness. Pride, in relation to same-sex marriage, was operationalized through these coded variables as representations of collectivism, accountability, inclusivity, independence, homonormativity and happiness.

Homosexuality and heterosexuality as a coding construct was defined through the examination of the photograph, the headline and/or the caption. This process was obviously fraught with complexity and there was no assurance that the final coded values were irrefutably correct. However, based on this triangulated approach, it was hoped that this research reached a reliable gage of how, at a minimum, a performed sexuality was perceived by the average viewer. Coding was based on knowledge of that person's sexuality (i.e. previously self-identified sexuality was stated in the headline or caption, or the person's sexuality was known to the coder); sexuality could be inferred from the context of the headline or caption (i.e. The photo of NBA player Jason Collins with a caption reading "Collins' brave decision to publicly reveal he is gay has been hailed as a landmark moment," was coded as 'homosexual'); the person's profession necessitated a stated position on sexuality (i.e. A Christian Minister was coded as 'heterosexual.');

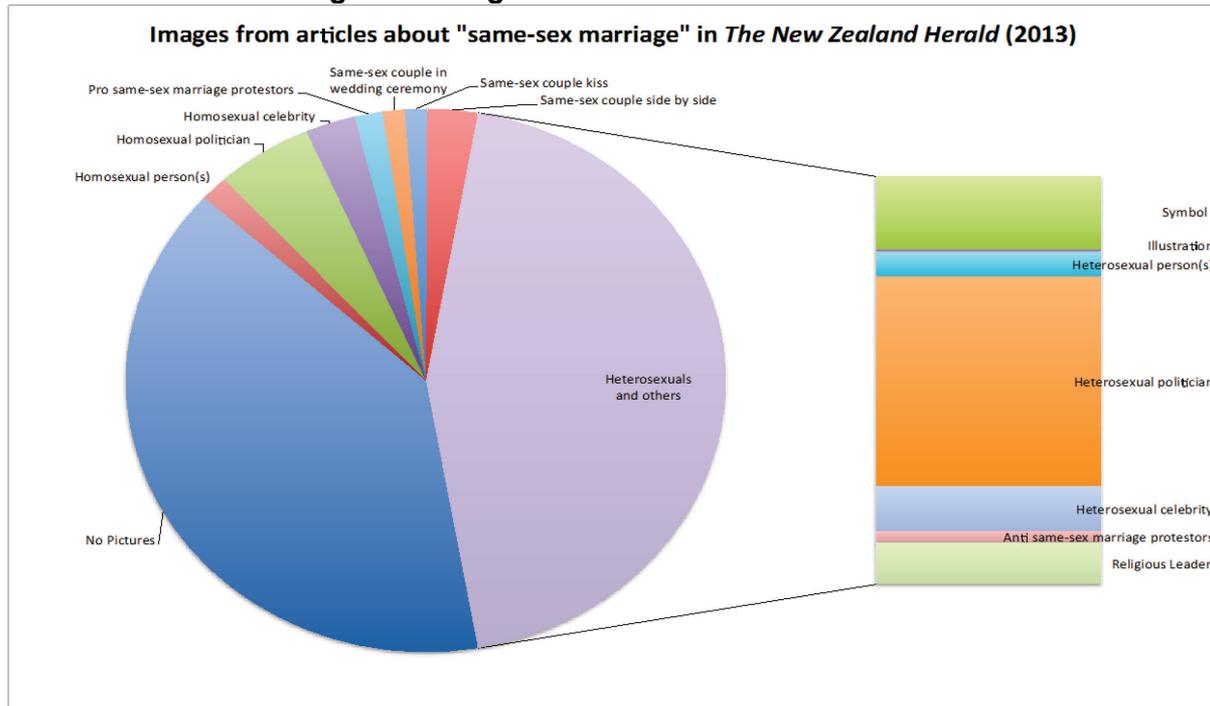
or the performance of affection within the visual frame indicated a sexual identity (i.e. Two individuals of the same sex demonstrating physical affection toward one another was coded as 'homosexual.').

Chi-square correlations ( $\chi^2$ ), Cramer's V associations ( $V_c$ ), expected values, adjusted residual scores, simple percentages, and frequencies were used to measure the relationship between measured variables and the source of publication.

## Findings and Discussion

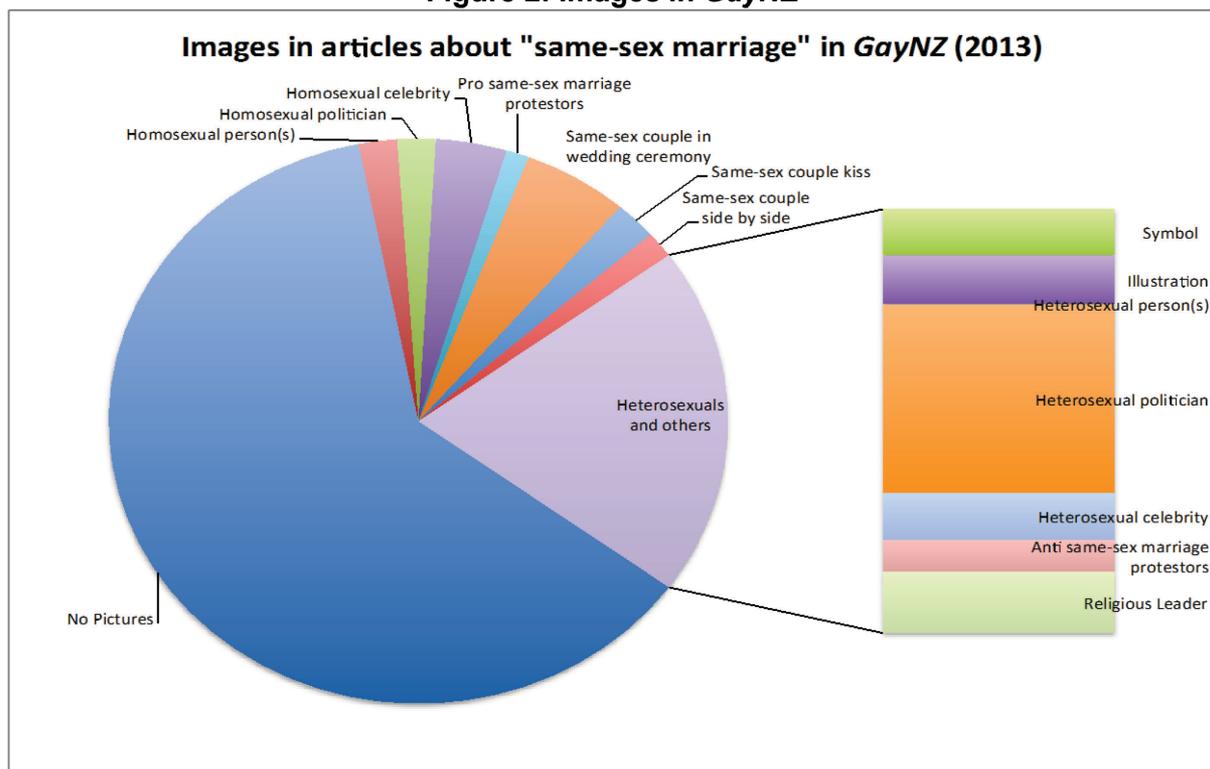
*The New Zealand Herald* had 329 articles that were listed as matches for the keyword(s) "gay marriage" in 2013 and *GayNZ* had 651 articles with those same keywords in 2013. Every second article from *GayNZ* was examined in an effort toward relative sample parity. This resulted in 325 *GayNZ* articles for analysis. The overwhelming finding from both news outlets was that images of homosexuals speaking about homosexual marriage were relatively rare. It was far more common, across both outlets, for there to be no accompanying images or photographs featuring heterosexuals. *The New Zealand Herald* used more photographic images than *Gay NZ*, but also relied on heterosexuals in their visual imagery more than *Gay NZ* (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Images in *The New Zealand Herald***



In contrast, *Gay NZ* used visual imagery far less than *The New Zealand Herald*. However, when images were used, they portrayed homosexuals more than *The Herald* (Figure 2) and in similar proportion to heterosexuals and others.

**Figure 2: Images in *GayNZ***



The Cramer's V measure of .366, which gauges the relationship strength, suggested a very strong relationship between the source of publication and use of visual imagery. All Cramer's V associations ( $V_c$ ) above .25 were classified as very strong; .15 to .25 indicated a strong relationship; .10 to .15 a moderate relationship; .05 to .10 a weak relationship; and .01 to .05 indicated no or negligible relationship.

#### Invisibility as a closet

A large portion of articles in both the mainstream, *New Zealand Herald*, and the alternative, *GayNZ*, did not use any images to visually tell the story of gay marriage. However, *The Herald* was statistically far more likely ( $\chi^2=87.06$ ,  $df=14$ ,  $p=.000$ ) to have accompanying visuals (60.5 percent) than *GayNZ* (38.1 percent). Taken together, there were no accompanying images in 54.3 percent of articles about gay marriage in these two publications. However, the lack of photographs in *GayNZ* was found more than would be expected by chance alone (adj. res. = 6.6). Adjusted residuals, or the difference between expected and observed counts, were used to demonstrate actual effects of any given relationship. Strong effects of a particular case of one variable on a particular case of another variable were found if adjusted residuals were +/- 2.0 points. The lack of visual images could be due to many reasons, with the most obvious being a dearth of resources – particularly at *GayNZ*. Photographers cost money and as such, the option of visual documentation for stories on gay marriage may have been disregarded when weighed against other budgetary concerns. Smaller, alternative news media often deal with even tighter financial constrictions, which may have resulted in less visual emphasis on gay marriage stories in *GayNZ*.

However, every decision in every newsroom is made within a larger context of news values, cultural expectations, and ideological influence. Images of actual people existing within the lived reality of a same-sex marriage humanize the narrative and provide relevance for readers who may not have a direct connection. The lack of visibility for gay marriage can be read as implicitly heterosexist as it destabilizes the essentialist humanity of homosexual marriage. Photographs speak to the "importance of rendering (an) event visible" (Meyer, 2006, p. 443). In the context of gay marriage, this lack of visibility resonates with a community that has struggled with recognition. Marriage itself is obviously an intensely personal issue in and of itself – it is defined by an intimate relationship between two people. As such, it is part of what it means, intrinsically, to be human and to

be alive. While many individuals may not marry in their lifetime, most have contemplated the principles of marriage, whether for themselves or for others. By reducing over half of the discussion about gay marriage to strictly textual-based narratives that are not visually connected to actual people, the media in New Zealand also removed much of what was human about gay marriage.

Ideologically, the removal of a human imprint for gay marriage operates within “historically mediated stereotypes of homosexuality and heteronormativity that suppress (their) presence” (Landau, 2009, p. 92). This suppression has been conceptualized through the metaphor of an oppressive closet for the gay and lesbian community. Coming out, or declaring your sexuality publically, has long been “framed by the movement not simply as a private act of self disclosure but as a public demand for visibility” (Meyer, 2006, p. 447). This public demand for visibility has occurred through a mediated lens. If indeed, news stories “become a forum for framing contests in which political actors compete by sponsoring their preferred definitions of issues” (Carragee & Roefs, 2004, p. 216), then access to those news stories are the result of the “economic and cultural resources available to sponsors to promote frames” (Carragee & Roefs, 2004, p. 219). From the position of the historically marginalized, representation means power – and a lack of representation translates to a lack of power. Such a (non) visual representation that removes the evidentiary, lived gayness from the visual frame becomes a homophobic narrative.

It is important to note that the decision to largely disregard visual images in news articles was made by the media, not by those represented. So, while it may appear that a lack of what is essentially a visual manifestation of humanity in news about gay marriage is a reflection of framing *through* the media, the steadfast reliance on text-based communication is perhaps more clearly an example of framing *by* the media (Van Gorp, 2007). It is through this context that the widespread omission of visual storytelling from *GayNZ*, feels its most pronounced. Visual documentation brings “the camera as an active participant in, rather than a neutral recorder of, gay liberation” (Meyer, 2006, p. 447). As such, both *GayNZ* and *The New Zealand Herald* remained largely removed from the issue of gay marriage.

In place of actual humans, there were symbols used in 5.6 percent of *New Zealand Herald* articles and 1.5 percent of *GayNZ* articles ( $p=.000$ , adjusted residual  $\pm 3.4$ ). These symbols were typically rainbow flags, two rings, or the disembodied hands of two individuals that appear to be of the same sex holding hands. In one case (Figure 3), the stock image was simply of one male hand with a

ring on the fourth finger of the right hand. It is presumed that this is a symbol of engagement but it is the left hand that is used for engagement rings in New Zealand. Notwithstanding this fact, the solitary hand would presumably not symbolize the unification of an engagement between two people. The inappropriate use of this symbolism highlights the difficulty in relying on symbols, rather than holistic images of individuals involved in same-sex marriage, to encapsulate the complexities of what has historically been a marginalized group in society.

**Figure 3: Engagement Ring on Right Hand**



Photo / Thinkstock

(Associated Press, 2013)

There is a presumption in the use of these symbols, for example, that all readers will understand the meaning of a rainbow flag. While the photographic editor might hope this would be the case, the preeminent cultural theorist, Stuart Hall (1973), pointed out years ago that decoding even the most manifest images can be complicated by a whole host of external factors. Relying on symbols also dehumanizes what is an implicitly human expression of love and commitment into an event or issue that is socially disconnected. This dehumanization is compounded through the use of disembodied body parts in within the visual frame (Pipher & Kilbourne, 2000). Images, such as these, move same-sex marriage emotionally away from a recognizable and accountable moment of shared pride to a hidden moment of purposefully obfuscated shame. The same-sex wedding becomes a closeted event that dare not risk exposure nor invite inspection from the public gaze.

### Heterosexuals as the authority on homosexual marriage

Overall, 38.5 percent of images portrayed individuals who were known to be heterosexuals and 15.8 percent were known to be homosexuals in the *New Zealand Herald* (adj. res. = 5.7). Thus, far more heterosexuals were given privilege to speak on the rights of homosexuals to marry than homosexuals themselves. The numbers were much more even in *Gay NZ*, whereby 15.8 percent of images portrayed known heterosexuals and 18.4 homosexual individuals. The difference between the two publications was found to be significant ( $\chi^2=61.28$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p=.000$ ). Twenty-eight percent of articles sampled in *The New Zealand Herald* and 10.9 percent of articles in *GayNZ* featured government officials or state legislators (adj. res. = +/- 5.1). The difference between the two publications was again found to be significant ( $\chi^2=87.05$ ,  $df=14$ ,  $p=.000$ ). Of the articles featuring politicians in *The Herald*, 22.8 percent were heterosexual politicians and only 5.2 percent were homosexual. The 10.9 percent of articles in *GayNZ* with politicians as the visual image accompanying articles about same sex marriage was comprised of 8.9 percent being heterosexual individuals and 2 percent being homosexual. Overall, only 16 percent of articles in *The New Zealand Herald* and 18.1 percent of articles in *GayNZ* visually represented homosexuals or same-sex marriage supporters (Figure 1 and 2).

The overall focus on known heterosexual politicians, rather than homosexual representatives can be read as a “heterosexist representational form” (Landau, 2009) and also as implicitly shameful for the gay and lesbian community. The subtext is that the gay and lesbian community can not, or will not, speak for themselves. Presumably, this could be read that they either do not have the power to speak for themselves or they are ashamed to do so. The reliance on heterosexual politicians in the visual representation of gay marriage suggests that homosexuals need or require heterosexuals for validation. Such a position assumes a lack of strength within the gay and lesbian community and within themselves. It suggests that if one wishes to determine the worth of gay and lesbian individuals, they must solicit the opinion of a heterosexual. Previous research (i.e. Dow, 2001; Walters, 2001) has found that representations of gay issues often co-opt straight elite voices to advocate for the gay and lesbian community – and in so doing, they also simultaneously silence that same community.

The representations of heterosexual politicians are also telling in their visual portrayal of strength and power. Two examples come from *GayNZ*. One image is the Prime Minister Henry Puna of The Cook Islands, who opposes gay marriage (Figure 4), and one image is the New Zealand Labour leader, Hon. David Shearer, who supports gay marriage (Figure 5). The images of both politicians appear to be professional ‘head shots’ and, as such, they denote a purposeful and planned re-presentation of political strength through the solitary direct gaze of each man looking confidently into the camera. These images are heavily scripted to present an uncompromising visual aesthetic of power. The selected white background demonstrates an uncomplicated transparency, communicating a direct engagement with onlookers. These constructed images present two individuals who have been solicited for their well-informed, thoughtful opinions. They do not need, nor require, the validation of others to espouse their views.

**Figure 4: Cook Islands PM Henry Puna**



**Cook Islands PM Henry Puna**  
(GayNZ.com Daily News staff, 2013a)

**Figure 5: Hon. David Shearer**



**David Shearer**  
(GayNZ.com Daily News staff, 2013b)

The dearth of homosexual political representations is that much more striking when one considers that Louisa Wall, a New Zealand Member of Parliament (MP) who self-identifies as lesbian, was the MP that submitted the bill to legalise same-sex marriage. As the individual who put forth the bill for consideration, she was the principal parliamentarian who spoke to the bill’s detail in surrounding commentary. Despite this, her visual representation was far eclipsed by heterosexual parliamentarians who voiced their support (or condemnation) for the bill’s passage. In total, images of

Hon. Louisa Wall accounted for only 2.5 percent of the images but comprised the near totality of gay politicians measured for this study.

#### Cinematic celebration of bill's passage

Although representations of homosexual individuals and politicians were relatively rare in this sample, almost all of the images of Hon. Louisa Wall were in a moment of celebratory pride. Hon. Wall was coded as 'happy' in 99 percent of her visual representations and the near totality of her representations were taken from the day of the Marriage Amendment Bill's passage in Parliament (Figure 6). However, the images of Hon. Wall often framed her in a cinematic gaze as she stared off the frame in a state of bewildered happiness while others visibly congratulated her for the passage of the bill. She is swathed in color, adorned with flowers and basking in the achievement of The Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment bill's passage. It is important to note that as an encapsulated visual moment, this is not a celebration of gay love or of same-sex marriage, but of a legislative agenda completed. The exclusively Parliamentary celebration is constructed through several visual artefacts: the Colonial wood benches and high-backed leather chairs, the individual microphones and water glasses as well as the business attire of those involved.

**Figure 6: Hon. Louisa Wall in Parliament**



Louisa Wall is congratulated by Labour leader Davis Shearer and MP Jacinda Ardern after the Marriage Amendment Bill was passed in Parliament. Photo / Mark Mitchell

(Davison, Young, Shuttleworth, & Backhouse, 2013)

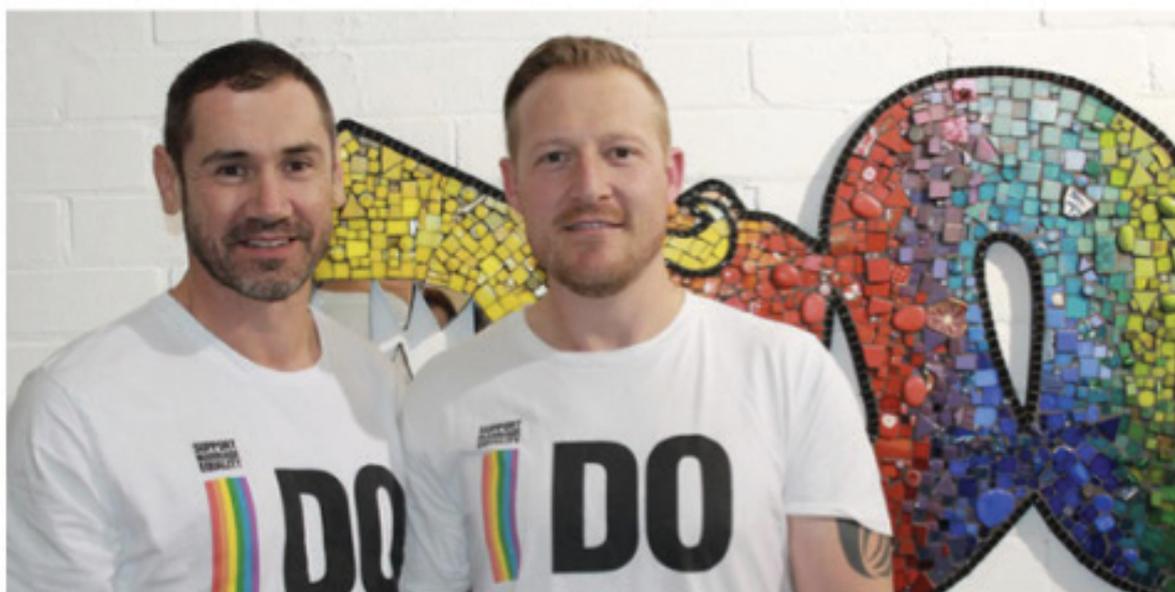
Hon. Wall is generally placed in the centre of the frame in these particular images, denoting a principal position of importance. The other (heterosexual) members of Parliament appear to be congratulating her as well as marking the historic occasion. This can be read as a validation of her efforts and as a moment of pride, both for her and the gay and lesbian movement. Whereas the majority of political photographs in this sample placed the heterosexual politician in the centre of the frame, highlighted as the principal centrepiece of knowledge and therefore the source for validation in the gay and lesbian community, these images reverse the flow of power. These images do not seek validation or support from the heterosexual community - it is not the heterosexual community that is being privileged to speak. Rather, the source of knowledge is demonstrated from within the gay and lesbian community while validation from the heterosexual majority is freely given within the frame. These images represent a rather utopian space of celebration. In addition, Hon. Wall is holding multi-coloured flowers and wearing a rainbow patterned shirt in these images. Both items symbolize her connection to the rainbow motif of the gay and lesbian political movement. This further positions her as a pivotal icon of pride for the gay and lesbian movement as these symbols mark her distinctively – and proudly – gay in an environment that has long been celebrated through traditional, heteronormative markers for success. While the moment captures a Parliamentary success, it does so within the markers of homosexual pride.

#### The asexual, heteronormative gay

Only a very small 1.2 percent of images in *The New Zealand Herald* and 2.2 percent of images in *GayNZ* showed a same-sex couple kissing or showing affection toward one another. While these relatively few images did demonstrate “happiness” (96 percent of all images of same-sex couples kissing and showing affection were coded as ‘happy’), the small amount of demonstrated sexuality amongst gay and lesbians is telling given that marriage is largely defined as the sexual and emotional commitment made between two individuals. Some have argued that displayed homosexual sexuality, as evidenced by intimate contact and kissing, needs to be radically repoliticized in the media (Morris & Sloop, 2006). This research would support that assertion. Gay and lesbian couples in this sample have been left virtually desire-less in a narrative that is intrinsically dependent upon desire for understanding. Through a western lens, marriage is simply a public pronouncement of two individuals who are in love with one another. Yet, this desire was rarely captured in either publication.

A homosexual couple in *The New Zealand Herald* was far more likely to be portrayed side by side without any demonstrated intimacy than to be demonstrating affection. These side-by-side portrayals may suggest a relational connection, but they do not visually direct the viewer toward a passionate and committed marriage between two individuals. There were many other symbolic cues used within the visual frame to suggest marriage when the physical connection between two individuals was removed (Figure 7). This image suggests that the two men featured in the frame are a couple through their matching “I DO” T-shirts. Their homosexuality is also demonstrated through the rainbow tile sculpture in the background of the image that is given equal asymmetrical weighting with the two individuals, suggesting its importance to the viewer. The use of such obvious symbols to suggest same-sex marriage can be read as an acknowledgement from the editors of *The Herald* that the sexuality of gay and lesbian individuals can not, or will not, be demonstrated visually in the frame. Instead, the symbolic material surrounding these two were constructed and codified as visible props to tell the story of gay marriage in place of demonstrated portrayals of physical affection.

**Figure 7: Same-sex couple side by side**



Paul McCarthy and Trent Kandler will wed on Monday.

(Eriksen, 2013)

There is a rather obvious difference between the images of homosexuals side by side and images of homosexuals kissing. One such, albeit rare, example of sexuality demonstrated in a visual image was found in an article from *GayNZ* on 1 March 2013 (Figure 8). This image also illustrates another finding from this sample – principally that when public displays of affection were found in news content, they were found to be more direct and obvious in *GayNZ* than in *The New Zealand Herald*. Affection

between two people of the same-sex in *The Herald* was generally not found to be passionate and not the centre of attention within the mediated frame.

**Figure 8: Same-sex couple kissing**



(The Gay Blade, 2013)

The image above is not accredited to any source but appears to be either clip art or an image from another time and place given that the article itself does not address any two specific individuals and there is no caption to the image. The overlay of a quote taken from another person not named in the article and the black and white, almost cinematic, coloring also suggest that this is an image taken from another source and not a news photograph. The closely cropped visual frame portends an obvious intimacy of the moment - two men, who appear to be naked, are clutching each other's faces while kissing with their eyes closed, intent on the other. One man's wedding ring is visibly present as well. They are centered with all other elements reductively reduced to a blur behind the focus of their bodies. The entire attention of this image is directed upon these two men and their love for one another. This is a very different image from the desireless portrayal of presumed same-sex couples found in the majority of images.

Although the overall numbers are very small, the largest percentage of homosexuals or supporters of same-sex marriage in *The New Zealand Herald* were homosexual politicians (as opposed to homosexual citizens, pro same-sex marriage protesters, homosexual celebrities, same-sex couples in a wedding, same-sex couples kissing, or same-sex couples standing side by side). Homosexual politicians were 32.08 percent of all homosexual representations in *The Herald*. None of these representations showed the politician (principally Hon. Walls) with his or her partner, so the opportunity for demonstrated sexuality or intimacy was removed. That being said, demonstrated intimacy amongst homosexual couples was exceedingly rare in *The Herald*. This was in sharp contrast to the majority, 30.51 percent of homosexual representations in *GayNZ*, which re-presented same-sex couples in a wedding ( $p = .000$ , adj. res. = 2.7). Further, when homosexual couples were visually portrayed in *GayNZ* they were more likely to be kissing or showing affection than in *The New Zealand Herald*. The real numbers are still relatively small but the proportional difference demonstrates differences in how each publication privileged different voices. The mainstream publication emphasized elite voices with entrenched ties to political power whereas the alternative publication privileged average citizens performing the lived reality of same-sex marriage.

Only a very small 1.6 percent of images in *The New Zealand Herald* and 2.9 percent of images in *GayNZ* showed a person as 'camp'. This suggests very limited, and generally homonormative, expressions of sexuality in both the mainstream or alternative press. All of the camp images found in this sample were in connection to Big Gay Out, a day to celebrate the gay and lesbian community in New Zealand (Figure 9). No image that portrayed camp homosexuality was in direct connection to gay marriage in either publication, which suggests that gay marriage was largely constructed through a heteronormative lens. Such a construction also suggests a rejection of homonormative culture and expression in the implicit privileging of heterosexuality as a performed gendered identity.

**Figure 9: Big Gay Out**

Prime minister John Key mixes with the crowd at the Big Gay Out. Photo / Michael Craig

(Newstalk ZB, 2013)

An interesting exception to the general blockade of sexuality in *The New Zealand Herald* and, to a lesser extent, *GayNZ*, was a cartoon drawing of two koalas in an affectionate embrace (Figure 10). The koalas and the Sydney Opera House in the background presumably symbolize Australia whereas same-sex marriage is encoded into the rainbow and the two male symbols intertwined on the one koala's arm. This generic illustration doesn't document a specific event. As an illustrated representation, it is meant to symbolize gay marriage in Australia as a timeless caricature. The fact that this embrace stands as one of the rare examples of visible homosexual affection in the news suggests a reticence to display gay physicality as a lived reality. The issue of gay marriage, through this illustration, is reformulated as an abstract expression between two anthropomorphized beings that has no bearing on social reality. The issue of gay marriage has been removed from any remote sense of reality and placed into a silly and rather contrived childlike illustration of love – albeit an intimate representation of that love. This cartoon illustration innocuously removes all the seriousness of homosexual commitment and eradicates the dedication of struggle that the gay and lesbian community has suffered through for decades. While intimacy is now present, after being steadfastly omitted in most of the images throughout this sample, it is lost in the muted brush strokes of a surreal comic that bears no connection to reality, and therefore does not actually have any pertinence to the reader. The subtext here, when the image is viewed within the larger sample of images, is that

intimacy in relation to same-sex marriage is acceptable when portrayed between two anthropomorphic illustrations but not acceptable between two human beings of the same sex.

**Figure 10: Illustrated Koalas**



**Illustration for Gay Marriage Equality in Australia. Image / Rod Emmerson**

(Ansley, 2103)

#### Gay marriage as a solitary non-event

There was no possibility of a marriage 'event' in New Zealand before the passage of the bill, so the media can not be faulted for not showing gay and lesbian marriages before April. However, marriages began after August and as such, one would have assumed a higher number of weddings photographed to demonstrate the lived reality of gay marriage. Yet, it was exceedingly rare to see gay couples photographed in an actual wedding – particularly in *The New Zealand Herald*. These images accounted for only 1.2 percent of articles in *The Herald*. A slightly higher 5.5 percent of articles in *GayNZ* portrayed a gay wedding. When these images were photographed, the couple were generally framed within a wider context of supporters. This served as visual validation for their union and the very principle of gay marriage (Figure 11). These moments of social support were uncommon in the broader context of visual imagery related to gay marriage. As such, they stand as important exemptions to a generalized portraiture devoid of validation or communal support.

**Figure 11: Gay Marriage**

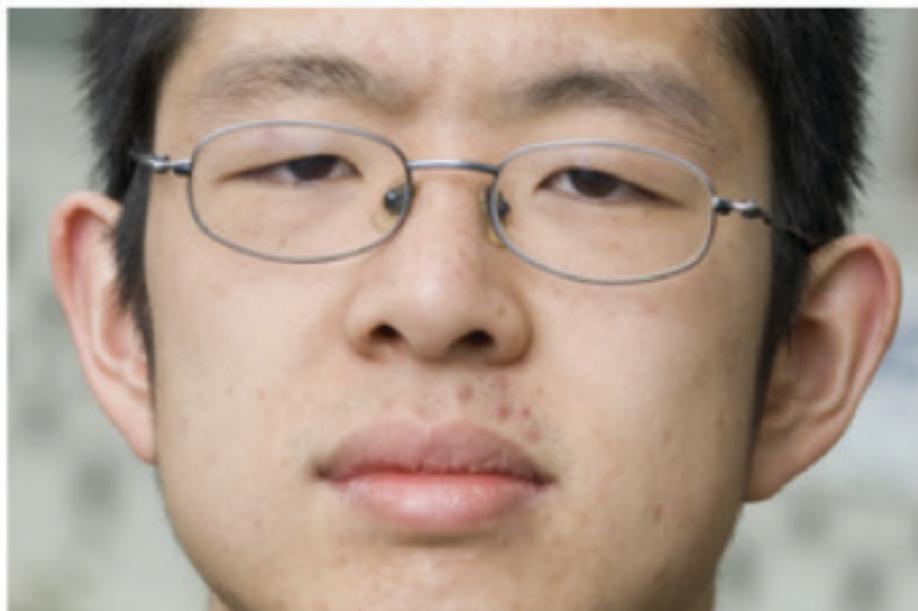
(GayNZ.com with Jonathan Selu, 2013)

The visualized engagement from others is completely removed when individuals were photographed alone. It was far more common for a gay person to be photographed as an individual than as part of a couple in *The Herald*. In fact, homosexuals were twice as likely to be photographed as a single person in *The Herald* (5.1 percent of articles portrayed a homosexual couple and 10.9 percent portrayed a single gay person). The proportion of homosexual representations in *GayNZ* was more balanced, but the real numbers of these photographs remained very small. In *Gay NZ*, 8.9 percent of images featured a single homosexual person and 9.2 percent of images featured a homosexual couple.

The relative isolation of gay and lesbian couples feeds into what has been labelled a rather common heterosexual hysteria of “gay ‘recruitment’” (Walters, 2001, p. 211). Without any performativity of shared relationships, there is no danger of gay and lesbian individuals ‘affecting’ or changing heterosexuals. This visual solitude as a homosexual, without any demonstrated connection to a broader community or like-minded network of support, has been found in earlier research (Dow, 2001). When an individual is removed from their support network, they are also removed from any

source of political power. The lone individual is framed in isolation from the rest of society (Figure 12). As such, that individual can be read to not deserve nor require social support. There are no others within the frame who support the individual, so any external support offered from society can be read as unwarranted.

**Figure 12: Isolation**



David Do. Photo / Paul Estcourt

(Davison, 2013)

## Conclusion

Shame – as an emotional construct from which to examine same-sex marriage - was operationalized through the coding of several specific variables toward a collective analysis of marginalization, anonymity, othering, dependence, heteronormativity and sadness. Pride, in relation to same-sex marriage, was operationalized through these same coded variables suggesting the opposite - representations of collectivism, accountability, inclusivity, independence, homonormativity and happiness. None of the individual variables examined would suggest a uniform representation of either emotional position. However, when all 654 images were examined in accordance to the host of variables constructed for this examination, a pattern of visual representation emerged that suggests a continued heterosexist representation of gay shame.

While the topic for examination was the rather emancipatory moment of gay marriage being legalized in New Zealand, gay and lesbian individuals were largely absent from the mediated visual

depiction of gay marriage in New Zealand. Indeed, the use of any actual people in news photographs about gay marriage was limited. This placed the issue of gay marriage within a metaphorical closet of invisibility. Gay and lesbian people were not made accountable as representative of gay marriage through any meaningful visual presence. This obfuscated an identifiable gay identity in the mainstream and alternative media of New Zealand in exchange for a cloaked anonymity, which can be read as continued shame surrounding homosexuality. By not being visually acknowledged, gay marriage could then become an internalized shame for the gay and lesbian community – even while the notion of gay marriage itself was gaining in mainstream popularity. In fact, it may be that this lack of visibility actually led to its popularity in New Zealand. With no identifiable images of gay and lesbian individuals perhaps challenging heteronormative behaviour, gay marriage could be supported by a mainstream society that only had to engage with the issue of gay marriage in the abstract. This lack of a mediated visibility meant that gay marriage became an issue that undefinable ‘others’ needed to negotiate, but could be supported by the mainstream because it was so opaque – particularly in *The Herald*. It is far easier to support an ideological position that does not directly challenge one’s own.

There appeared to be some presence of heteronormative pressures on visual content in *The Herald*, most obviously in the displayed affection between same-sex couples, but these differences were not markedly pronounced when examining the total sample across all variables. There were indeed differences found between the mainstream *New Zealand Herald* and the alternative *GayNZ*, but these deviations were not as large as was originally expected. While significance in some relationships were found, the overall percentages of specific variables remained very low. However, it is worthwhile to note that of each statistically significant relationship that did exist, the ideological leaning was in the direction one would expect – mainstream media were exclusively more shameful of homosexuality than the alternative media in this sample.

When human beings were actually included as part of the visual narrative describing gay marriage in the press, those individuals were generally heterosexual. If the individual was homosexual, she or he was likely to be portrayed as asexual or as a solitary figure that was only rarely placed within the context of an actual marriage. There were slight deviations between the alternative *GayNZ* and *The New Zealand Herald*, which indicated an added heteronormative pressure on visual representations. However, the overall visual narrative of gay marriage again suggested a level of shame due to the inability for homosexuals to speak on behalf of homosexual rights.

Depending on heterosexuals to validate the rights of homosexuals situates homosexuality as a deviant child of sorts that is in need of parental permission for self-expression. This capitulation entrenches heterosexual domination as an accepted and obvious eventuality for the homosexual community. The minority must receive the approval of the majority if it is to succeed. The implicit deal for gay and lesbian couples is (and has always been for most minorities), “assimilate, but on our terms. By all means, add your flavouring to the national stew, but keep it subtle enough not to threaten the dominance of White middle-class...hetero-normativity...and we reserve the right to demonize and marginalize those who refuse to play by our rules” (Gross, 2001, p. 262).

This marginalization of homosexuality was most clearly seen through the solitary representations of gay and lesbian people. These isolated images do not recognize a wider community or support network for gay and lesbian couples. As solitary individuals, the individual gay and lesbian person was placed outside of collectivist support and ‘othered’ as a social grouping not deserving of wider camaraderie. Thus, the generalized image of gay marriage – particularly in the mainstream *New Zealand Herald*, but also in the alternative *GayNZ* – was one of marginalization. The only break in this hegemonic heteronormative portrayal was in the moment of the bill’s passage. It was at that moment that the gay and lesbian community, manifested through the cinematic representation of Hon. Louise Wall, became a material embodiment of political success. While the positive visual portrayal represented a shift in coverage, it was a confirmation of political achievement and not necessarily a moment of ideological support for the gay and lesbian community - even though there were markers of homosexuality within the frame such as the rainbow jacket of Hon. Wall and her colourful flowers. The distinction here is important because a political achievement in Parliament can not be equated to a lived achievement in society. Legislative changes often lead to social change but the connections between the two are not always immediate nor obvious. The passage of gay marriage in New Zealand is a remarkable achievement for gay and lesbian people as well as for the global march toward equality for all human beings. “These times *are* earth-shattering and exciting but also deeply confusing, often ambiguous, and paradoxical with a vengeance...because the increased visibility of marginalized groups often creates new restrictions and recycles old stereotypes” (Walters, 2001, p. 10). In this case, one lesbian Member of Parliament was roundly congratulated by her governmental peers, but very few lesbians spoke directly to the press about their lived realities in New Zealand; only the random gay couple demonstrated their love through public displays of affection in

the news; most homosexuals were visualized as isolated and asexual; and heterosexuals were found to be largely responsible for discussing the rights of homosexual people. None of these findings suggest a shattering shift toward emancipatory visual coverage for gay and lesbian people in New Zealand. However, paradoxically, these visual representations may have helped the bill's passage.

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