

A straight gay wedding?

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

Linda-Jean Kenix (University of Canterbury, New Zealand)

Abstract

New Zealand was the first country in Oceania and 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 surrounding the Parliamentary vote coalesced to form a heteronormative or homonormative ‘image’ of gay marriage through an examination of 654 articles about gay marriage in the mainstream, New Zealand Herald, and the alternative publication, GayNZ. This research asks whether there was 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.

Keywords: homonormativity, gay marriage, New Zealand, alternative media, visual.

Introduction

On 19 April 2013, a bill to legalize same-sex marriage was passed by the New Zealand House of Representatives, making it the first country in Oceania and the fifteenth in the world to allow same-sex marriage. This research explores whether the visual representations of same-sex marriage in newspaper coverage surrounding the Parliamentary vote coalesced to form an ‘image’ of gay marriage within the pages of The New Zealand Herald and Gay NZ. This research also asks if differences in that representation appear across ‘alternative’ and ‘mainstream’ news media outlets, given that it has been suggested that shifts occur in visual codes of reference when they migrate to alternative communicative spaces.

The concept of pride has been central to the expansion of gay and lesbian rights in the developed world. Pride developed, rather vociferously, as a construct for the gay and lesbian political movement after decades of what was perceived as oppressive heteronormatively-driven social expectations. Pride in one's homosexuality stood as oppositional to heteronormativity, which was 'at once its emotional antithesis and its political antagonist' (Halperin & Traub, 2009, p. 3). The radical notion that one could be proud of a sexuality that was not heterosexual worked to situate homosexual pride as oppositional to heteronormativity, given that heterosexuality was widely celebrated as 'normal' (Warner, 1999) in so many western cultures—and psychology texts. Pride in one's homosexuality began to define the political narrative for gay and lesbian equality through a variety of visual and textual constructions that were not widely celebrated within heteronormative conceptual frameworks. The most obvious public display of homosexual pride is the gay pride parade. However, marriage, as a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) event is also an obvious opportunity to demonstrate pride in one's homosexual relationship. A wedding is a performative space given that a wedding meticulously scripts each move by the central actors. The 'marriage event' is one event that most individuals have personally and performatively re-created and re-imagined countless times and one that has been quite some time in the making for New Zealand homosexuals.

In 1986, the Homosexual Law Reform Act—which decriminalised homosexuality and legalised gay sex—was passed by Parliament, 49 votes to 44 (New Zealand Parliamentary Votes Database, 1986). This highly contested Act laid the groundwork for what would transpire eighteen years later. In December of 2004, New Zealand Parliament passed the Civil Unions Bill, which came into effect the following April. Rather than take the approach of Canada, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and South Africa, which all have 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 between heterosexuals. The Civil Union Bill established civil unions for both opposite-sex and same-sex couples. In February of 2005, the accompanying Relationships (Statutory References) Bill 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. Three months after its enactment, a majority of New Zealanders said they were happy with the civil union law (Berry, 2005). By December of 2006, 317 gay and lesbian couples, and 80 heterosexual couples had a civil union in New Zealand. This number was compared to the 21,500 heterosexual marriages during that same time frame (Marriages, Civil Unions and Divorces, 2007). It took seven more years, however, for homosexual individuals to be able to choose between a marriage or a civil union, when a bill to legalise same-sex marriage was passed by the New Zealand House of Representatives.

During this expansion of LGBT rights, there was a concomitant expansion of LGBT representation across media which included camp representations (Kenix, 2008). Camp sensibilities have been historically used to convert ‘the serious into the frivolous’ (Sontag, 1966, p. 276), but they also serve as a confrontational and proud challenge to heteronormative assumptions about sexuality. The construction of camp sexual identity can represent a refusal of heterosexual rigidity, a proud embrace of sexualised difference, and a visual rejection of private monogamy coded as heterosexual (Bell & Binnie, 2000). Performative spaces, such as gay weddings, can be used as stages to purposefully problematise heterosexual culture (Johnston, 2005) or actively conform to heteronormative models of behaviour. Such public representations inform sexual politics (Thomsen & Markwell, 2009), which has led to a dichotomy of ‘good’ gay citizens who conform to heteronormativity, displaying privatised, coupled and monogamous relationships, and ‘bad’ gay citizens who do not conform to these heteronormative models (Bell & Binnie, 2000). 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 et al., 2012). The performance of pride in regard to sexual politics, therefore, involves an acknowledgement of deservedness that is created through an increased sense of unified collectivism as well as a celebration of homosexual culture.

This research explores how the celebration of heterosexual culture may be visually displayed in mediated images about gay marriage. This research examines gay weddings as a performative space, given that a wedding meticulously scripts each move by the central actors. The ‘marriage event’ is one that many individuals have personally

and performatively re-created and re-imagined countless times. Yet, the performative space of gay marriage 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). In other words, each person witnessing and participating in any intended ‘celebratory’ performative space in regard to sexuality, might have a completely different set of experiences, with different purposes and affective outcomes, which—at the binary extreme—introduce the consideration and confrontation of opposing sexualities. Thus, a political movement focused directly on celebratory expressions of gay and lesbian sexuality can be encoded and/or decoded through many different frameworks, even within the movement itself (Oveis et al., 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).

Indeed, some within the gay and lesbian community believe that the movement ‘over-corrected’ in their struggle for social equality, transforming their previously unique, and perhaps radical, aspirations into a mainstream heteronormative middle class (Crimp, 2002). It certainly is not that homosexuality was solely conceptualised within the gay and lesbian community as being exclusively outside of the mainstream. Yet, when historical depictions of homosexuality were so obviously marginalised within a mainstream media that encoded only heterosexuality as normal, to eventually align towards anything similar to that constructed normalcy was seen by some as an overcorrection. As Stepien (2012) argues, these historical attempts at mainstream acceptance presented ‘a type of homosexuality that has become so normalised, so commonplace, and so politically correct that it has practically been de-gayed’ (p. 144). Duggan (2002) goes further to define homonormativity as ‘a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions – such as marriage, and its call for monogamy and reproduction’ (p. 179).

The reinforcement of heteronormative discourses of mainstream ‘respectability’ and ‘appropriate’ sexual behaviours conjures a volatile and rather uncertain cohesive identity for a political effort that is rhetorically constituted in narratives of pride, born as a visible reaction against rigid sexual constructions imposed by a mainstream, heteronormative culture. Thus, a celebration of heteronormative culture as homonormative translates to a ‘symbolic annihilation’ that 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).

This research, therefore, challenges previous research (Duggan, 2002), which has argued homonormativity is anchored to mainstream heteronormative assumptions, and thereby assimilates those assumptions into the politics of homonormativity. Such a position argues that homonormativity, in the most basic terms, is heteronormativity displayed by those of the same sex. I aim to problematize such a categorization by challenging the appropriation of homonormativity into a readily accepted assimilative framework. Conceptualising homonormativity in this way distorts the origins of homosexual identity, the meaning of what it purports to represent. For homonormativity to be so easily inverted into a celebration of what it once actively opposed, actually works to create an ‘other other’ (Ahmed, 2002) within the gay and lesbian community. Those who remain rooted in the celebration of distinction, rather than the anonymity of assimilation, become marginalised and ‘othered’. There is a ‘violence of seeking to assimilate difference back into the category of the same’ (Ahmed, 2002, p. 560). Therefore this research situates homonormativity within the politics of diversity, rather than assimilation—as distinct from heteronormative assumptions, rather than similar to them.

This research further explores if there are differences in representation across ‘alternative’ and ‘mainstream’ news media outlets as visual codes of reference may shift when a traditionally marginalised group of people speak 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 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), and can produce an obvious distinctiveness in aesthetic form and approach (Atton, 2002). While situated along a continuum of media (Kenix, 2011), alternative media have been defined as attempting ‘to transform existing social roles and routines by critiquing and challenging power structures’ (Atkinson, 2006, p. 252). Most researchers agree that at the most

fundamental core; alternative media have, at least historically, aimed to facilitate cultural disruption while the mainstream press avoids such social critique (Makagon, 2000). This distinction has been attributed to a conceptual and practical difference that is purposefully in ‘explicit opposition’ (Dowmunt & 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), may 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 time-frame 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.

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 needed if research is to better understand the wider network of representations and how they intersect and diverge.

On a typical day The New Zealand Herald—considered to be the national newspaper and the only newspaper representing the entirety of New Zealand—is read by an average of 835,000 people, either online or in print (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 adult population. The owner of the newspaper is Sydney-based APN News, which in turn is owned by Rupert Murdoch’s News Limited, which oversees a vast range of publishing outlets.

GayNZ 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. This research examined only the online content of GayNZ. In 2014, GayNZ boasted 90,000+ website visits per month and 3.2 million+ page views per month (GayNZ, 2014). GayNZ is clearly directed to New Zealand's LGBT community, which has historically been on the boundaries of mainstream society. In catering to a particular minority community, GayNZ operates as an alternative media publication, addressing issues that are of unique concern to LGBT readers and often in contradiction of and in conflict with mainstream society.

The photograph was the unit of analysis. All photographs from The New Zealand Herald and GayNZ were located through a word search of 'gay marriage.' This particular search term was used to gather the largest number of articles possible. Previous searches using 'same-sex marriage,' 'gay wedding' and 'same-sex wedding' resulted in smaller samples of applicable articles. The use of 'gay marriage' as a search term broadened the final number of articles that were able to be examined. All of the articles found through the previous search terms were also found by searching 'gay marriage.'

Based on a constructionist approach that explores how repeated structures produce 'authoritative accounts of the world' (Waitt, 2005, p. 168), this study aimed to examine the news photographs used in connection with each relevant newspaper article. Deconstructing the visual markers of heteronormativity and homonormativity is complex. These images are inherently ideological and laden with multiple meanings. The following variables were coded for each image found through a search of 'gay marriage' in the two new outlets in 2013: 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 coded according to perceived happiness/sadness and camp representations.

Heteronormativity—as a relational construct to same-sex marriage—was operationalised through the coding of these specific variables towards a collective analysis that celebrated heteronormative assumptions about sexuality involving a visual acceptance of private monogamy (Bell & Binnie, 2000), non-confrontational posturing, an absence of sexual expression or relations that is generally coded as heterosexual in a

broader heterosexual mainstream society, an assimilation of sexualised homogeneity, and conformity to rigid gender-based sexual norms. Homonormativity, in relation to same-sex marriage, was operationalised through these coded variables in opposition to heteronormativity, within the politics of diversity rather than assimilation. Thus, representations of gay collectivism (Gross, 1991), confrontational posturing (Duggan, 2002, Stepien, 2012), independence, happiness and a proud embrace of sexualised difference (Ratcliff et. al., 2012), as well as a visual rejection of private monogamy (Bell & Binnie, 2000) were operationalised as homonormative. This operationalization of homonormativity has historically often been read as ‘camp,’ which is indeed the celebration of homosexuality, i.e. the acceptance of homosexuality as normal. Given that emotionality was also coded: a ‘happy’ homosexual person and a ‘sad’ heterosexual person were both coded as homonormative. The reverse coded as heteronormative.

Sexuality as a coding construct was defined through the examination of each photograph, the headline and/or the caption. This process was fraught with complexity and there is no assurance that the final coded values were irrefutably correct. However, based on this triangulated approach, I hoped to reach a reliable gauge 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 (e.g. ,two individuals of the same sex demonstrating physical affection towards one another was coded as ‘homosexual’).

Inter-coder reliability coefficients were utilised to provide an indication of the reliability of the coding scheme used. Chi-square correlations (χ^2), Cramer’s associations (VC), 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

In 2013 The New Zealand Herald had 329 articles that were listed as matches for the keyword(s) ‘gay marriage’ and GayNZ had 651. Selecting every second article from GayNZ gave relative sample parity and resulted in 325 GayNZ articles for analysis.

Two coders, one of whom was the author of this research, generated a reasonably high 84.6 per cent inter-coder reliability agreement for all the variables coded. This agreement was drawn from a randomised 15 per cent of the articles from GayNZ (49 articles) and The New Zealand Herald (50 articles). Values of kappa greater than 0.75 indicate excellent agreement beyond chance alone and suggest a strong standard measure of reliability (Riffe et al., 1998). Scott’s Pi was computed at 0.801, representing the inter-coder agreement after chance has been removed, suggesting a reliable coding scheme was utilised.

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/support the story of gay marriage. However, The New Zealand Herald (Figure 1) was statistically far more likely ($\chi^2=87.06, df$ (38.1%).

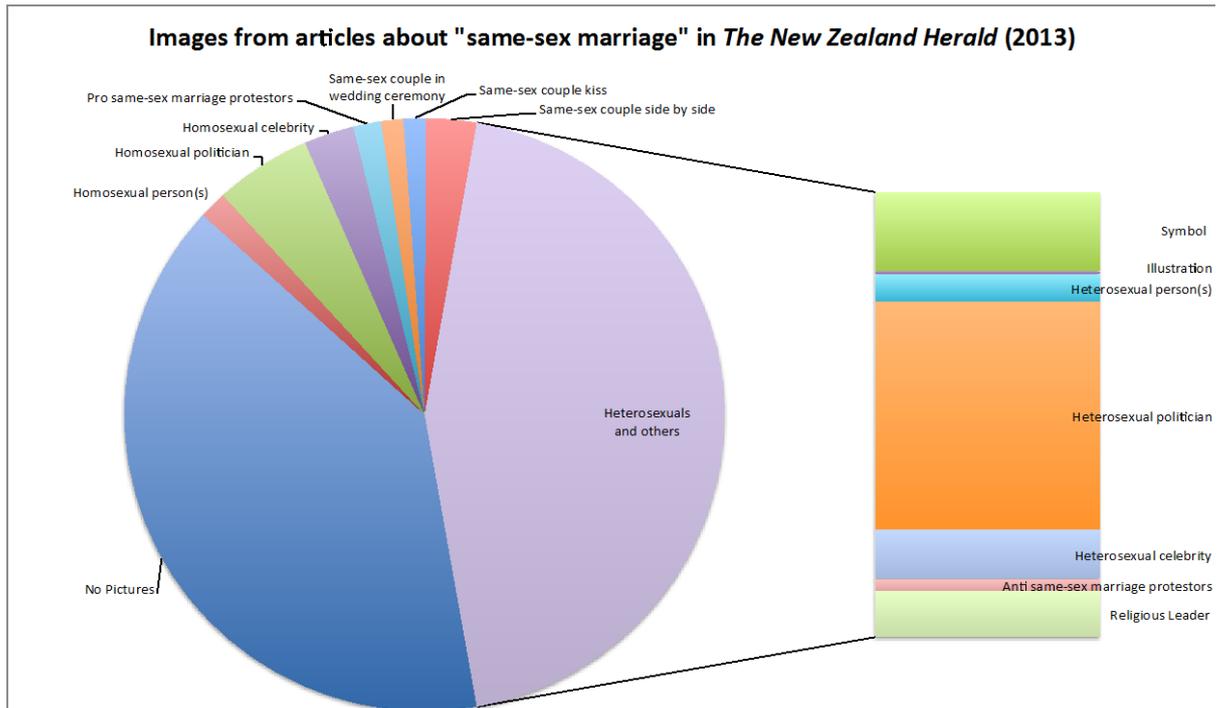


Figure 1: Images in *The New Zealand Herald*.

Cramer's V returned a very strong relationship between the source of publication and imagery use ($VC = .366$) as all associations above 0.25 were classified as very strong. The lack of photographs in GayNZ was found to be 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 overall lack of visual images could be due to many reasons, with the most obvious being a dearth of resources, particularly at the smaller, alternative publication, GayNZ (Figure 2). Photographers, as well as the use of large image repositories, 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. This conclusion is not based on interview findings with the publications, but rather suggested as an hypothesis based on the larger global trend of newspapers to employ fewer and fewer photojournalists because of budgetary cuts.

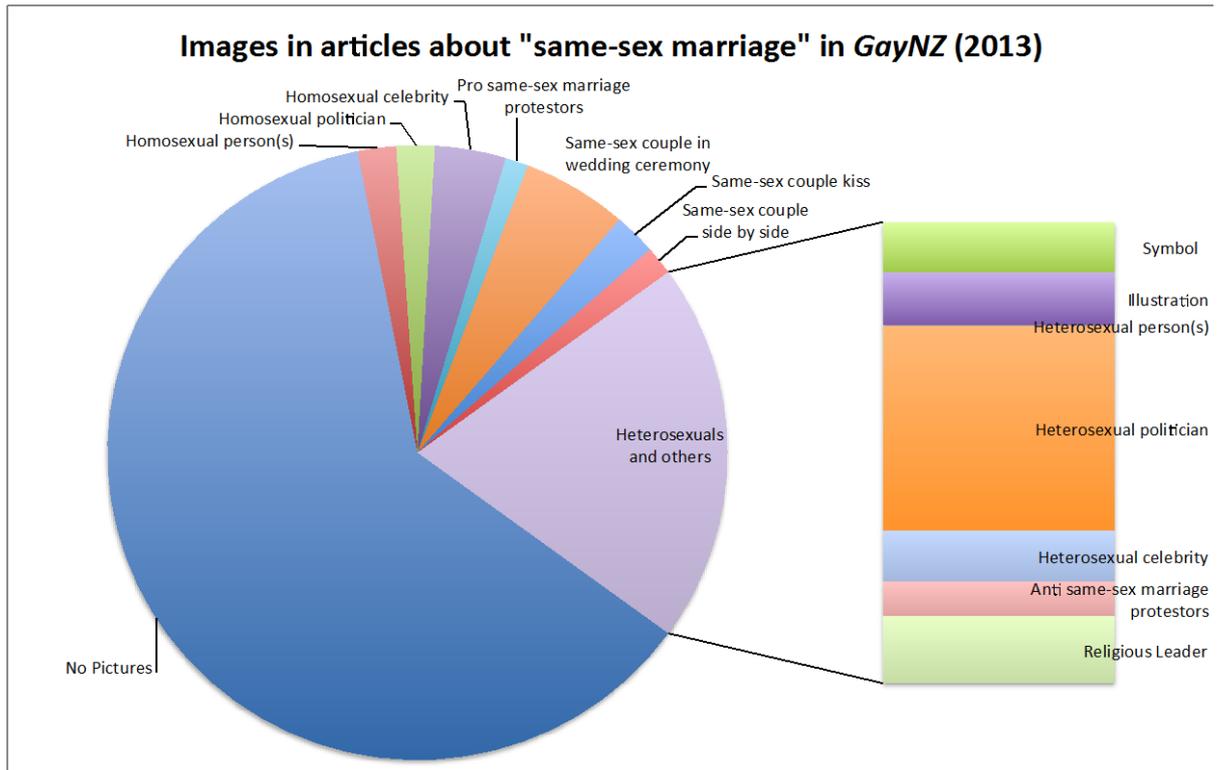


Figure 2: Images in *GayNZ*.

The lack of visibility for gay marriage can be read as implicitly heterosexist as it removes the visualised humanity of homosexual marriage. Photographs speak to the ‘importance of rendering (an) event visible’ (Meyer, 2006, p. 443). With no supporting pictures, of the humans who are participating within what is a human act, the media also dehumanises same-sex marriage. The issue itself becomes symbolic rather than material, which marginalises its importance. Such marginalisation is created from mediated invisibility (Alhayek, 2014). In the context of gay marriage, this lack of visibility resonates with a community that has struggled with recognition. 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 also removed much of the humanity about gay marriage. Again, it is important to note that this conclusion assumes that there may have been visual material available for use. This cannot be substantiated with the methodological approach used for this research. There are obviously many constraints on newsrooms and consent is often required to reprint visual material. However, each of these constraints and restrictions has its own ideological underpinning. Decisions to include particular images inevitably mean that

other images are not included. It is only after viewing a larger sample of images that any ideological conclusions can be drawn from repeated decisions over time.

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 conceptualised 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). From the position of the historically marginalised, visibility means power. A lack of representation translates to a lack of power. Obviously, an alternative analysis might suggest that a lack of visibility can also present unique opportunities for undetected, and politically powerful, relationships to develop. However, it is suggested in this work that on the spectrum of sexual visibility, the absence on one end of expressed sexuality often equates to the implicit presence of the other. Such a (non-) visual representation that removes the evidentiary, lived gayness from the visual frame becomes a heteronormative narrative.

In place of actual humans, symbols were used in 5.6 per cent of New Zealand Herald articles and 1.5 per cent of GayNZ articles ($p=.000$, adjusted residual ± 3.4). These symbols were typically rainbow flags, two rings, or two disembodied, clutching hands (that appear to be of the same sex). In one case (http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=10911473), the stock image was simply of one male hand with a ring on the fourth finger of the right hand. As it is the left hand that is used for engagement rings in New Zealand, it is presumed that this is a symbol of engagement. Nonetheless, the solitary hand could presumably not symbolise the unification of an engagement between two people, but rather the isolation of a stated homosexual individual. The image 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 marginalised group in society.

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 decades ago that decoding even the most manifest images can be complicated by a host

of external factors. Relying on symbols also dehumanises 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 within the visual frame (Pipher & Kilbourne, 2000). Images such as these move same-sex marriage emotionally away from an accountable moment of shared homonormative celebration to a heteronormative narrative about marriage itself. The image is no longer about two specific, unique men who love each other and are expressing that love through marriage, but is rather about the generic institution of marriage, which reflexively is coded as heteronormative.

Heterosexuals as the authority on homosexual marriage

Images of homosexuals speaking about homosexual marriage were proportionally rare. In the New Zealand Herald, 38.5 per cent of images portrayed individuals who were known to be heterosexual and 15.8 per cent of images were defined homosexual (adj. res. = 5.7). Thus, far more heterosexuals were given privilege to be shown speaking on the rights of homosexuals to marry than homosexuals themselves. The numbers were much more even in GayNZ, whereby 15.8 per cent of images portrayed known heterosexuals and 18.4 known homosexual individuals. The difference between the two publications was found to be significant ($\chi^2=16.08$, $df=4$, $p=.000$). 21.6 per cent of articles sampled in The New Zealand Herald and 10.9 per cent 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 New Zealand Herald, 22.8 per cent were heterosexual and only 5.2 per cent were homosexual. The 10.9 per cent of articles in GayNZ with politicians as the visual image accompanying articles about same sex marriage comprised 8.9 per cent heterosexual and two per cent homosexual individuals.

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 reinforcing heteronormative valuations on the gay and lesbian community. The subtext is that the gay and lesbian community either does not have the power to speak for itself or is not qualified 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 the individuals themselves. It suggests that to determine the worth of gay and lesbian individuals, one must solicit the opinion of a heterosexual. Previous research (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. In so doing, they simultaneously silence that same community.

The representations of heterosexual politicians also portray strength and power. Two examples come from GayNZ: one image is the Prime Minister of The Cook Islands, Henry Puna, who opposes gay marriage (http://www.gaynz.com/articles/publish/2/article_13240.php), and the other image is the New Zealand Labour leader, David Shearer, who supports gay marriage (http://www.gaynz.com/articles/publish/2/article_11223.php). The images of both politicians appear to be professional ‘head shots’ and, as such, they denote a purposeful and planned representation 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 white background of both 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.

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 who 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, visual representation of her was far eclipsed by heterosexual parliamentarians who voiced their support for (or condemnation of) the bill’s passage. There is no conclusive list of LGBT Members of Parliament. However, Wall made her sexuality very clear in her earlier statements of support for this bill and how it would affect her personally. Yet, in total, images of Louisa Wall accounted for only 2.5 per cent of the images but comprised the near totality of gay politicians found. It should be noted that her lack of visibility might be further complicated by her gender and/or her ethnicity as Maori—

the indigenous people of New Zealand. Yet, it is clear that there was an absence of homosexual political representation in relation to a bill that was presented by a homosexual and was directed to homosexual rights.

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 Louisa Wall MP were taken in a moment of celebratory joy. Thus Wall was coded as 'happy' in 99 per cent of her visual representations and the near totality of her representations were taken from the day of the passage of the Marriage Amendment Bill in Parliament (http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10878200). 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 colour, adorned with flowers and basking in the achievement. 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 completed legislative agenda. The exclusively parliamentary celebration is visually constructed through several artefacts: the wood benches and high-backed leather chairs, the individual microphones and water glasses, as well as the business attire of those involved.

Louise Wall is generally placed in the centre of the frame in these particular images, denoting a principal position of importance. The other members of Parliament who are known to be heterosexual 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 homonormative pride, both for her as an individual and for the gay and lesbian movement. Whereas the majority of photographs in this sample placed the heterosexual politician in the centre of the frame, these images reverse the flow of power. They 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, Wall is holding multi-coloured flowers and wearing a rainbow patterned shirt in these images. Both items symbolise 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 as 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 with the markers of homosexual pride.

The desexualised, heteronormative gay

Only a very small 1.2 per cent of images in *The New Zealand Herald* and 2.2 per cent of images in *GayNZ* showed a same-sex couple kissing or showing affection towards one another. While these relatively few images did demonstrate ‘happiness’ (96% of all images of same-sex couples kissing and showing affection were coded as ‘happy’), the small amount of visible sexuality amongst homosexuals is telling, given that marriage is largely defined as a sexual and emotional commitment made between two individuals. Gay and lesbian couples in this sample were depicted as virtually desire-less in a narrative that is intrinsically dependent upon desire for understanding. Through a western lens, marriage is a public pronouncement of two individuals who are in love with one another. Yet this love was rarely captured in either publication. It must be noted that marriage can also be a legal, financial or other practical affair—and media coverage of heterosexual marriages may also visually portray these less romantic aspects of what is essentially a legal union. Further research should compare heterosexual and homosexual marriage representations to confirm that possibility. However, the desexualisation of homosexual marriage, in and of itself, and not in comparison, makes a visual claim as to what constitutes a marriage between homosexuals. This desexualisation relocates the individual as largely disconnected from homonormative pleasure and codes such non-confrontational posturing as an assimilation of heterosexualised homogeneity (Bell & Binnie, 2000).

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 towards a passionate and committed marriage between two individuals. Intimacy, obviously, is not required for a committed marriage. However, the lack of homosexual physical affection in visual imagery does suggest either a stated acceptance of private monogamy or, alternatively, an absence of sexual expression—both of which implicitly celebrate heteronormative codes.

There were many other symbolic cues used within the visual frame to suggest marriage when the physical connection between two individuals was removed. One image suggests that the two men featured in the frame are a couple through their matching 'I DO' T-shirts (http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10912531). Their homosexuality is also demonstrated through the rainbow tile sculpture in the background of 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 New Zealand Herald that the sexuality of gay and lesbian individuals cannot, or will not, be demonstrated visually in the frame. Instead, the symbolic material surrounding these two was constructed and codified as visible props to tell the story of gay marriage in place of a demonstrated portrayal of physical affection.

One such, albeit rare, example of sexuality demonstrated in a visual image was found in an article from GayNZ on 1 March 2013 (<http://www.gaynz.com/blogs/gayblade/?p=437>), which states that the 'point of marriage is a public, legally binding declaration of love in front of all who we love and recorded officially by the power of the State' (GayNZ, 2013). The image and the text of this article both argue for confrontational visibility. This image also illustrates another finding from this sample, that when public displays of affection were found in news content, they were found to be more explicit in GayNZ. Affection between two people of the same-sex in The New Zealand Herald was generally not found to be passionate and not in the centre of mediated attention. The closely cropped visual frame portends an obvious intimacy of the moment, where 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 centred with all other elements a blur behind the focus on their bodies. The entire attention of this image is directed at these two men and their desire for one another. It is important to note that this is probably a stock image. While it does demonstrate physical affection between two individuals of the same sex, it also does so through a removed and distanced engagement with the local New Zealand audience. As a stock image, it would also be dislocated in both space and time.

Although the overall numbers are very small, the largest percentage of portrayals 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 per cent of all homosexual representations in *The New Zealand Herald*. None of these representations showed a politician with his or her partner, so the opportunity for demonstrated sexuality or intimacy was removed. This was in sharp contrast to the majority—30.51 per cent of homosexual representations in *GayNZ*—that represented 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 than in *The New Zealand Herald* to be kissing or showing affection. The real numbers are relatively small but the proportional difference demonstrates how each publication privileged different voices. The mainstream publication emphasised elite voices with entrenched ties to political power, whereas the alternative publication privileged homosexual citizens performing the lived reality of same-sex marriage.

Only a very small 1.6 per cent of images in *The New Zealand Herald* and 2.9 per cent of images in *GayNZ* showed a person as ‘camp’ as perhaps construed by the early work of Sontag (1966) where camp is understood as a refusal of heterosexual rigidity and a proud visual celebration of sexualised difference. However, these images do demonstrate a homonormative code that positions homosexuals as independent, and joyfully embracing sexualised difference. The very small number of these representations suggests a much more omnipresent expression of heteronormative sexuality, which embraces private monogamy and non-confrontational posturing in contrast to visually expressed homosexuality. All the camp images found in this sample were related to Big Gay Out, a day to celebrate the gay and lesbian community in New Zealand (http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10864548). No image in either publication portrayed camp homosexuality as directly connected to gay marriage, which suggests that gay marriage was largely constructed through a heteronormative lens. Such a construction also suggests a rejection of homosexual culture and expression in the implicit privileging of heterosexuality as a performed gendered identity.

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

(http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=10894653). The koalas, the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Sydney Opera House in the background doubtless symbolise Australia, whereas same-sex marriage is encoded through the rainbow and the two female symbols intertwined on one koala's arm. This generic illustration doesn't document a specific event. As an illustrated representation, it is meant to symbolise gay marriage in Australia as a caricature. The issue of gay marriage, through this illustration, is reformulated as an abstract expression between two anthropomorphised beings with no bearing on social reality. The issue of gay marriage is thus placed into a silly and rather contrived childlike illustration of love—albeit an intimate representation of that love. 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.

Gay marriage as a solitary non-event

It was exceedingly rare to see gay couples photographed in an actual wedding, particularly in The New Zealand Herald where these images accounted for only 1.2 per cent of surveyed articles. A slightly higher 5.5 per cent of articles in GayNZ portrayed a gay wedding. When these images were used, the couple was generally framed within a wider context of supporters. This served as visual validation for their union and gay marriage (http://www.gaynz.com/articles/publish/32/article_14224.php). However, these moments of social support were uncommon in the broader context of visual imagery related to gay marriage in this study.

In The New Zealand Herald homosexuals were twice as likely to be photographed as a single person (5.1% of surveyed articles portrayed a homosexual couple and 10.9% 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. For GayNZ, 8.9 per cent of studied images featured a single homosexual person and 9.2 per cent featured a homosexual couple.

The relative isolation of gay and lesbian couples feeds into what has been labelled a rather common heterosexual hysteria around the notion 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 has been found in earlier research (Dow, 2001), suggesting 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 (http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10862472). As such, that an individual can be read as not deserving or requiring 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.

Conclusion

Heteronormativity was operationalised through the coding of specific variables towards a collective analysis that involved a visual acceptance of private monogamy, non-confrontational posturing, an absence of sexual expression or relations, an assimilation of sexualised homogeneity, and conformity to rigid gender-based sexual norms. Homonormativity, in relation to same-sex marriage, was operationalised through these same coded variables in opposition to heteronormativity, as gay collectivism, confrontational posturing, independence, happiness and a proud embrace of sexualised difference, as well as a visual rejection of private monogamy that has been generally coded as heterosexual. None of the individual variables examined would suggest a uniform representation of either emotional position. However, when all 654 images were examined in accordance with the host of variables constructed for this examination, a pattern of visual representation emerged that suggests a continued heteronormative narrative.

While the topic for examination was the rather emancipatory moment in 2013 of gay marriage being legalised 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 a heteronormative adaptation of private monogamy and non-confrontation. By not being visually acknowledged, gay marriage could then be assimilated within a broader heteronormative narrative of marriage, even while the notion of gay marriage itself was gaining in mainstream popularity. Indeed, it may be that this lack of visibility actually assisted the passage of the bill on gay marriage 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 in the abstract. This lack of a mediated visibility meant that gay marriage became an issue that undefinable ‘others’ needed to negotiate, society could support the issue because it was so opaque. It is far easier to support an ideological position that does not directly challenge one’s own.

When individuals were portrayed in the articles surveyed, they were largely heterosexual. Depending on heterosexuals to validate the rights of homosexuals situates them as deviant children of sorts, in need of parental permission for self-expression. This capitulation entrenches heterosexual domination as an accepted and obvious eventuality for the homosexual community. Homosexuals do not have the right to speak on their own existence in this anonymous mediated landscape. Using images of heterosexuals in content discussing the basic rights of homosexuals also works to take Duggan’s (2002) fear of a depoliticised homonormativity to its most marginalizing conclusion—an assimilation that excludes any homosexuality at all. What is seen in the media can be as important as what is not seen. This omission could have a potentially powerful impact on how homosexuals are viewed in New Zealand society, and also influence expectations of how political change can and should happen to those on the margins of political power.

The visual marginalization of homosexuality continued through the solitary representations of gay and lesbian people. As solitary individuals, the individual gay and lesbian person was placed outside of collectivist support and was ‘othered’ as not deserving of wider camaraderie. 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 Louise Wall, the MP who brought the bill to parliament, became a material embodiment of

political success. While the positive visual portrayal represented a shift in coverage, it can be seen a confirmation of political achievement rather than a moment of ideological support for the gay and lesbian community. The distinction here is important because a political achievement in parliament cannot 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 or obvious. In this case, one lesbian MP was roundly congratulated by her parliamentary 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 visualised as isolated and desexualised; and heterosexuals were found to be largely responsible for discussing the rights of homosexual people. None of these findings suggest an earth-shattering shift towards emancipatory visual coverage for gay and lesbian people in New Zealand. Paradoxically, it is possible that these heteronormative visual representations may have helped facilitate the legalization of gay marriage in New Zealand.

There were differences found between representations in the mainstream New Zealand Herald and the alternative GayNZ, but these deviations were not as large as was originally expected. The overall percentages of specific found variables remained very low across both news media. This can suggest a pervasive heteronormative set of news values across this sample. However, due to the small sample size, the representativeness of these findings is acknowledged as a limitation of the study and conclusions cannot be extrapolated to the broader New Zealand media.

More research could examine a wider sample of media content, including both heterosexual and homosexual marriage, to build upon these findings. Further research could also explore how this finding compares to other marginalised groups to ascertain whether these results are unique to the LGBT community or pervade throughout coverage of minorities in the mainstream and alternative press. Finally, a future research project could explore how the use of photography and visual imagery compares across subject matter as well as across media type. This would help uncover if publications are more or less likely to use visual imagery when it comes to portraying gay marriage in news media.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2002). This other and other others. *Economy and Society*, 31(4), 558-572.
- Alhayek, K. (2014). Double marginalization: The invisibility of Syrian refugee women's perspectives in mainstream online activism and global media. *Feminist Media Studies*, 4(4) 696-700.
- Ansley, G. (2103). Gay marriage seen as lure for young voters. *The New Zealand Herald*, 4 July.
- Atkinson, J. (2006). Analyzing resistance narratives at the North American Anarchist Gathering. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 30(3), 251-272.
- Atton, C. (2002). *Alternative media*, London: Sage.
- Atton, C. (2004). *An alternative internet*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bell, D. & Binnie, J. (2000). *The sexual citizen: Queer politics and beyond*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Berry, R. (2005). Majority happy with civil union, prostitution laws. *New Zealand Herald*, 01 July.
- Crimp, D. (2002). Mario Montez, for shame. In S.M. Barber & D.L. Clark (Eds.), *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays on queer culture and critical theory*, (pp. 57-70). New York and London: Routledge.
- Curran, J. & Couldry, N. (Eds.) (2003). *Contesting media power: Alternative media in a networked world*. Lanham, UK: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Darts, D. (2004). Visual culture jam: Art, pedagogy, and creative resistance. *Studies in Art Education: A Journal of Issues and Research*, 45(4), 313-327.
- Dow, B.J. (2001). Ellen, television, and the politics of gay and lesbian visibility. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 18(2), 123-140.
- Dowmunt, T. & Coyer, K. (2007). Introduction. In K. Coyer, T. Dowmunt & A. Fountain (Eds.), *The alternative media handbook*, (pp. 1-12). New York: Routledge.
- Duggan, L. (2002). The new homonormativity: The sexual politics of neoliberalism. In R. Castronovo & D.D. Nelson (Eds.), *Materializing democracy: Towards a revitalized cultural politics*, (pp. 175-194). Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- GayNZ (2013). Love, trust, marriage and HIV. *GayNZ*, 01 March.
- GayNZ (2014). About GayNZ. *GayNZ*, 30 January.
- Gould, D.B. (2009). *Moving politics: Emotion and ACT UP's fight against AIDS*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gross, L. (1991). Out of the mainstream: Sexual minorities and the mass media. In M.A. Wolf & A.P. Kielwasser (Eds.), *Gay people, sex, and the media*, (pp. 19-46). New York: Haworth Press, ,

- Hall, S. (1973). *Encoding and decoding in the television discourse*. Birmingham, UK: Centre for Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham.
- Halperin, D.M. & Traub, V. (Eds.) (2009). *Gay shame*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Johnston, L. (2005). Man: Woman. In P. Cloke & R. Johnston (Eds.), *Space of geographical thought: Deconstructing human geography's binaries*, (pp. 119-141). London: Sage.
- Kenix, L.J. (2008). 'From media frame to social change? A comparative analysis of same-sex rights in the United States and New Zealand Press. *Australian Journal of Communication*, 35(3), 105-128.
- Kenix, L.J. (2011). *Alternative and mainstream media: The converging spectrum*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Landau, J. (2009). Straightening out (the politics of) same-sex parenting: Representing gay families in US print news stories and photographs. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 26(1), 80-100.
- Makagon, D. (2000). Accidents should happen: Cultural disruption through alternative media. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 24 (4) 430-447.
- Markwell, K. & Waitt, G. (2009). Festivals, space and sexuality: Gay pride in Australia. *Tourism Geographies*, 11(2), 143-168.
- New Zealand Government (2007) *Marriages, civil unions and divorces*. Retrieved 12 February, 2008, from <http://www.stats.govt.nz/products-and-services/hot-off-the-press/marriages-civil-unions-divorces/marriages-civil-unions-divorces-dec2006-hotp.htm>
- May, J. (2003). The view from the streets: Geographies of homelessness in the British newspaper press. In A. Blunt, P. Gruffudd, J. May, M. Ogborn & D. Pinder (Eds.), *Cultural geography in practice*, (pp. 23-36). London: Arnold.
- Meyer, R. (2006). Gay Power circa 1970: Visual strategies for sexual revolution. *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, 12(3), 441-464.
- New Zealand Parliamentary Votes Database (1986). *Homosexual Law Reform Act 1986*. Retrieved 1 March, 2006, from <http://commonz.wotfun.com/bill/31>
- Oveis, C., Horberg, E.J. & D. Keltner (2010). Compassion, pride, and social intuitions of self-other similarity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 98, 618-630.
- Pipher, M. & Kilbourne, J. (2000). *Can't buy my love: How advertising changes the way we think and feel*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Ratcliff, J.J., Miller, A.K. & A.M. Krolkowski (2012). Why pride displays elicit support from majority group members: The mediational role of perceived deservingness. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 16(4), 462-475.
- Riffe, D., Lacy, S. & F. Fico (1998). *Analyzing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Sontag, S. (1966). *Notes on camp: Against interpretation*. New York: Delta.

- Statistics New Zealand (2014). *Population clock, Statistics New Zealand*. New Zealand Government, 30 January.
- Stepien, V. (2012). *Book Review: Gay shame*. David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub (Eds.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 59, pp. 144-147.
- Thomsen, S. & Markwell, K. (2009). *When the glitter settles: Safety and hostility at and around gay and lesbian public events*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology Reports, Research and Public Policy Series.
- Waitt, G. (2005). Doing discourse analysis. In I Hay (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods in human geography*, (pp. 163-191). South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Waitt, G. & Stapel, C. (2011). 'Fornicating on floats'? The cultural politics of the Sydney Mardi Gras parade beyond the metropolis. *Leisure Studies*, 30(2), 197-216.
- Walters, S.D. (2001). *All the rage: The story of gay visibility in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Warner, M. (1999). *The trouble with normal: sex, politics, and the ethics of queer life*. New York: The Free Press.

Author

Linda Jean Kenix is Head of the Media and Communication department at the University of Canterbury. Her book, *Alternative and Mainstream Media: The Converging Spectrum*, was published in 2011. She has also published broadly in over 30 journals examining the visual and textual media representation of marginalized groups.
