

To the Committee Secretary

RE: MARRIAGE EQUALITY AMMENDMENT BILL

I am forwarding this submission to express concern about the changes proposed with respect to marriage.

I believe that marriage is a uniquely heterosexual institution. I am making this assertion not simply because it has always been heterosexual and should remain so for the sake of consistency, I believe that marriage is the institution within our society which celebrates the achievement of men and women coming together to form a stable and long-lasting relationship, **despite differences in gender**. Marriage is the glue which has held two people from different genders together. It is the place where men and women have been able to celebrate their success in negotiating the sometimes mysterious, always challenging task of living with the opposite gender on a long-term basis. Sometimes we can't 'see the wood for the trees'. The significance of heterosexual relationships shouldn't be taken for granted because marriage is such a dominant institution. People sense this intuitively, and this is why they are reluctant to surrender their understanding of marriage as a heterosexual institution.

There is a large space within our culture utterly devoted to the mystery of heterosexual relationships. We can see this in such books as "Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus". Apparently "the book has sold more than 7 million copies and according to a 1997 report by the book's publisher, HarperCollins, it is the all-time, best-selling hardcover nonfiction book. CNN reported it to be the "highest ranked work of nonfiction" in the 1990's" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Men_Are_from_Mars,_Women_Are_from_Venus) The popularity of books such as this reflects the difficulties and rewards of heterosexual relationships. It also reflects the meaningfulness of marriage to the majority of the populace. Marriage is the glue which holds men and women together. Marriage is the celebration of heterosexual relationships. It is the space where women and men acknowledge the nature of their intimate relationship with each other, in the public sphere.

We live within a milieu where the idea of differences in gender is being increasing undervalued. And yet there is a large body of scientific evidence attesting to the differences between the male and female brains and gene expression.

"Male and female brains differ in how they're built, with some parts larger in men, others larger in women. Researchers at the University of California-Irvine ... reported that men have more gray matter in the brain, and women have more white matter. Gray matter forms the brain's information-processing centers, and white matter serves as wiring to connect the processing centers. Women also tend to use their frontal lobes for intellectual performance, while the gray matter used by men is distributed throughout the brain. That has implications for treating diseases like stroke and

Alzheimer's, Haier says." (His brain, her brain <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/articles/050307/7harvard.b1.htm>, accessed 20 March 2012)

Such differences have been found to exist within the genetic foundations of our brains;

... lead researcher Dr. Nirao Shah and his team analyzed sex differences in gene expression in the hypothalamus, a part of the brain that is involved with sensing hormones. They managed to locate 16 genes that were expressed differently in males and in females, and showed that the different expressions were regulated by the sex hormones. But what they also found is that they could isolate parts of classic male and female behaviors and pinpoint them as being governed by their own particular genes." (Science Uncovers Genes Governing Male and Female Behaviors <http://jezebel.com/5881919/science-uncovers-genes-that-govern-male-and-female-behaviors>, 20/03/12)

Whilst it is considered odious to make generalisations these days (especially about gender), we cannot ignore the evidence of science;

There are many individual exceptions to any empirical generalization, but exceptions do not invalidate generalizations. For example, there are many women who are taller than the average man, and there are many men who are shorter than the average woman. But the generalization "Men are on average taller than women" is still valid. Similarly, not all men have a strong male brain, and not all women have a strong female brain, but there are average differences between men and women, and men are far more likely to have the male brain and women are far more likely to have the female brain. (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-scientific-fundamentalist/200803/male-brain-vs-female-brain-i-why-do-men-try-figure-out-t-0>)

We have to remember again that whilst there are always exceptions that prove the rule, the vast majority of relationships within society are heterosexual. Changing the definition of marriage for the sake of a very small minority is taking away the meaningfulness of this heterosexual institution, and I believe that there will be repercussions in the way that people perceive the importance of marriage when it's meaning is altered.

The scientific evidence is compelling, but all we really need to do is to look at the jokes about marriage from popular culture to understand that we all know gender differences exist, and we all know marriage celebrates those differences;

"We always hold hands, if I let go, she shops."

"There are two times a man doesn't understand a woman, before marriage and after marriage."

These jokes are often based on generalisations about men and women, and yet what we see is a space within society which we all relate to, one that is important in creating a sense of mutual understanding about the challenges of relating to a different gender. Jokes about marriage

bring us together as a society, diffusing some of the tensions that exist when men and women pledge to live together. We laugh because we 'get it'.

It is difficult to enter into this debate without being labelled 'homophobic' and without being dismissed out of hand as someone who is reactionary and who is denying gay people equality. I don't believe the assertion of homophobia is valid, it is a blanket insult which stifles debate. To assert marriage as the space within society to celebrate heterosexual union is not invalidating gay relationships, or saying anything about the legitimacy of gay relationships. It is not saying anything about the equality of gay relationships compared to heterosexual relationship either. As I understand it at the moment gay couples are able to experience all of the freedoms and guarantees granted heterosexual married couples at law, and this is the issue of equality **which has been achieved.**

There is a term 'gay pride' which asserts the legitimacy of gay relationships. Straight people are also entitled to have an arena which celebrates who they are. I think that if anything in society reflects 'heterosexual pride', it is marriage. I hope this debate is able to move beyond the shaming tactics that are brought into play against people who do not believe in 'gay marriage', and that we are able to assert the legitimacy of the heterosexual place in society which is marriage.

I believe people who are gay need to form their own institution, one which celebrates the unique nature of gay relationships. There should be books published, dealing with gay relationships. These books wouldn't be premised on the differences between gender as the books on heterosexual relationships are, but they would examine issues gay couples face. Gay people don't need to co-opt a heterosexual institution. This moment in time is an opportunity for the gay community to form their own institution.

I believe I have articulated what many people in our society feel about marriage. Marriage is the institution within our society which celebrates the achievement of men and women coming together to form a stable and long-lasting relationship, **despite differences in gender** (seen above in gene expression and brain structure). Marriage is the glue which has held two people from different genders together since the dawn of time. To substantially change the nature of a fundamental institution will be to substantially change the way people feel about the achievement of their own heterosexual relationship, in effect to invalidate the achievement of heterosexual union within the public domain, and to change the nature of this 'glue'. Marriage is a heterosexual union which affirms the unique nature of heterosexuality.

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