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Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee  
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Canberra ACT 2600  
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Dear Senators,

As a 59-year old gay man, I find it hard to warm to the current well-organised social change movement for gay marriage, or, as it has been re-named, “marriage equality”.

I am fortunate in having been able to share my life for the last 22 years with a loving partner a year younger than I am. That relationship has been a source of deep comfort and support, as well as happiness, to me throughout that time, during which we have been welcomed into each other’s families, we have watched our brothers’ children grow up, and we have each experienced the long illness and death of a parent.

It was not always thus.

#### Discrimination?

My twenties were years of considerable turmoil and unhappiness. When I read statements that it is discriminatory to restrict the term marriage to a union between members of the opposite sex, I think back over my life. I do not remember ever being conscious of being discriminated against for being gay. I remember hurtful and painful discrimination, however, on the part of other gay men, for, over the years, not having the right “look”, being too old, not having enough hair, or a variety of other factors over which I had little or no control. My straight friends and family, on the other hand, have offered me nothing but support and good friendship, in a spirit of respect for difference that I have always found to be one of the best things about Australian society.

The word “discrimination” in the context of the campaign for gay marriage has a hollow ring to me. I say campaign, because it is hardly a debate. Unfortunately, the language of the campaign is very dismissive of anyone who dares to question gay marriage. Labels such as “bigot” are frequently employed. Predictably, the campaign has roused the religious right and I should make clear that I do not endorse their views that gay marriage will undermine the family, or that it is against God’s will, or that it should not be allowed because the Bible says so.

I do not feel discriminated against because I am not able to marry my partner. To me, talk of discrimination in this context is rather like saying that someone is discriminating against an apple because it is not an orange. I feel that I have all the respect and validation I need from the people that matter to me. As far as legal rights and privileges are concerned, I would be happy with a civil union for clarity in matters of superannuation and the like.

However, the advocates of gay marriage say that civil unions are somehow second-class and that the wider community is therefore telling them that they are second class if their relationship is called marriage.

The inescapable corollary for me is that these advocates are now telling me that my relationship is second class because it is not called marriage. This to me is a resurgence of the discrimination and rejection I felt in my twenties. I would find this harder to take if I had not had the benefit of the last 22 years of love and companionship.

#### Medical and scientific evidence.

Much as I feel concern for distressed young people, I am not convinced by the statements by medical and scientific bodies that gay marriage will somehow solve the problems of young people and stop them committing suicide. Mostly these position statements seem to have been prepared by a sub-group or committee which has been set up, not to consider the evidence impartially, but to find evidence in favour of gay marriage. Much of the published evidence comes from the USA, a country which seems similar to Australia because of the massive penetration of American culture, but which socially is quite different. Opinions on both sides of most arguments are more vehemently expressed than in Australia, and not uncommonly lead to violence.

Evidence that gay people have higher rates of mental illness and substance abuse is well accepted. Attributing this solely to their innate sexual preference is an assumption, and ignores the possibility that people with a predisposition to some mental health issues such as depression may be more likely to turn out gay.

Gay marriage may well be a wonderful aspiration for two young people who have found each other, but can seem an even more unobtainable prize to young people who have trouble finding a date, let alone a partner. To me, this is like giving to those who already have, while taking from those who are struggling.

#### Religion and the Church

I cannot speak for organised religion, or for married people. However, I do feel that the relationship that my parents had, and that my married relatives have, is somehow qualitatively different from the one that I have with my partner. I sense a large amount of resentment on the part of gay marriage advocates against organised religion. I know that many people including gay people have had a bad time with the Church. I did not. I do not harbour a sense of resentment against religious people, and I believe that it is the duty of all citizens to engage respectfully with people of other backgrounds, whether their difference be based in ethnicity, religious background, gender, sexual orientation or other factors. Where issues such as sexual abuse, forced marriage or the like occur in religious groups, wider society has a duty to engage with them. Change in the structures or beliefs of religious groups and organisations has its part to play. For instance, it could be said that many people might be better off if the Roman Catholic Church did not require celibacy on the part of priests. However, it is doubtful whether this is something that the government should take on.

While I respect the desire of people who feel damaged or harmed by the church to fight back, I do not feel compelled to adopt their cause. The church no longer has a monopoly on the administration of marriage, but marriage remains a God-given sacrament for many believers.

Why not let them have it?

#### A pluralistic society?

I would not like church leaders or traditional marriage advocates to judge whether or not there should be gay bars, gay saunas or other gay institutions, and what should or should not be allowed to go on there. They are for gay men.

Marriage is for men and women.

Yours faithfully