

Dear Senators,

I am writing to express my support for marriage equality in Australia. As a member of a Baptist church, I am very much aware of the arguments against same-sex marriage which will be presented to you by some of my Christian peers. These arguments have failed to convince me that marriage in Australia should remain as between a man and a woman only. I wish to make sure that it is on the record that not all Christians take such a conservative view on the matter.

Marriage in Australia is not a religious institution but rather a secular one. Many of my non-religious friends have been married. Therefore it is inappropriate to restrict marriage to between a man and a woman due to the teachings of religious organisations. The fact that some religions teach against homosexuality or define marriage as being between a man and a woman should not be a reason to prevent all homosexual couples from marrying. That said, I think that if marriage was to be extended to same-sex couples individuals who have the right to marry people in Australia due to their religious position (e.g., ordained ministers), rather than being civil celebrants, should have the right to say that they will only marry couples who fit the definition of marriage as taught in their religion without being charged with discrimination. I think that this is very important and needs to be a part of any legislation that proceeds through parliament.

The most commonly used argument against legalising same-sex marriage is that marriage is not about the love between adults but about raising children. The argument seems to imply that the worst possible thing for a child is to be raised by gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or transsexual parents. I would contend that the worst possible thing for a child is to be raised in an unstable, neglectful or abusive environment. By preventing same-sex couples from marrying we are reducing some of the stability that they are able to provide for their children. Additionally, in my work as a speech pathologist, same-sex parents have been some of the best parents I have worked with. It is not possible for same-sex couples to accidentally become parents. They have to fight hard to be given that opportunity and as a result they usually are very involved as parents, much more so than many heterosexual parents. I know that there is research suggesting that children who have parents in a stable heterosexual marriage have better outcomes than children from non-married parents, and this is often used as proof that a child requires both a mother and father. I would contend however that a child requires two parents who support each other and love the child, and that it is likely that the gender of the parents does not matter but we do not have the research to support that because we don't allow same-sex couples to marry and often do not allow same-sex couples to adopt children either.

The other issue I have with the "marriage is about raising children" argument is that in Australia there is no requirement that married couples have children. I certainly did not include that in my marriage vows. I never had a fertility test before I was allowed to be married. If that is truly what marriage in Australia is about then why are infertile heterosexual couples allowed to get married? Why are women who have gone through menopause allowed to get married? If that is going to be the argument used to prevent same-sex couples from marrying then the logical extension is to fertility test everyone who applies to be married and restrict marriage only to those who are able to procreate.

Some people claim that homosexual couples do not support the idea of monogamy; that once they get the right to marry they plan to "rewrite" the definition of marriage. Certainly I have

heard some more extreme gay-rights activists say such things. However, the idea of open marriage is not new to the homosexual community. Some heterosexual couples have been actively promoting the idea since the 1970s. The important point is that it is only *some* heterosexual couples who promote such an idea, just as it is only *some* homosexual couples who promote such an idea. Marriage in Australia is meant to be to one person to the exclusion of all others. Why should the vast majority of homosexual couples who wish to experience marriage in that way be prevented from doing so just because a few activists have vowed to push those boundaries, as some heterosexual couples have been doing for years? It is not as though anyone has suggested that heterosexual marriage should be illegal because some people don't like the exclusion of all others part of the vows.

Homosexuality is not illegal in Australia. Therefore I fail to see a logical reason why two consenting homosexual adults cannot show their love and commitment to each other through marriage. I hope I have outlined some of the flaws I see in the commonly used arguments against same-sex marriage. I hope that you will not be swayed by powerful religious lobby groups but will look at the merits, or lack there of, of the arguments presented to you and support the Marriage Equality bills currently before parliament.

Kind regards,

Michelle Swift