

Dear Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee,

This is my submission to your inquiry into marriage equality. I would like to add my voice to those of the many Australians who endorse the submission made by Australian Marriage Equality in favour of the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009. Marriage is an important legal and social institution in our society, and something most people consider a fundamental right. It is a right that most of my heterosexual counterparts have never needed to question or doubt, and yet it is a right that is denied to me and many others. For a country that prides itself on equality and the importance of a fair go, this is unacceptable.

While the government seems to believe that prohibiting gay marriage is protecting some kind of important tradition – as if marriage has remained unchanged throughout the ages – the reality is that it only serves to perpetuate the idea that heterosexual relationships are superior to homosexual ones. The logical conclusion of this concept is that heterosexual people are superior to homosexual and bisexual people. Is that really the message this country wants to send?

You can promote all the anti-homophobia and anti-bullying programs you like, but how can you hope to combat this discrimination when it is still written into our own legal system? I'm one of the lucky ones. I never faced a great deal of discrimination throughout my life, but many of my friends have. In high-school, one of my closest friends faced frequently bullying from another boy because of his sexuality. This bullying took the form of outing (revealing my friend's sexual orientation to others), attempts to isolate my friend, and verbal taunting that eventually escalated to physical violence. This kind of bullying is hardly a rare occurrence. Another friend was asked by a teacher not to hold hands with her girlfriend at school because it was inappropriate, while nearby two heterosexual couples were kissing each other passionately. No comment was made to those in heterosexual relationships. This was at a public school, not a faith-based private school. More recently, after having her sexual orientation revealed in the work place, a friend of mine was told it would not be good for her career to appear "too queer". And I myself, along with many others, regularly face comments about how weird and perverted our lives are. The point is, no matter how often people are told that prejudice of this or any other kind is wrong (and this is still not happening often enough), the fact that gays are denied marriage will always be seen as proof that we are not *really* equal, and don't *really* deserve to be treated with the same respect as others.

But marriage is not just a symbol, it is a real contract with real implications. The question many are asking is, why should gays be allowed to marry? The most obvious, and genuine answer is: because we want to. I don't mean that as an empty and childish demand. I'm not trying to say that our needs should come before anyone else's. What I'm saying is, we want to get married – not just as a symbol or an abstract concept, but as recognition of the reality that many of us are already living every day. That we are fighting so hard to have our relationships acknowledged through marriage speaks volumes about the kinds of relationships we have. Marriage is a responsibility and a commitment as much as it is a privilege, and it is a commitment gay couples wish to enter

into with the same sincerity and gravity as heterosexual couples.

I grew up with the idea of marriage as an expression of true love, the kind that lasts forever. I still believe in that kind of love, and I still believe that one day I will make that commitment. I don't know if anything can convince those that have made up their mind that my love is a sin and a moral outrage, so all I can do is speak from the heart. I love my girlfriend. Neither of us are ready for marriage yet, but I can see myself spending the rest of my life with her. If we do eventually decide to get married, it won't be a casual or fickle decision. It will be something we both want with all our hearts and with full understanding of the lifelong commitment it represents. And I firmly believe that the marriage should be recognised by law. The love that I feel is every bit as real and valid as heterosexual love, and so my marriage should be as real and valid as a heterosexual marriage.

This isn't just about the legal rights associated with marriage, although these are important. It isn't just about the right to marriage as a symbol, although marriage is a very powerful symbol. It's about marriage, the way I grew up thinking of it – as the ultimate expression of love. And I have as much right to that expression of love as anyone else does.