

A marriage is a commitment made not only to another person, but to the joining of families, friendships groups and religious and cultural communities. As a married person myself, I cannot understand why we would not encourage everyone in our country to make strong, public commitments, embracing love, family and stability.

I believe people naturally search for a partner in life. This Senate Inquiry may get bogged down with intellectual debate, but in the end, I think it is important to remember that we are talking about love. Not allowing gay marriage denies many Australians the right to express their love in the same way heterosexual couples do. This denial is fundamental in our community's inability to accept gay couples as equal with any other.

I know a number of same sex couples. Many of who have been in committed relationships for more than 10 years: some for decades. My husband and myself have been together for only 7 years. It galls me every time we got out to dinner or are in any public place with one of these couples and while we hold hands, they do not show any affection to each other, for fear of comment or attack. How can we claim outrage against violence and abuse against gay couples, when our laws and government do not recognise them as a natural and equal part of our life and society?

Respect must exist in law, in government and in our homes, before it has any chance of existing in the streets, where the lack of it puts gay couples in danger every day.