

Dear Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, This is my submission to your inquiry into marriage equality.

I am an Australian like any other. Yesterday I went to see Harry Potter. I am worried about the recession. I did my gap year in Europe. Next year, I might work for the APS. I am in a loving and committed relationship. Someday, I would like to have children. I am not ready to be married yet, but that is probably just as well: I am not allowed to. Yet - inexplicably - the fact that my partner and I are of the same gender makes our relationship different in the eyes of Australian law. I am at a loss to explain why. I am not a delinquent or a criminal; I am not physically or mentally ill.

If the reasons are religious, are we then to deny marriage to atheists, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Jews? Of course not - but following the logic that same-sex marriage violates Christian notions of marriage, we would have to. If the reasons are about the historical meaning of marriage, well, let me remind you that last time I checked, my mother did not belong to my father. Will same-sex marriage harm heterosexual marriage? Ridiculous.

The message, the overwhelming and indisputable message, is that my relationship is worth less than those of heterosexual couples. It is a disgraceful message to send in this day and age, especially for the damage it does to young gay people, who often struggle with their sexuality regardless. It is a hypocritical message to send in this day and age, when segregation and apartheid and a ban on mixed-race marriages are now regarded as primitive.

As I said, I do not want to get married yet. This debate is about respect. It is about recognising that gay couples, gay people, are not going away. Nobody is forcing anybody else to become homosexual. I simply want to live and let live, and I do not want to live in the kind of country that denies a group of its citizens equal rights, because that attitude is inscribed in the tradition of discrimination and hatred that has seen young gay men bashed to death.

Like many gay people, I am capable of making a substantial contribution to society - but if Australia does not move out of the Dark Ages, that contribution will be made to another society.

Tom Tanhchareun

This submission may be made public.