

Marriage Equality from a Parents Perspective



by Shelley Argent

*“A conscience vote is good,
but will not ensure equality. As parents
we encourage you to vote for
a policy change to ensure change
on the issue of marriage equality.”*



INTRODUCTION

This booklet has been written to give another side to the issue of marriage and permitting same sex couples the right and privilege to marry their partner of choice.

As parents we want the best for all our children and we believe the time has come for equality to be recognised in this country, which will benefit everyone by removing the unnecessary discrimination that still exists in the country.

As Aussie parents we bring our children into this world believing that in Australia we live in a free and equal society, but when a "loved one" discloses they are gay or lesbian we quickly realise we are wrong.

As parents regardless of family wealth, education, love and support we provide, we cannot buy or provide them with equality.

I hear from time to time about "justified discrimination" but when individuals and groups recognise the actions or legislation as

discriminatory, how can we, as a nation justify, condone or believe that it is okay to actively discriminate against a minority.

Marriage equality is no longer ground breaking legislation for here or anywhere. Conservative religious countries like Spain, Argentina and Mexico have marriage equality, so why not here? Canada and South Africa (both Commonwealth countries), also have marriage equality.

We need to look past the myths and 1950's thinking. We as a society have moved past "looking down" on couples in, inter-racial marriages. We have moved past worrying that catholic/protestant couples weren't in a real marriage and the children are no longer seen as illegitimate as "the church" would have us once believe. These are now the norm and people laugh and wonder what the fuss was all about.

Parents of Australia soon hope that equality for our sons and daughters will no longer be an issue. Just the

same as the examples mentioned above once were. Education and exposure showed there was nothing to fear.

Our Same-Sex Gay Sons and Lesbian Daughters deserve better:

As National Spokesperson for parents with lesbian daughters and gay sons we believe it's time for equality for all of our children, not just most.

It needs to be made clear that we are all born with our sexual orientation (just like our eye colour) no one chooses to be gay or lesbian. It's not a choice, fad or phase.

It isn't a deviance and our sons are not a danger to society. They don't lose their morals or family values just because they have disclosed they are gay or lesbian.

The American and Australian Psychological and Psychiatric Associations removed homosexuality from their mental health list in 1973 and all agree it is a natural sexual orientation that people are born with.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) also removed it from their mental health list in 1990.

Our sons and daughters are professionals and trades people and even those who choose to discriminate against them still benefit (even if unknowingly) by the services they provide through their careers, community commitments, taxes etc.

The present inequality affects our same sex attracted sons and daughters in a very negative ways which causes low self esteem and depression and the risk taking behaviours, suicidal ideation that come with personal self loathing just because they feel they are treated as second rate citizens.

Some groups suggest same sex relationships don't last but this isn't so. A recent study, "Not so Private Lives" - August 2009, showed that over 50% of same sex attracted couples would prefer to be married, if given a choice.

A report by the Catholic Church in 2004 shows that couples who marry:

- have a greater sense of purpose in life;
- are happier;
- are more optimistic;
- are more energetic than singles;
- have more sex and enjoy it more.

The report continues by telling us:

- men find sex in a committed relationship more satisfying than casual sex;
- fidelity makes you happier and improves your marriage;
- people live longer due to strengthened immune system;
- marriage has an overall positive impact on both sexes;
- married couples are more inclined to divide household tasks;
- have more time for each other;
- two can often live as cheaply as one so overheads decrease and savings increase.

Any person regardless of age, creed, culture or orientation wants happiness and fulfilment in their lives. As parents we want the same positive outcomes mentioned in this report for our same sex attracted sons and daughters as we do our heterosexual children.

Marriage for any couple regardless of sexual orientation is about:

- the instant recognition that comes with marriage;
- symbolism and celebration;
- removal of next of kin issues;
- social commitment;
- official recognition of the relationship by family and friends;
- minimisation of legal issues, should they arise;
- planning a future life together;
- sharing sexual pleasure;
- the respect that automatically comes with couples being married;
- emotional security and stability that marriage brings to a relationship.

We need to keep in mind:

- the general community doesn't realise that same sex couples face discrimination that heterosexual couples will never experience;
- same sex couples ask for no more or no less than what we have. They just want equality and choice;
- approximately 1 in 5 families have a gay or lesbian family member, whether they realise it or not;
- lesbians and gays pay taxes, contribute equally to society and as a community we benefit from their talents and careers;
- they are not a morally inferior as some groups suggest; they do not lose their family values we as parents taught them as children;
- many are politicians, police, tradesmen and/or professionals;
- they have families who care about them and we want them to have the same rights and privileges as their siblings;
- they come from all walks of life regardless of socio-economic group, cultural and religious groups.

What marriage equality won't do:

- it won't trivialise heterosexual marriage;
- the only person who can cause harm to your/my marriage is us, the individuals. Countries who have legislated for equality have not suffered any ill effect. Equality has had a positive effect making their society more inclusive and aware of difference;
- it can't undermine the status of marriage;
- it won't bring society into decay;
- it doesn't want to affect the religious freedom of churches that don't want to marry same sex couples.

However, marriage is legal in catholic countries such as Spain, Mexico, Argentina and Portugal and will soon to be introduced in Brazil. Canada and South Africa (other Commonwealth countries) have had equality without any negative repercussions. Why not us?

Countries such as United Kingdom (UK) and New Zealand that have civil unions are now moving towards marriage equality.

The UK has legislated for marriage to be formalised for same sex couples in 2015. Allowing only civil unions for same sex couples, as some suggest, is still discriminatory because they still won't have the same choices and rights as their heterosexual counterparts.

Additionally, there is the issue of Christian gay couples who believe, for the same reasons as any other couple, that it is very important to have their marriage blessed by a minister or priest.

Of course, no person or group suggests that ministers of religion should be forced to marry a same sex couple, but we do know there are many who are prepared and happy to perform such marriages.

What about the children?

This is an area of concern for many because it is often assumed, as in straight marriages, that children are a given, but for same sex attracted couples this isn't possible.

Children are planned and brought into the world by either Artificial Reproductive Treatments (ART) or IVF, and in some states, surrogacy is legal, so parenting is a real option regardless of marriage.

For those who believe children need the stability of married parents, this adds to the debate. As grandparents of these children we agree because we want our children to be able to provide a stable home life for their children, our grand children.

Studies consistently show that regardless of parental gender, children are less dysfunctional with better educations in families where parents are married, than where parents are cohabitating.

Studies also show the myth about children needing both a mother and a

father as role models is not correct. Role models can be teachers, sports coaches, uncles, aunts etc. Children care about being loved and supported not the gender of their parents.

The point also needs to be made that even if marriage equality isn't introduced, our lesbian daughters and gay sons:

- will continue to have children;
- and the federal government already recognises same sex couples and their children as family units due to the removal of economic discrimination in 2007/8 which was fantastic.

So we need to permit these family units to be formalised by marriage and allow the children to have parents seen as legitimate couples/families, the same as their cousins and school friends.

Legalising Marriage Equality will not:

- bring society closer to the slippery slope as some suggest;
- trivialise marriage;
- promote polygamy. No country that has introduced marriage equality has moved in this direction so why should we?;
- have people wanting to marry their plasmas, pets or cars etc.;
- bring society into social decay;
- force Ministers or Priests of religion to marry same sex couples.

This logic is promoted by uninformed people who are just scaremongering and applying the "fear factor."

Those who feel marriage equality will trivialise marriage should be aware:

- Liz Taylor married 7 times;
- Zsa Zsa Gabor married 9 times;
- Tom Cruise married 3 times;
- John Singleton married 6 times;
- Rex Harrison married 6 times;
- Stan Laurel (of Laurel and Hardy fame) married 7 times .

The people mentioned above are just a very few people who have trivialised marriage and many more heterosexuals famous and not so, will continue to do so.

As parents we don't believe marriage equality will be "utopia" for our same sex attracted sons and daughters, but we do believe they should be given the same opportunities and privileges as their heterosexual counterparts.

And, one privilege is to have their relationship legally recognised and allowed to marry long term partners.

The people mentioned below all lived responsible, productive lives and made impressive contributions to society and were homosexual:

- Erasmus 1466- 1536 Greatest scholar of his age;
- Leonardo Di Vinci 1452-1519;
- Christopher Marlowe Elizabethan dramatist and poet 1566-1625;
- James 1st of Bible that bears his name;
- Sir Francis Bacon 1561-1626 jurist, essayist and scientific theorist;
- Tchaikovsky 1840-1893;
- Nijinsky - the greatest dancer who ever lived 1890-1950;
- T.E Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) 1888-1935;
- Walt Whitman 1819-1892 US Poet.

CONCLUSION

As parents, we ask that you do the right thing. We don't ask for or want special rights for our same sex attracted sons and daughters, we just want them to have equality. As parents who love all of our children equally and it is painful to watch the discrimination that impacts on their lives in a way that those who don't have loved ones who identify as gay or lesbian cannot imagine.

Some of us have lesbian daughters and gay sons who feel "what's the point?" and give up. Others have children who feel they need to over achieve to be seen as half as good, while others have sons and daughters who are extremely sensitive to rejection because of their feelings of inferiority. This is not fair or right.

I once read that in passing judgement on another, you condemn yourself. Condemnation is indeed a boomerang. Fortunately, so is loving acceptance. Whatever we do to our fellow citizens, good or evil, we do to ourselves.

PLEASE MAKE OUR SOCIETY INCLUSIVE AND VOTE FOR EQUALITY.

*Shelley Argent OAM,
National Spokesperson PFLAG*



The Churches Choices and Rights

As parents we need it to be made very clear that we do not believe any person of religion, or any religious body should be forced to marry same sex couples.

However, there are many ministers, priests and religious groups who have already publicly stated they would happily marry same sex couples and we believe they should be permitted this choice.



*I hope this booklet has helped you to
understand the need for equality
from the parents' perspective.*

Shelley Argent



An initiative of PFLAG Brisbane Inc.
Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
www.pflagbrisbane.org.au