

Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill

A Submission to the
Government Administration Committee

from

Christians for Marriage Equality
Aotearoa New Zealand

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We wish to appear before the committee to speak to our submission.

Who we are

Christians for Marriage Equality is an ecumenical network formed this year to support the passage of Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill into law. Through our network we are in touch with a wide range of Christian individuals, congregations, and church leaders from the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist, and Presbyterian Churches. Participants in the network come from around the country and communicate by teleconference, email and social media.

Diversity within Christian communities

We began our network out of a concern that most of the Christian voices contributing to the public discussion were advocating the on-going exclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people from the rights and responsibilities of civil marriage. We felt it important that legislators recognise that there is a significant degree of diversity among Christians on this issue. The differences exhibited in public among Christians about the Marriage Amendment Bill are indicative of divisions within Christian churches on the issue of gay and lesbian people and their relationships generally. Churches have dealt with theological differences throughout our two thousand year history and many of us hold that we must respect our differences and not impose them on others who decide differently.

We are mindful that other important pieces of legislation that affect the lives of gay and lesbian New Zealanders have attracted input from people of faith. Homosexual Law Reform (1986), the Human Rights Act (1993) and the Civil Union Act (2004) and Relationship Statutory References Bill (2005) were all opposed by some religious people and supported by others. The Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill has the advantage of allowing a place to stand both for those Christians who would support same-sex marriage theologically, and those who believe that marriage can only be entered in to by a man and a woman. We support the interpretation that says that no religious leader will be required to celebrate a same-sex marriage, but will be free to hold and practice their religious beliefs.

Christians for Marriage Equality strongly supports the Marriage Amendment Bill. We believe that it marks a positive development for New Zealand society because all couples who are willing to express love and commitment to one another publicly, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, are deserving of legal protection and social respect. As twenty-first century Christians, we hope to see our country continue to implement the Human Rights Act by extending the definition of marriage to include all persons regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

I. Areas of discrimination and concern

Legal Protection: adoption and international jurisdictions

The Civil Union Act provided for legal equality in many areas of law where there was previous inequality. However, it did not address adoption law so injustice continues in this area. The current situation particularly discriminates against adoptive children being raised by parents in a same-sex relationship. Currently only one partner is able to adopt (as a single person) and so the complex guardianship arrangements have to be made for the other parent to have a legal role in the child's life. In the event of the death of the adoptive parent, the child may not be legally related to his or her other parent which increases their vulnerability.

We are also aware that while marriage is almost universally understood, there remains confusion about the status of civil unions. In New Zealand, a civil union provides recognition and rights but we are aware of the difficulties that NZ or bi-national couples (in which one partner is a New Zealander), have experienced overseas. In other countries and states, civil unions are not always fully equivalent to marriage and so a New Zealand civil union will not automatically be recognised as equivalent to marriage for the purposes of immigration or employment visas. We are aware of actual situations where this has been an issue that has involved considerable time and expense to prove the status of a New Zealand civil union before the rights accorded by marriage have been made available to the couple. Had they been civilly married, there would have been no problem.

Social respect for all couples: the voices of young New Zealanders

The current situation is discriminatory because different-sex couples have a choice of marriage or civil union and same-sex couples do not. This conveys the message that the personhood and their relationships of same-sex couples are less valuable socially. All people in our society are intrinsically of equal moral worth and all should be entitled to enact their capacity for moral agency. Legal protection must be accompanied by social recognition, by respect.

When the Civil Union Act was passed, it did provide for a level of social recognition as well as legal protection. Some of us in the Christians for Marriage Equality network advocated for the Civil Union bill in the face of fierce opposition from other religious groups (which now ironically proclaim that civil unions are a good thing, and are good enough). We felt that achieving legal protection was of primary importance. We were also pleased that civil unions offered not just a "registered partnership" but also the opportunity for ceremony and celebration. Several of us have become civil union celebrants and have been delighted to officiate at civil unions as part of our roles as Christian clergy or celebrants.

Nine years ago, there was not sufficient public support or political will to change the Marriage Act and we believed that civil unions were a positive step forward for gay people and their families. But since that time, with the coming of age of a

new generation, it has become clear separate is not equal. Some of us have been inspired into action by the voices of a younger generation, which overwhelmingly supports marriage equality. This is an issue that matters to young people and as they are the ones who will be most likely to enter into marriage in the years ahead, their voices must be taken seriously.

Young gay and lesbian and transgender people want to be able to marry. For them the historical baggage of marriage (particularly gender inequality and property transfer between families) is ancient history. They are aware of marriages that do not lead to the birth of children, and of the varieties of ways that children are conceived by and born to both same-sex and different-sex couples. The only negative they see in marriage is that it excludes a group of people based on the gender of the one they love. For them marriage is about love and commitment. Heterosexual young people are also overwhelmingly in support of the Marriage Amendment Bill, because they want their gay and lesbian friends to be treated equally and they want the institution of marriage not to be marred by claims of social injustice.

The Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill will enhance and enrich the status and nature of marriage.

Well-being of children

New Zealand society is vitally concerned with the well-being of all its children no matter what the constellation of their family. Families come in a variety of forms and consequently our government recognises and values the significant number of children who are growing up in families with gay or lesbian parents. Christians for Marriage Equality is aware that all reputable mainstream social science evidence suggests that children in these families do as well as children in more conventional families, despite some religious groups making claims to the contrary. We have baptised the children of gay and lesbian parents and we know how loved and wanted these children are. When children are conceived with the support of artificial reproductive technologies, there are no accidents! The threat to these children comes not from the parenting they receive, but from the continuing expression of prejudice against gay and lesbian people from some quarters of New Zealand society. The Marriage Amendment Bill will give these children language to talk about the nature of their families and empower them to participate fully in their wider families, communities and schools.

Well-being of queer youth

Those of us who are involved with the pastoral care of young gay and lesbian people are concerned about the lack of role models for them in the area of relationships. Too often, the visible areas of gay culture have been those which do not encourage committed relationship and which invite young people into a life-style that is not respectful of their own bodies and those of other people. While same-sex relationships have only “segregated” social recognition, society sends the message that gay and lesbian people are less valuable and that their

relationships, and how they express themselves sexually, matter less than for heterosexual people. Queer young people still experience exclusion, bullying

Freedom of religion

It is confusing to some people that marriage can be both civil and religious. This Bill does not affect religious views of marriage but rather seeks to make a further change in the evolving nature of civil marriage. Religious marriage has also evolved but this is a matter for religious institutions. Opponents of the bill mistakenly argue that changing the definition of marriage to permit people of the same gender to marry violates their religious freedom. Religious institutions have a variety of theological understandings of marriage but regardless of these or of the vows, rings, and blessings, what makes the marriage recognised by the State is the marriage license completed and signed by an authorised representative of the State. The couple becomes legally married when they, their witness and the State's representative sign the form and it is returned to the State. If a religious leader is involved, they perform two distinct roles, one on behalf of the State and the other on behalf of the faith community. The process for divorce makes it clear that marriage is a civil matter presided over by the State. When a couple divorces they do not return to the religious institution but to the State.

The Marriage Amendment Bill does not seek to change any religious body's theology or practice of marriage. Rather it seeks to add gay and lesbian couples to the list of people eligible to access the civil institution of marriage.

The Bill's supporters have made it clear that no religious body or religious leader will ever have to authorise, solemnise, or preside over a same-sex marriage. This freedom of religion already exists in that Anglicans are only permitted to marry baptised people, Catholics are not required to marry atheists, and Imams are not required to marry Jewish people. No religious body will ever have to sanctify or bless a legal marriage between two people of the same gender if that goes against its policy.

But more importantly, religious opposition to same-sex marriage goes against freedom of religion in the other direction. The attempts by religious organisations to block the passage of the Marriage Amendment Bill is an example of religious bodies influencing the State and the lives of citizens who are not members of the religion. Religious bodies have a right to make their views known in the public square but not to expect that the State will legislate their theological beliefs when they are in opposition to the Bill of Rights Act and the Human Rights Act. We don't live in a theocracy where a particular understanding of religion and faith dictates what the State will and will not do.

On the other hand, there are currently churches that do bless the relationships of same-sex couples and offer ceremonies that are religious marriages. They are in the uncomfortable position of having to discriminate on behalf of the State because they cannot include civil marriage as an aspect of these ceremonies. Some offer civil unions but would like to be able to offer the same choices to

same-sex and opposite-sex couples, both marriage and civil unions. Some of these churches have been celebrating same-sex unions for nearly twenty years. The State, unduly influenced by religion, has interfered in the choices of individuals and faith communities by refusing same-sex couples the right to marry.

II. A public theology of marriage

In addition to ameliorating inequities and injustices, we support the law change because of our understanding of the nature and value of marriage to society.

While Christians for Marriage Equality, does not seek to impose a religious definition of marriage on the State, we do believe that Christians have important insights to offer the public conversation. We do not believe that biblical proof texting has a place in public theology, but we are often questioned by people who believe that to be Christian requires condemnation of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. For this reason we have attached an appendix addressing biblical texts and their interpretation. The following are themes that we think are appropriate to raise in the expression of a public theology of marriage.

The meaning of marriage

The debate about same-sex marriage has provided an opportunity to look deeply within ourselves and to consider the mysteries of human sexuality, spirituality and companionship. For all people, whether religious or not, it is serious business as we recognise the full humanity of persons in relationship and the desire which draws us to intimacy and community. Marriage is made for us, not we for the institution of marriage. We humans have changed the rules before (about slavery, subordination of women, institutionalised racism) and we can do so again. References to “one man and one woman” in canons and confessions were originally put there to limit the *number* of partners in a marriage, not to specify *their* genders. There is enough marriage for everyone. Marriage will be strengthened rather than diminished by being inclusive of same-sex couples.

The value of public commitment

Marriage provides an opportunity for public commitment, whether in a religious or secular setting. Churches have been involved in blessing and celebrating marriages in part because we believe that intimate relationships require the support of a wider community if they are to endure. Many churches conduct marriage preparation courses (and also do so for same-sex blessings in the churches where these are performed) and while this is not an exhaustive process, it communicates to the couple that successful relationships require intentionality and commitment. Societal well-being depends on the existence of stable, committed, faithful relationships for couples and for any children they may have. The Marriage Amendment Bill furthers this social benefit by expanding it fully to same-sex couples.

Human rights and theology

We believe that one source of New Zealand's commitment to human rights has been the Christian tradition, especially the teaching of Jesus that we should love one another (do unto others as you would have them do unto you), and the doctrine of creation which recognises that every individual is of worth, or in theological language, is created in the image of God. The extension of human rights to people regardless of their gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or marital status has its logical consequence in passing the Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill. For us, this is a matter of social justice.

A relational ethic for everyone

As members of Christian churches, we have an understanding of Christian sexual ethics that values the quality of the relationship. We believe that sexual relationships should be loving, committed, faithful, mutual and respectful. Same-sex and different sex relationships both have the potential to be ethical in this way and therefore acceptable in the sight of God. Our experience as people in faith communities leads us to conclude that different-sex and same-sex relationships have more similarities than differences. Both have the capacity for love and both have the capacity for destructiveness. Both involve two people who share emotional interdependence and a sexual relationship. Both have the possibility of parenting responsibilities. Both require trust and commitment to flourish. Both entail social obligations. The similarities make it obvious that both need equivalent legal protection, social respect and encouragement.

III. Conclusion

Marriage has a complex history and multiple meanings (see Appendix 2 for more detail on the history of marriage). However, marriage has evolved through time to become a commitment between two people who love each other. And now that marriage is not determined not by procreation, property control or gender inequality, but by love, friendship, compassion and commitment, there is no reason to exclude people on the basis of sex, sexual orientation or gender identity.

We are not concerned about where same-sex marriage will lead us, because it is clear to us that it will lead to more love and more justice.

In conclusion, we would like to share with the Select Committee a cartoon by Australian Christian cartoonist and poet, Michael Leunig.



There is so much to celebrate and nothing to fear. In the interests of love and justice, we urge support of the Select Committee to support the Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill and its passage through parliament into law.

We request that Christians for Marriage Equality be given time by the Government Administration Committee to speak to this submission in Wellington.

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Appendix 1 – Contemporary Biblical Interpretation

Interpreting the biblical references used to condemn homosexuality

The Bible says very little about marriage, as we understand it today, and nothing at all about same sex marriage. The texts that are used to condemn homosexual acts were written by people who had no understanding that human sexual orientation is naturally variable. They have nothing to say about people who experience same sex attraction and love and who wish to commit themselves publically to one another, and to receive the benefits and protections available to citizens in such relationships.

Any biblical translation that uses the word “homosexual” or “homosexuality” is popular rather than scholarly. This is a projection of a modern understanding onto cultures and religions that had no such term. The English language translation most accepted by reputable scholars is the New Revised Standard Version which does not use the word.

Three of the six often-quoted references are not actually about homosexuality at all:

1) Genesis 19

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is a story primarily intended to teach the importance of hospitality in the Hebrew culture. A similar point is made in the more gruesome story in Judges 19. By way of contrast, in the story of the destruction of Jericho (Joshua 6) the only person who survived was the prostitute Rahab and her family, who had sheltered Joshua’s spies. This gives an indication of the relative importance of importance of hospitality and sexual sin in this period of Israel’s history. In the NT, Jude 7 references Sodom and as an illustration of the destructive consequences of sin. It does mention “unnatural sexual lusts” in the list of sins but reading condemnation of homosexual relationships on to that is not defensible.

2) Deuteronomy 23: 17-18

This probably refers to a heterosexual prostitute involved in Canaanite fertility rites that had infiltrated Jewish worship. The King James Version inaccurately translated prostitute as ‘sodomite.’ The concern of the passage is the dilution of Jewish ritual with Canaanite fertility religion.

3) 1 Kings 14:24, 15:12, 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7

These verses report the establishment and abolition of temple prostitution during the Davidic monarchy. They do not address homosexuality aside from temple prostitution, which was condemned.

Three clear condemnations of homosexual acts remain.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

From a section of the Bible known as the Holiness Code, emphasising the differences between the people of Israel and other nations. Women were not

mentioned because men were regarded as the providers of the embryo, women being the vessel in which the seed develops. Israel was a small nation surrounded by powerful enemies and needed to increase in number in order to win wars, so any sexual act involving semen and not open to the possibility of conception was forbidden. Other parts of the Holiness Code prohibited eating meat that contained blood, wearing clothing of mixed fibre, appointing priests with a physical blemish, planting two types of grain in a field, and eating shellfish. The word abomination, which sounds so terrible in English, simply means putting things together that do not belong together. The second Leviticus verse prescribes the death penalty for homosexual acts, something with which biblical literalists must contend.

Both of these verses need to be read with Acts 10-11 in which the apostle Peter is specifically instructed by God to eat food that had been considered unclean as a sign that he is baptise the Gentile, Cornelius. The Holiness Code is transcended by the gospel, in which God declares "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." The outsider is welcomed into the covenant community.

I Corinthians 6: 9-11 and Romans 1: 26-27

I will deal with these two Pauline passages together. In neither passage is Paul referring to people of homosexual orientation. He had no concept of variation in human sexual orientation. He, like others of the biblical period, assumed that everyone was heterosexual and so his condemnations are addressed to heterosexuals. Neither of these passages is addressed to people of homosexual orientation who form long-term, committed, faithful relationships.

In the case of the Corinthians passage, translation is again questionable. Some scholars believe that the word translated 'sodomites' in I Corinthians is ambiguous. It is unclear whether the issue is homosexuality alone, or promiscuity and prostitution.

For this reason, Paul's unambiguous condemnation of both male and female homosexual acts in Romans 1: 26-27 is the key text: "For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error."

It is clear from the text that Paul thought that the people he was addressing were heterosexual (they were giving up what was natural for them). The idea of homosexual orientation was not part of his world-view. We now know that there are people who are homosexual by nature (creation). Whether this is a result of genetics or environment or some combination is not known and not relevant. Paul clearly believes that homosexual behavior is contrary to nature, whereas we have learned that it is found in a wide variety of species, especially (but not solely) under the pressure of overpopulation. Perhaps it is a natural mechanism

for preserving species. Paul is arguing from nature here, and so new knowledge of what is “natural” is relevant.

Romans 1 is a condemnation of idolatry and homosexual acts are included almost parenthetically in a list of sins (along with theft, drunkenness, gluttony, etc) that Paul assumed to result from idol worship. This links back to the references in Kings suggesting that Jewish people considered homosexual acts as an aspect of other religions and condemned them primarily for that reason.

Also, the sexual activity that Paul describes here is marked by lust and says nothing about the relationship of a faithful and committed gay or lesbian couple. It is simply not what Paul was addressing in this text.

Other Biblical texts used to affirm heterosexual marriage.

Creation stories in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2

These are etiological stories, written to help people understand why things are the way they are. They are two similar stories from oral tradition recorded by different authors, at different times. Both refer to Adam and Eve. As there were no other humans present in the stories, they contain no references to other relationships. They do not deal with racial differences, for example. Interestingly, they have different understandings of the purpose of relationship. Genesis 1 emphasizes companionship. Genesis 2 speaks of multiplying and subduing the earth. Jesus refers to Adam and Eve when talking about marriage. However, as with other New Testament references to marriages, this is descriptive rather than prescriptive.

Ephesians 5:33

The author was probably a follower of Paul. This is a comparison of the relationship of husband and wife and Christ and the church. It is not prescriptive for human relationships. Other relationships, or absence of relationship, are not considered. If you argue that it suggests homosexuality is sinful, you would also have to deduce that celibacy is sinful, something other NT passages do not support.

Matthew 19: 3-12

Biblical interpretation means paying attention to context. This passage has Jesus speaking against men’s hard-heartedness to women and a harsh system of divorce that allowed men to divorce their wives without reason. There is nothing about homosexuality in the text. Adultery and divorce break apart what God has joined, not homosexuality. It should be noted that most of the church has set aside Jesus’ teaching on divorce on grounds of pastoral compassion much as Jesus set aside laws (like feeding the hungry and healing on the Sabbath) in the interests of compassion.

Using the Bible today

The Bible, for contemporary Christians, contains the inspired word of God. It is mediated to us through the words of human beings who were subject to their culture, religion and history. We read it now with the guidance of the Holy Spirit

(the aspect of God that is present within and among us all) in light of our cultural and scientific knowledge. The Bible was written down over a period of 1500 and covers a historical period even longer than that.

While these passages are quoted frequently to argue against gay and lesbian people, there are hundreds more that relate to heterosexuals which are completely ignored today by Christians. The passages that guide a responsible Christian sexual ethic for the twenty-first century are not those that emphasize the detail of sexual behaviour, but those that emphasize the quality of human relationship and the value of just and peaceful community.

A contemporary biblical sexual ethic

The Bible makes many references to sex but does not address what contemporary people understand as sexuality. It is not a text book, or rule book, on sexual ethics. However, it does give us guidance in understanding how society is to relate to women and to members of minority communities. Many of the practices that the Bible prohibits, we allow, and many that it allows, we prohibit. The Bible does recognise a love ethic, which is constantly being brought to bear on whatever sexual mores are dominant in any given country, or culture, or period. So we must critique the sexual mores of any given time by the love ethic exemplified by Jesus. Such a love ethic is non-exploitative (hence, no sexual exploitation of children, no using of another person), it does not dominate (hence, no patriarchal treatment of women a chattel), it is responsible, mutual, caring, and loving. For contemporary Christians this is the basis on which same sex marriage must be judged. And on this basis, it is clear that same sex marriage is not simply acceptable, but desirable, in the framework of the ethics of Jesus.

Sources: Walter Wink, *Homosexuality and The Bible*.
and Alan A. Brash, *Facing our differences: The churches and their gay and lesbian members*.

Appendix 2 – History of marriage

Marriage is evolving

Some religious arguments claim that marriage began with Adam and Eve, but the account in Genesis where they are said to become one flesh there is no mention of an institution of marriage nor any liturgical ceremony. This prehistorical story can only serve as an illustration of the meaning that marriage began to have over time, not its inception. Marriage has changed through time. Arrangements that are presented as “traditional” in popular culture have a relatively recent history. The involvement of church or state in marriage is a more recent “tradition” in human history. In ancient Rome, the partners were considered married, rather than co-habiting, when they expressed the intent to understand themselves, and to live publically, as a married couple.

Old Testament

Most of the Old Testament assumes polygyny (polygamy practiced by males, not females) as the norm. Men who were wealthy or powerful enough had sexual relationships with slaves and concubines. Marriage was patriarchal. Women had no rights to property or bodily integrity. Marriage arrangements were negotiated by the bride’s father and future husband. Rape victims were required to marry their rapists.

New Testament

Jesus was radical in his treatment of women. He considered that marriage was life-long and that divorce was only permitted for unchastity. St Paul was not at all enthusiastic about marriage. He thought that being unmarried was superior but that it was better for people to marry than to “be aflame with passion.”

Family Values

The modern nuclear family would not be recognised in biblical times and Jesus was critical of the ties of family in preference to undivided attention to his project of the “kingdom of God.” He denied his own mother and brothers and related to a chosen family of male and female disciples whom he called friends.

Marriage in early Christianity and medieval periods

For many centuries marriage was a civil and private matter. For much of Christian tradition, a couple were considered married when they privately said the words of intent to one another. Where the words of intent were said mattered not at all. Neither judge nor clergy were involved. But it was a serious commitment. The church was involved to the extent that it taught that once those words “I take you to be my wife or husband” were said, the partners could not cancel the agreement even if they had never consummated the marriage. For wealthy people it was political involving alliances between families. For poorer people, choice of partners was often government by economic factors. However, church influence over marriage began to increase over time, limiting marriage among those considered too close by blood. But it was not until the 12th century that priests began to be involved in wedding ceremonies.

Marriage from the 18th century

Marriage shaped by political or economic considerations only began to change in the 18th century, five thousand years after it first began to take shape in the ancient tribes and kingdoms of the middle east. The Protestant Reformation was one factor in the change. The reformers argued for clergy marriage because enforced celibacy led to priests having concubines or seducing their parishioners. The reformers rejected the claims that marriage was a necessary evil and instead regarded it as a glorious estate.

But despite the valorisation of marriage by the reformers, marriage was still far from being seen as a matter of love and intimacy. While the reformers rejected the involvement of neighbours in regulating and supervising marriage, they encouraged the state to pin down the legal definition of marriage and increased the right of parents to veto marriage. Marriages based too strongly on love were subject to comment.

All of this really began to change at the end of the 1700s, when personal choice of partners replace arranged or socially condoned marriages as the ideal. For the first time in thousands of years, marriage began to be seen as a private relationship between two people rather than as part of a system of political or economic alliances. The wife became to be associated with the moral and sentimental aspects of marriage. It's important to see how recent this gendered idea of marriage, which feminism fought against in the 20th century, really is.

Late 19th - early 20th centuries

But even as this massive change in understanding marriage was beginning to be embedded, fractures began to appear. The first wave of feminism saw women challenging the cult of domesticity and purity and seeking to re-engage in the public sphere. Some women in the late 19th and 20th century rejected the idea of female sexual purity and sought to participate as equals in marriage and society.

It was the first and second world wars and the post war period that probably created the greatest recent changes for marriage. Marriage was embraced enthusiastically in the post- war period across the western world. Women were marrying younger and younger. Divorce rates dropped from post-war peaks. The 50s and the 60s were undoubtedly the golden years of modern marriage, the years that resulted in most of the myths that are currently at play when same sex marriage is opposed.

Mid and late 20th century

It took more than 150 years to establish the love-based, male breadwinner model of marriage as the dominant model of marriage. It took less than 25 years to dismantle it. The 60s and 70s generated radical critiques of marriage and the civil rights discourses of the time encouraged people to begin to think of marriage as a basic right. This thinking led to the overturning of laws which banned mix race marriages in most of the US south until 1967. When that law

change occurred almost immediately gay and lesbian people began to argue that they too should have access to this fundamental right to marry.

By the late 70s the social challenges of the 60s and 70s had created huge social change in people's attitudes towards personal relationships. There was a massive decline in people valuing conformity in favour of a focus on self-fulfilment, intimacy, fairness and emotional sustenance. People valued autonomy and voluntary cooperation rather than obedience to authority. Acceptance of singleness, living together, childlessness, divorce, and out of wedlock childbearing increased dramatically. Once again the economy figured in changing attitudes as women were pushed in to the workforce by the need for two income families as well as personal fulfilment.

Heterosexuals have changed marriage

This is the context in which gay and lesbian people are now naming their relationships as marriage and asking that the State recognises them as such. All over the western world, the movement to transform marriage is underway. However, it is not gay and lesbian people who have been transforming marriage. It is heterosexuals. It is because heterosexuals have changed marriage from an economic arrangement to a relationship of love and support, that gay and lesbian people are seeing its value and seeking to participate.

Sources: Stephanie Coontz "Marriage, a History: how love conquered marriage" and Chris Glaser "As my own soul: the blessing of same-gender marriage"