

Government relations and issue assignment



In contemporary society, the notion of Same-sex marriage has popularized public opinion worldwide and is recognized as one of the most controversial non-economic issues to ever confront the Australian parliament. The contentious issue provides a modern 21st century example of “civil-governmental cooperation” (Kane 1998), comparable to 1960 libertarian movements against racism and sexism. One right to the institution of marriage is the key distinction between the treatment of heterosexual and same-sex relationships in Australia, and forms the foundations upon which the highly contentious issue is contested.

Australian Marriage Equality is an activism group partnered with a myriad of pro same-sex marriage organizations around Australia, who collectively fight to end the evident disparity in entitlements between heterosexual couples and same-sex partners. Founded in 2004, the lobbying group was established preceding the Federal Parliament’s amending of the ‘Marriage Act 1961’, which ultimately prohibited lawful recognition of same-sex partners. Opposing the concept of Same-sex marriage is the politically active ‘Australian Christian Lobby.

Publicly condemning the notion of same-sex marriage in the public sphere, the influential group raises moral and religious concerns and assertively promotes the damaging social consequences associated with the potential legalization of same-sex marriage. Both these well-established lobbying groups are key participants of what John Kane (1998) describes as the “third sector and through their movements and campaigns they provide an explicit example of a non-economic battle in a modern “civil society’ (Mackey 2012, p. 9) John Kane portrays an idealistic civil society as “a political project bent

on enabling a inanely non-hierarchical plurality of Individuals and groups openly and non- violently to express their solidarity with and opposition to each others Ideals and Nays of 998, p. 55). It Is this terrain In which the ' Australian Charlatans Lobby and the ' Australian Marriage Equality exercise " epileptic rhetoric"(Mackey 2012, p. 20) through a myriad of castles along to capture and Influence public pollen.

Building the foundations and underpinnings on how same-sex marriage Is perceived In the public sphere, these castles radically Influence the political processes and ultimately the legislative outcomes of parliament. The " agnostic rhetoric" (Mackey 2012, p. 20) practiced in parliaments chambers largely stems from ere ' Australian Christian Lobby main visualization is to " see Christian principles and ethics accepted and influencing the way we are governed, do business and relate to each other as a community'(The Australian Christian Lobby 2013).

The notion of same-sex marriage evidently contradicts Christianity concept of marriage, which is defined in the ' Marriage Act 1961'; " Marriage as understood in Christendom is the luminary union for life of one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all Christian Lobby 2012 p. 3). Attempting to persuade public opinion and inhibit further legislation that would legalize same-sex marriage, the ' CAL' has acted as the architect of a myriad of municipal activities and submissions made to parliament, subsequently eliciting anger and drawing criticism from opposing groups such as Australian Marriage Equality.

In 2011, the CAL congregated an alliance of over 50 Churches entitled the 'Committee for the Preservation of Marriage'. A notice comprising of there perspective was disseminated to parliament testifying that the protection of the unique definition of marriage as stated in the ' Marriage Act 1961' serves the common good, particularly the good of children"(The Australian Christian Lobby 2012, p. 5).

The document, formalized by over 50 religious leaders from a myriad of churches located around Australia, illustrated not only to parliament, but all bodies operating within the public sphere of the strong religious opposition to the matter. In 2012 the CAL further exhibited its supremacy as a dominant lobbying group as it lobbied against a bill introduced to the South Australian Legislative Council aimed at legalizing same-sex marriage.

The welfare of Children remained at he forefront of concern for the CAL whom insinuated children " will have to be taught that homosexuality is the same as heterosexuality' (Dunking 2012). The bill was subsequently defeated as was a same-sex marriage bill introduced into the South Australian Lower House in July 2013. The Calls most monumental lobbying triumph, however, commenced on the 22nd of October 2013, shortly after the territory's legislative assembly passed ' ACT Marriage Equality laws which came into effect in Canberra on the 7th of December 2013.

The CAL actively lobbied against the new controversial laws again bringing to light the disregard for the welfare of children ND broader social and religious values. The Commonwealth government, under immense pressure from public opposition including the Australian Christian Lobby, sought a

expedited hearing in the High Court contending the ACT's laws were inconsistent with Federal legislation and therefore unconstitutional.

In a victory for the 'CAL', the High Court unanimously struck down the ACT's Marriage Equality Act, stating, "The ACT Act cannot operate concurrently with the Federal Act" (Wilson L 2014). Lyle Shelton, managing director of the Australian Christian Lobby stated the inundation of their lobbying was "about providing a future for the next generation Inhere they can be raised by their biological parents, wherever possible" (Wilson L 2014) and that "marriage between a man and a woman is good for society and beneficial for governments to uphold legislation" (Wilson L 2014).

The Australian Christian Lobby success in challenging prospective legislation concerning same-sex marriage is indicative of the power granted to the bourgeois in an egalitarian society and furthermore illustrates the influence such third sector organizations can have on Australian Marriage Equality typifies another activism group in society who fight and lobby in the pursuit of legalizing same-sex marriage in Australia. A myriad of campaigns undertaken by the 'NAME' have aimed to influence societies perception of same-sex marriage and further demonstrate to parliament the importance of marriage equality in contemporary society.

In 2009 'NAME' commenced lobbying through piloting television and newspaper advertisements aimed at dispelling the unfavorable preconceived connotations associated with gay marriage, whilst also pushing the issue to the forefront of the political agenda. Instigating and promoting research established by a 'Galaxy poll' in 2010, 'NAME' exposed societies

unprecedented support, with 62 percent of Australians in favor and a remarkable 30% of 18 - 24 year olds supportive of marriage equality (Galaxy Research 2010, p. 3). The compelling poll commissioned by 'NAME' signified contemporary societies unique support for marriage equality, predominantly in the youth of Australia and further pushed the contentious issue into the spotlight. Placing immense pressure on the government, 'NAME' promoted the notion of a representative government, one of the monumental characteristics of a democracy. The 'Name's lobbying is built upon the notion that parliamentary legislation should be representative of the values and needs of society and that modern society's evident support for marriage equality justifies and warrants its legislation. 'NAME' activism has also encompassed a myriad of demonstrations aimed at amplifying the pressure placed on parliament. The most notable, the protest of 'NAME' members at Sydney Ulna Park in April 2011, during former Prime Minister Julia Gillard's speech to the 'Sydney Institute', an Australian current affairs forum. Protesters flaunted images of same-sex partners unable to marry due to existing legislation. The protest gained attention nationwide, further enhancing the cognizance of the issue and further placing extreme pressures on parliament.

Whilst 'Name's movements haven't yet resulted in an overturn of legislation, they have however, had a dramatic bearing on shifting societal perceptions of marriage equality since John Howard's ban on gay marriage in 2004. The juxtaposition between a 'Newsreel' analysis in 2004, which found 38% of Australians supported marriage equality (Australian Marriage Equality 2010, p. 2), and the 'Galaxy poll' in 2010, which displayed 62%, were in favor

of same-sex legislation, exhibits a monumental shift in public opinion that can be largely attributed to the activities of lobbying groups such as Australian Marriage Equality. The resilient organization has played an instrumental role in educating and influencing society's understanding of same-sex marriage, to the point in which 75% of Australians believe marriage equality laws are inevitable in today's contemporary society (Galaxy Research 2010, p. 1). The ideal functionality of a democratic state is largely contingent on a healthy "public sphere" (Mackey 2012, p. 25), whereby society as a whole is informed and conversant of social and political issues which ultimately influence governmental legislation. While all scholars agree, "openness" (Mackey 2012, p. 5) and "publicness" (Mackey 2012, p. 25) is the key to a thriving democracy, the extent to which society matters. Judge Habermas (1991) accentuates, in its ideal form the public sphere "is made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state" (Habermas 1991, p. 176). Habermas contends in a modern liberal democracy the convergence of the "private sphere" (Habermas 1991, p. 266) with the public sphere has consequently resulted in a manipulated public sphere in which large institutions and corporations exploit to gain financial returns and promote self-interest.

Habermas's notion of "colonization" (Habermas 1984) is clearly evident in modern society, with profit-driven corporations operating only for self-interest. However, Habermas clearly overlooks and the vital benefits that non-financially oriented activist groups such as the 'Australian Christian Lobby' have in a non-egalitarian society. As Edward Shils (1928)

states; “ The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in a democratic society’.

These organizations play a critical role in educating the public and bringing issues such as same-sex marriage to the political agenda. Haberdasher’s theory ultimately fails to recognize the importance and contribution in Inch third sector organizations have in an egalitarian society. Without such groups, allowing individuals to collaborate as one and promote their ideals, the advancement f contentious issue’s such as same-sex marriage in society would not be possible. Same-sex marriage continues be one of the most controversial issues facing the Australian parliament.

Whilst the Australian Christian Lobby has been supremely successful in campaigning against marriage equality legislation, an evident shift public opinion stemming from campaigns implemented by Australian Marriage Equality is indicative of the power lobbying organizations exert in the public sphere. Ninth the Name’s director Rodney Chrome labeling the High Court’s decision to strike down the ACT’s Marriage Equality Act as a “ temporary defeat”(Wilson 2013), it is ensured the contentious issue will remain on the political agenda until the organizations objectives are realized.