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As a gay man, I will not be lectured on discrimination by Julia Gillard

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As a gay man, I will not be lectured on discrimination by Julia Gillard

Abstract

Julia Gillard has had a rough few days. More accurately weeks, well, months. Let's face it, years. And at the centre of so many of her travails has been debate about her gender. She's been called a witch, deliberately barren, asked if her partner is gay and been the subject of a "joke" menu where a dish was described, with misogynistic cruelty, in terms of parts of her anatomy.

But for all Gillard's outrage about the language and attitudes she faces, there's a rather large elephant sitting in her office in The Lodge which she seems to determined to ignore: she's just as guilty of discrimination herself, the only difference being that instead of differentiating between people on because of their gender, she does so on their sexuality.

Until she changes her position on marriage equality anything she has to say on gender, discrimination or equality can only be taken as political posturing. In many ways marriage equality is a relatively minor issue in the larger drama of Australian political life. But on another level it is central to any evaluation of Julia Gillard's leadership.

Equality of any kind is always important but that's not why it matters at the moment. It matters because it speaks directly to the question of trust. It speaks to who will be valued and who will be cast aside by our political leaders. It shows us who the PM thinks is expendable.

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Julia Gillard has taken Tony Abbott and the Liberals to task for gender bias, but what about her own stance on gay marriage? AAP/Lukas Coch

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In announcing the [gender discrimination inquiry](#) Gillard held up a conviction she needs to be held to:

Given that I want us to be a nation where [there is] equal opportunity for everyone at every time in their life, I want to get to the bottom of the problem and what the solutions could be.

A deeply admirable sentiment, but if she genuinely believed in promoting “equal opportunity for everyone at every time in their life” gay men and lesbians would have the same choice that is open to her and every other straight parliamentarian. She has chosen not to marry her partner, Tim Mathieson, but the reality is she could marry him tomorrow if she chose to.

She maintains her position on marriage is a [personal view](#). She maintains that marriage is a deeply held tradition. She maintains [that other options](#) are available for gay and lesbian relationships.

But each time she comes up with one of these justifications for her position she portrays gay and lesbian people as “others” and actively discriminates against us, constricting our choices. Neither personal beliefs nor tradition can be used to justify discrimination. There’s a word for it: prejudice.

Gillard’s only attempt to justify her position are appeals to tradition. [She told Q&A viewers](#) that she didn’t support change because exclusively heterosexual marriage was a “cultural institution of long standing in Australian society.” To [Sky News she added](#) that there are “some important things from our past that need to continue to be part of our present and part of our future.”

Should discrimination be one of them? The White Australia policy is an important element of our past, but nobody in their right mind would suggest bringing that back.

Every advance in public policy from civil rights through to the advances of women have been battles against deeply entrenched “cultural institutions”. This is another one that simply needs to be renewed.

On the issue of marriage equality and gay rights in general, Gillard is, to quote Churchill, a riddle wrapped inside a mystery in an enigma.

She’s an atheist, socially progressive woman in a defacto relationship who most recently became famous for a [speech on misogyny](#) – it is simply inconceivable that she has deeply held personal views against same sex marriage.

If she does, it’s pure prejudice because it would go against everything else she supposedly stands for. So my only conclusion here is that she’s simply pretending, in order to play safe with marginal electorates where she hopes to shore up her votes among social conservatives. As [Tom Dick](#) has pointed out some of the marginal electorates in Northern Queensland and Western Sydney that most concern Labor are 75% Christian. Gillard’s stance on same sex marriage is designed for them.

I’m a gay man, historically I’m a Labor voter, I’ve always considered myself a feminist, but every time Julia Gillard talks about same sex marriage with one of her “I’m not a homophobe but...” statements, the Prime Minister of Australia tells me I don’t matter. The only thing that matters is her grasp on power.

I’ve made up my mind. I don’t trust her.

Can you blame me?