**Jess Keane – Marriage Equality: the morning after**

>> Welcome to the podcast series of Raising the Bar Sydney. Raising the Bar in 2017 saw 20 university of Sydney academics take their research out of the lecture theatre and into bars across Sydney, all on one night. In this podcast, you'll hear Jess Kean's talk. Marriage Equality, the Morning After. Enjoy the talk.

[ Applause ]

>> Thanks Liz [phonetic] for the introduction. And thank you all for coming out on a Wednesday night, particularly this Wednesday night because I know that in choosing to be here we're all also choosing to miss that most magical glorious spectacle of heterosexual sanctity in marriage. That is the finale of The Bachelorette. And in all honesty, I will try and like we just got to strap ourselves in and get the most out of our time together. And I'll try and get you home in time to watch the recap before sleep. Okay. So we're going to get going, and I'd like to start by asking you to imagine waking up a few months from now and marriage equality has been achieved. I'm asking you to imagine that because I actually do think it's a matter of when not if. And to be honest it makes me a little happier to think of it happening sooner rather than later. It goes a little way toward easy those [inaudible] blues. So imagine that you're waking up a couple of months from now, and you're remembering the day before. And the day before was the day that the bill finally passed. That day, there was crying and laughing in the streets. There was dancing. There were rainbow flags everywhere. Judging by the state of your pillow, there was quite a bit of glitter too [laughter]. Long-term committed same-sex couples who had waited for years, maybe decades, to be able to get wedding, to be able to get marriage licences [inaudible] to get the licence that they had been wanting to be allowed to for years. Probably a few less established couples get a bit swept up in the euphoria and join the queue as well, just going to roll the dice in the face of the Gideon [phonetic] joy of a new freedom to exercise a new way to express their love for each other. What else might happen that day? Maybe some trans-people will be celebrating that they no longer need to choose between state recognition of the gender and state recognition of their marriage. Maybe also there are some cute kids with same-sex parents that make the evening news. And they smile and tell everyone that the world feels just a little bit fairer now that their mummies can get married and probably you cry a little bit when you see them smiling and hugging their mums. Probably all of the politicians from both sides of the aisle just might jump up to congratulate themselves on being forward-thinking enough to recognise that LGBTIQ Australians deserve complete equality in their access to this probably most significant form of relationship recognition that we have right now. Despite the fact that it took a ridiculously expensive postal [phonetic] survey to convince them of that fact. And maybe you're waking up the morning after all of this, and you're wondering okay, so what next? And really what next? Because this postal survey so-called debate has been fought on the back of that what next. That question of what next has really fueled the no campaign, the question of what next has also been there in the yes campaign. And this is kind of what I want to talk a little bit about with you tonight. So, according to the no campaign, as you lie in bed that morning thinking about what might be happening. You'll be asking yourself that question as you're staring into the genderless abyss [laughter]. You'll be lying there, and you'll be thinking you know I wonder what happens after marriage equality. And while you're doing that like slowly the social order will be unravelling behind you. According to Tony Abbott, questioning this most fundamental of social institutions risks us no longer knowing what family or community might mean. Cory Bernardi has called same-sex marriage a rainbow Trojan horse that's going to sneak in radical sex and gender and sexuality education into our public schools. Quite a few other people who've jumped on that bandwagon as well. So, as you're lying in bed the morning after marriage equality has been achieved, the no camp would have you believe that society, gender, all of it, up in the air. Just like who knows what's going to happen next? Probably, there'll be primary school teachers who are like plotting how they could meaningfully support the rainbow children in their classrooms. Probably they'll be like evil gender study theorists who are trying to think of new ways that they might encourage their students to think critically about what makes a family. Like these are some of the real nightmares that might be coming after marriage equality, according to the no camp. They'd have you believe that once marriage equality has been achieved, heteronormativity, that is like all of those institutions and ideas that make heterosexuality seem normal, natural, good, right, best. That all of that heteronormativity will have suffered a crucial blow once marriage equality becomes a reality. The yes camp have quite a different version of what happens next. In fact, I think it would be hard to get two sets of predictions about the outcome of a single event that were further apart. According to the yes camp, once marriage equality has been achieved, it will be business as usual. According to the yes camp, marriage equality will change access to marriage but, other than that, pretty much the same except for a significant addition -- which is what Karen Phelps [assumed spelling] says -- like a little bit of extra dignity. Right? So on one hand you've got the no camp saying society might end. And, on the other hand, you've got the yes camp saying business as usual. Nothing to see here. Just a few extra rights. A little bit more dignity. The thing is that the no camp's version of events actually sounds kind of thrilling to me. And like I would say that because it's literally my job to teach the radical sex and gender and sexuality education that Cory Bernardi and [inaudible] terrified of. Like that is what I do. So their version of events to me sounds like some sort of fantastic utopia. Unfortunately, though, if all that happens when we achieve marriage equality is we change the marriage act back to maybe its pre-2004 definition, we get rid of all of those gender disclaimers and just say marriage is the union of two people. If that's all that we achieve, I actually think that the yes camp are going to be correct. Which is like good news if you're worried about a slippery slope. If you're worried about a slippery slope, be at ease. I really don't think it's going to happen. When marriage equality is achieved, the world will keep on turning. Nothing much to see here actually. The sad thing is, though, that I think that the no camp actually have some things that if they weren't being hateful when they said it would be worth listening to. Because I actually think that some of their proposals that they are pitching, as like the worst case scenario, the thing to be worried about if same-sex marriage came true. I actually think a thing's worth fighting for. I'm just going to back up a little bit first, though. I said that nothing much is going to change. I said that the yes camp was right in saying nothing much would change, but I also said that the two things that they think will change is the actual wording of the marriage law, access to marriage. And then also dignity and that dignity is no small thing. So I'm being a little bit glib. But I actually think that giving a little bit of dignity, even it's only a little bit of extra dignity to [inaudible] people as they move through social spaces that are set up to ignore or exclude them. I actually think that that's quite profound. So definitely I'll be joining the glittery throng regardless of the outcome of this. I remember still, for example, when the Howard government originally changed the definition of marriage to explicitly exclude people like me from married. I was in high school. I read it in the morning newspaper. And the idea that grownups, like fully grown adults, had gone out of their way to explicitly limit this fundamental aspect of like what [inaudible] people believe is like the pinnacle of happiness in life. Had gone out of their way to explicitly exclude me from that. It felt like a punch in the gut to me as a teenager, as a queer teenager growing up. And thinking about that, like I know that I was not alone in feeling acutely personally the damage of that kind of exclusion. And, in fact, we know it as a fact. So I'm going to read out these names so that I get them right. The CEO of ReachOut John [inaudible] Nicholas has reported that there has been a 20% increase in people reaching out and accessing LGBTIQ services that ReachOut offer since this postal survey began. And that's a 20% increase in people who are reaching out for help, to reach out for this issue. Dr Joe Robinson, who's a senior researcher at the National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health at Melbourne University, has done -- like crunched the numbers, done the research. And says that it looks like in the United States the introduction of same-sex marriage legislation has amounted to a seven percent relative reduction in suicide attempts for young people. Let's at that for a minute. Seven percent might feel like a hard thing to get excited about, but Dr Joe Robinson has done the numbers for us. They reckon that a seven percent reduction in Australia could, for example, if same-sex marriage -- if the yes vote wins. That seven percent reduction could amount to 3,000 fewer young people attempting suicide every year. Like that little bit of dignity is worth quite a lot. So yeah. The yes camp has a little bit of dignity and that's nothing to sniff at. And we should all join the glittering throng, even if a little bit of dignity is all we get from this. But I think that the conversation shouldn't start there, and this is what I'm really here to talk to you about tonight. As valuable as it would be to those it directly affects, including those young people who maybe don't even want to get married ever but who get a little bit of extra dignity for it. And not to mention those people whose dearest wish is to get married, and they are currently excluded from that institution. I've got no right to stand in their way, or no wish to stand in their way. And I don't think anyone does. But as much and as valuable as this is for them, I actually don't think that this goes far enough in terms of really undoing what I'd like to call intimate injustice. I think that if we're really looking to imagine a world where peoples' sexualities, intimacies, ways of doing family, ways of loving, are respected. That this thing, this very much needed thing. This very much necessary thing cannot be the end of the road.

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>> In, I think that this is especially worth thinking about today because in a time of Trump and Brexit, I really don't believe we can afford to assume anymore. That like what Martin Luther King says. That, you know, the moral arc of the universe bends towards justice. I'm just not sure. I'm not convinced right now that we can take that for granted. Right? So I think that, if we want a world without erotic inequality, without intimate inequality, erotic inequality is something that Gail Ruben [assumed spelling] talks about who's an anthropologist, a sexuality and gender theorist. If we want a world without those kinds of inequalities, without those kinds of injustices, then I think that we're going to need to roll up our sleeves and do something about it. In that spirit, I'm going to tell you about three types of things. Three things that marriage equality won't do. So marriage equality will change marriage. Marriage equality will like [inaudible] will give some people extra access to it. Marriage equality will give some people much, much needed dignity. That can't be underestimated. But I kind of think that that might be [inaudible] unless we fight for it. So here are three things marriage equality won't do but that I'm going to argue we should do together. So marriage equality, on its own, won't dismantle couple privilege. It won't dismantle all of the ways in society that couple that held up as being the pinnacle of how one should do one's life as being the best way to organise one's intimacy. As the right way to raise a child. As the right way to show that you're a committed grownup, mature adult. We kind of pack a lot of pressure onto the idea of the couple. We think that the couple is like the greatest. And there are heaps of people who aren't in couples and that kind of privilege -- I mean it's also -- it's not just our social ideas, it's also institutions. So we talk a lot about the facts that marriage equality excludes gay people. Of course [inaudible] it does, right? Marriage equality excludes gay people, but there's another [inaudible] people want broadly. But there's another exclusion that we don't talk that much about in the marriage act that's built into the same definition that we're all fighting about at the moment. That we're fighting for at the moment. So the definition of marriage in Australian law is the union between a man and woman to the exclusion of all others, entered into voluntarily for life. Did anyone spot it? The union between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, right? So we're fighting right now on this basis that marriage shouldn't just be between a man and a woman. But the conversation that we aren't having right now that maybe we don't want to have right now is about whether we should fight for that second exclusion. The idea that marriage should only be or that we should only recognise unions between couples. Unions between monogamous couples. Unions that are to the exclusion of all others. Should those be the only kinds of unions that get the kinds of legal, social recognition that married couples get? That monogamous couples get. At the moment, if you are, for example, non-monogamous. Maybe you're in a polyamorous relationship. You don't have the same kinds of protections under the law about your relationship status that someone does have about their sexuality or their gender identity. If you're discriminated against because of the way that you organise your relationships. Like there's nothing in particular to protect you if someone wants to fire you, or if someone wants to use that against you in custody battles. Whether or not that ever actually takes place. And I haven't heard of a case in Australia recently, thank goodness. But whether or not that actually takes place, I know for a fact that that is a kind of threat, alive and well, in the minds of non-monogamous people. People that I -- you know, this is my main research topic, talking to people about their non-monogamous relationships and that idea that people -- that that kind of discrimination could actually cost someone custody of their children. It could cost them their job. It could even just cause a little bit of extra social stigma. That is like alive and well in most people's minds. And that is not going to change if we achieve marriage equality, when we achieve marriage equality. Which is not a reason not to achieve marriage equality. None of these things are. We should do it and then, right? So it's not just non-monogamous people, though, who are on the back foot because of couple privilege. It's also, for example, sprawling extended families who don't fit the nuclear form. People who raise their children in more complicated relationships than a mother or a father or maybe even then a mother and a mother. People whose families might include housemates in a meaningful way. People whose families might include aunties or uncles in a meaningful way. Or stepparents in a meaningful way. People whose families don't fit neatly into the family tree, exercises that children are asked to do at school, for example. People who might find it hard to be allowed to or maybe even hard to afford accommodation in this city. If you think about like what it takes to rent a place here and then you try and think about renting a place that has enough space for multiple adults and children and complex arrangements. It's not an easy city to live in and that's just the kind of financial side of it. It also disadvantages single people. Single parents. But also people who are single and are just told all of the time that that must mean they're miserable. That without being part of a couple you must be a sad person, frankly. I feel for you. You know? Like that's the kind of attitude that people have towards single people, especially over a certain age, and that is part of this kind of raising up of the idea of the couple that we have in society. The kind of higher we put that up on a pedestal, the harder life is for people who don't arrange their lives in that way, who maybe [inaudible] most significant relationship might not be their partner. They might not have a partner. Their most significant relationship might be their best friend and you know? Maybe they're pissed off that at Christmastime their families ask have you got a boyfriend yet instead of how's that friend of yours going? I haven't seen or heard from them in a while, you know? We really do elevate certain sorts of relationships over others, and I don't think marriage equality is going to do anything to change that. If anything, it might do something to reinforce it, if we're not careful. Marriage equality [inaudible] number two. Marriage equality won't actually dismantle [inaudible] gender privilege or unravel the gender binary [phonetic]. This is a kind of the punch line of the no campaign at the moment, is the idea that marriage equality will set us on a slippery slope, the bottom of which will be gender mayhem. But marriage equality, on its own, actually won't do that, and it's a thing worth doing, right? Marriage equality won't do it but we should. Transpeople and other nonbinary or gender-clear people, in society right now, are horribly dehumanised often. We also -- you know, the no camp is obsessed with the idea of like radical sex and gender and sexuality education of young people. But I'll tell you what, there is a straight conspiracy to brainwash our children into hard [inaudible] gender binaries that no one is talking enough about, I think. The fact that you can't go to a park and see a child playing without asking boy or girl, if it's not already obvious by the pink or blue, I think is a problem, right? If this were happening the other way around, I'm sure Cory Bernardi would have like another fun term. This would be the rainbow Trojan horse. But I think that there's something else going on here. I think that there's the idea that someone's gender, someone's gender must be in -- like must be man or woman. That that must stay the same their whole lives. That that must be a core part of their identity and must line up neatly with their sex. That idea is so deeply ingrained in our everyday life, and we need to do more to unravel that, actually. But marriage equality on its own will not do that. And I think, when marriage equality passes, I think that we owe it to our trans allies, to our gender-clear friends. I think we owe it to them to do something about this form of intimate injustice because it has been often those people who've been bearing the brunt of criticism in this campaign. It has been those people who've been positioned as the [inaudible], right? They've been the people who Bernardi and Abbott and the likes have pointed to as the worst case scenario, and that is just a horrible thing to do about another human being. So when marriage equality happens, we owe it to our trans and gender-clear and gender diverse friends and allies to do something about the fact that it still seems to be socially acceptable in 2017 to talk about their way of being in the world as if that is a drama. Or as if that is the worst case scenario is that -- as if that is a risk to the children. Not only that, but I think we owe it to our young people. And there's been a lot of talk about thinking of the children during this time. And I don't think anyone's not thinking of the children. But the children that I think need to be thought about right now are the children who are maybe themselves realising that the gender that they have been assigned doesn't fit them, doesn't work for them. And are sitting and listening to fully grown adults, as I did as a queer teenager, listening to fully grown adults talk about their identity as if it is like the end result of brainwashing from people like me, you know? Like that that is a kind of nightmare scenario for politicians. And I think that we owe those young people and we owe our allies to really get this done when marriage equality has been achieved. Finally, marriage equality won't end stigma surrounding all kinds of diverse sexual practices and sexual desires that aren't just about the way that we usually think of sexuality. So we usually think of sexuality -- when most people talk about their sexuality, we're talking about whether you're gay or straight. Sometimes people remember that bisexuality exists and that we should talk about that and take it seriously and that that often -- I mean every now and then people think that they know that there is a word queer. And we remember as well that you know that there's maybe a spectrum of the way that people identify in terms of sexuality. But even, even if we've got the full spectrum in the picture. Even if people remember bisexuality and they remember that queer is a thing. Even then, that version of what human sexuality is is all entirely wrapped around the idea of the gender that you might be attracted to. And people's sexual tastes and preferences are actually a little bit broader than that. I mean we could divide the room in about 50 different ways, depending on how much time we had and how willing you were to do it. About like what your sexuality was if we lost the sense that the most important thing about someone's sexuality is the gender of their objective, like lust or love, right? I could say how many people in this room really like say rough sex or gentle sex? Divide the room. Really deep. Reach deep down inside yourself and work out what the truth of that is for yourself, and then let's divide the room that way and get you to confess. Or what about who likes sex to be more or less emotional. You know, how much eye contact do you like? How well do you need to know the person? How many dates do you prefer to have gone on first? These are all different ways of organising sex. The thing is, though, that while increasingly and sadly I think for the postal vote has shown us we've not come far enough with sexuality, in terms of -- you know I think that there's still clearly a lot of homophobia are alive and kicking in Australian society. But a lot of people have gotten onboard with the fact that it's okay if you're gay. It's okay if you're bi. It's okay if you're straight too. That's fine. But a lot of people haven't gotten onboard with the idea that with Gail Ruben might call a benign theory of sexual difference. You like that? There you go. You know, benign. Not a big deal. Often people still respond to other people's sexual tastes -- you can see through Fifty Shades of Grey, right? People respond to other people's sexual tastes not with like what I think would be appropriate, which is at most polite curiosity, right? Fancy [laughter]. Like, good for you. Like that's the most kind of response that one could expect in that kind of situation, but often that's not the response that we get. Often when we think about sexual diversity in that broader sense, we still get kind of panic, moral outrage, think of the children. Think of like what happens when grown women go and see Fifty Shades of Grey. Might they want someone to spank them? Like what will happen in the world? And instead of thinking about just in a benign like you prefer tomatoes. I prefer eggplant. Instead of thinking it in that kind of way like we all have different tastes, no big deal. People still think about sexuality in a way that's so attached to morality. So attached to panic that I think it's actually another source, it remains a source of erotic injustice in the world. Okay. So that was three things that I think marriage equality won't actually do. Marriage equality won't end couple privilege. Marriage equality won't end [inaudible] gender privilege or unravel the gender binary and our attachment to it. And marriage equality won't actually do much to dispel sexual stigma that still surrounds nonstandard sexual practices for a lot of people, right? So if any of those things are your concerns and I'm getting the vibe in the room that probably they're not, right? But if any of those things were your concern, you can rest easy and tick yes and post it by Friday and, you know, know that the world won't unravel. Because all of these things they're not just going to happen. If marriage equality is our horizon, then that will be all that we achieve. Like if marriage equality passes, when marriage equality passes, please. Well we'll get marriage equality. Like that's what's going to happen. That's the what next. But I think that there's a bigger question and the bigger question is not what will happen because of marriage equality but what next for us? We've [inaudible] in an unprecedented way in Australia, a network of people, allies, friends, families, who are willing to stand up and say this form of intimate injustice is no longer acceptable. This form of injustice is really going to stop. We're going march down all of the streets in Sydney. We're going to put rainbow flags on our doors, like my mum and dad did. And we're going to do all of these things and stand up and say that it is no longer okay to limit access to needed institutions to a little bit of dignity. Is no longer okay to exclude people from that. And we've this big group of people who are ready to fight on this issue. And so I think the what next is what next for us as a community of people who are interested in ending intimate injustice? Do we take this and say thank you and then forget about the fact that the biggest victims, I think, in this kind of debate, have been kids whose families don't look like two-parent families? And I think that it has been and like, you know, I think the rainbow kids have really suffered in this conversation. And I think it is also -- it's gender diverse people. It's transpeople. Who've been used as the boogeyman in this conversation. And do we just say okay, great. Thank you. Well we've got married now so job done. I think that the what next is a question for us all. It's not a question about, you know, it's not a slippery slope thing. It's not an inevitability, and that means that we need to commit to what else we believe in here? What other forms of injustice do we think should be on our radar? And recognise that it's just not going to happen. We can't just trust it to happen. I think if the postal vote has showed us anything, it is that it's not going to be easy to win these things but that we should get the job done. So I think bring on marriage equality. And I also think bring on the morning after. Thank you.

[ Applause ]

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