

I think it's hard for those who have never experienced what it's like to be on the receiving end of discrimination to understand what it really feels like to be singled out, earmarked as different, and made to feel as though you're inferior compared to everyone else.

Personally, it's not the blatant in-your-face abuse that wears you down, but the many small things that happen on a daily basis that are a constant reminder that you're different to everyone else.

It's sitting on the bus and hearing the repeated use of the term "that's so gay" from the teenagers at the back. There's nothing like hearing who you are being used as a derogatory term for something that "sucks".

It's the sideways glances as you walk down the street merely holding your partners hand, or the mothers who purposely distract their children as they walk past so they don't have to explain to them why two girls are holding hands.

It's shopping in the supermarket with your partner and hearing the people that walk past enthusiastically whisper "Did you see the lesbians?" behind you, as if they've just seen a unicorn (which is preferable to the snide remarks you sometimes receive).

It's turning on the television and watching programs, movies and advertisements that do not reflect your life or relationships. It's the excitement you feel when you find a show that actually contains gay characters, and the disappointment when you realise they've been thrown in for comedic effect or it's been given a late night time slot because there's a same-sex scene that happens to be no different to scenes between opposite-sex couples that you frequently see in earlier time slots. It's hearing about the uproar a simple same-sex kiss on a show causes in the general community.

It's having to decide whether to 'come out' every day and never knowing how the other person is going to react, like the sales person on the phone when they automatically use the incorrect pronoun when referring to your partner. The bank manager, the receptionist, the mechanic... should you correct them? Do they need to know that you're gay? What if the person on the other end of the line is homophobic? Will they look unfavourably upon your application, or will you receive less than satisfactory goods or services?

It's worrying about whether to be open about your sexuality in the workplace. Wondering whether you'll be overlooked for that promotion if your boss is homophobic, or whether you will always be given the less appealing tasks. If you do choose to hide your personal life, it's spending your working life carefully navigating the tricky questions that come up when your colleagues are talking about their partners in the lunch room, and never bringing your partner to Christmas functions.

And all that is waiting for you if you make it past your teenage years. Words cannot describe what it feels like to reach a point in your formative years when you realise that you're different to all the other kids. When, after you have struggled with your feelings for so long, you come to realise that you are gay. You can't begin to imagine what it feels like at that age to wonder whether your parents are still going to love you when they find out the truth. Wondering whether you'll be one of the lucky ones who have parents that will continue to love and support you. Add to that your fear of losing your friends and being bullied and beaten up at school. And that's just the people that know you.

Don't underestimate the impact of knowing that there are hundreds of thousands of complete strangers in the world who actually hate you. People who don't even know you that absolutely hate you. Some even wish that you would die. Others are merely disgusted by you. None of them understand you or have any desire to, but some of them will actually take time out of their lives to let you know that they think you're wrong. They even stand in the streets holding signs that single you out, just to let you and everyone else know how wrong you are.

It's not surprising the suicide rate amongst young people is four times higher for those who identify as gay than their straight peers. It's hard enough as an adult to try and keep a positive outlook sometimes.

Despite the fact that times have changed and things have improved, this is still the daily reality for many gay people.

I support the Bill because allowing same-sex couples to partake in the institution of marriage would legitimise same-sex relationships. It would put them on equal footing to opposite-sex relationships. It would say to Australians that same-sex relationships are ok. That being gay is ok.

I honestly believe it would go a long way towards improving the lives of gay Australians, and who knows, maybe one day we will have a generation who will grow up never knowing what discrimination feels like.