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**“It’s Plebiscite or Nothing”: Cultural and Symbolic Strategies of the
Religious Right in Australia’s Same-Sex Marriage Debate**

A thesis presented

by

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ABSTRACT

In 2004, the Howard Government amended the *Marriage Act 1961* to explicitly state that “marriage was the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others...” in order to ban same-sex marriages being performed in Australia and overseas same-sex marriages being officially recognised under Australian law. With reputable polls consistently showing a majority of voters supporting same-sex marriage since 2007, the issue has come to dominate much of Australian public and political discourse in recent years. Despite this, same-sex marriage is still illegal in Australia with a number of failed attempts to legislate it at the federal level. However, capitalising on renewed momentum following the successful Irish constitutional referendum on 22 May 2015 and the US Supreme Court’s historic ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* on 26 June 2015, a cross party bill to legalise same-sex marriage was introduced to the federal Parliament in early August 2015. In response, the then Prime Minister Tony Abbott called for a special joint party room meeting of the Liberal and National parties, with 66 MPs voting against a conscience vote being held on same-sex marriage legislation and 33 voting for a conscience vote. Following the meeting, Mr Abbott announced his strong disposition to hold a national vote on the issue after the 2016 federal election, in the form of a compulsory plebiscite. Considering the unprecedented nature of holding national plebiscites in Australia, and the Coalition historically affording its members a conscience vote on issues surrounding marriage and family relationships, an examination of the religious right’s social and political lobbying power in shaping the policy agenda on this issue is warranted. Thus, through utilising the theoretical framework of agenda denial, it is the purpose of this thesis to critically analyse the religious right’s cultural and symbolic strategies of choice and their overall effectiveness in denying proponents of same-sex marriage access to the overall policy agenda. A detailed thematic and framing analysis of content including speeches, interviews, press releases, social media posts and parliamentary submissions was conducted from when a plebiscite was

first postulated by the then Prime Minister Tony Abbott on 12 August 2015 up until the defeat of the *Plebiscite (Same-Sex Marriage) Bill 2016* in the Senate on 7 November 2016. Whilst considering Australia's increasing political engagement marked by secular traditions, falling church attendance and overall religious affiliation, it will be argued that the Christian right enjoyed disproportionate power and influence in successfully delaying and preventing the implementation of same-sex marriage in Australia. This research is critical in contributing to the limited scholarly research regarding the religious right's influence on LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex) policy outcomes.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Statement of Policy Problem

In response to the implementation of same-sex marriage in comparable jurisdictions such as the Netherlands and Canada, the Howard government in 2004 introduced the *Marriage Amendment Bill 2004* in order to insert the common law definition of marriage into the *Marriage Act 1961* and the *Family Law Act*. The amendment aimed to clarify the meaning of marriage as it had no formal definition up until that point, but also to explicitly ban same-sex marriages being performed in Australia, and prevent overseas same-sex marriages being recognised under Australian law. The amendment stated that:

marriage means the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life. Certain unions are not marriages. A union solemnised in a foreign country between: (a) a man and another man; or (b) a woman and another woman; must not be recognised as a marriage in Australia.

In 2017, same-sex marriage is still illegal in Australia. This is of particular concern for a number of reasons. Firstly, marriage is not an immutable religious institution. Federal legislation should reflect the separation of Church and State and not seek to privilege particular religious interests over treating all its citizens equally. Therefore, civil marriage should be made available to all couples regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status.

Secondly, extending marriage to same-sex couples is inherently a human rights issue. The Australian government has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in which Article 26 explicitly states that all people "are equal before the law and entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights). Furthermore,

the Australian Human Rights Commission has considered that this principle of equality means that civil marriage should be extended to all couples regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status (Triggs, 2016). Recent amendments to the *Marriage Act 1961*, such as the recognition of interracial unions and providing women more agency in marriage, have been implemented through the lens of non-discrimination. Therefore, in the context of the evolving nature of marriage, the *Marriage Act 1961* should be amended to define marriage as “the union between two people”.

Thirdly, public opinion on same-sex marriage has shifted dramatically in the last 10 years. In 2004, a Newspoll found that 38 per cent of Australians supported the reform, while 44 per cent opposed. In 2007, a Galaxy poll found 57 per cent of Australians support same-sex marriage. By 2009, a survey conducted by a Galaxy poll using the same question to 2007, showed 60 per cent were now in support with a majority of support among voters for both major parties. This figure increased to 65 per cent in 2012. A national survey conducted in 2014 by prominent research company, Crosby Textor, found 72 per cent overall support for same-sex marriage, with majority support in every demographic including the elderly, people in rural and regional areas and also Christians (Croome, 2015, pg. 102).

One of the many misconceptions in the same-sex marriage debate is that same-sex couples in de-facto relationships have the same legal rights as married heterosexual couples. However, the definition of de-facto is dependent on the state you live in, whether you are applying for a visa or whether you are accessing Centrelink payments. According to Section 4AA of the *Family Law Act 1975* a de-facto relationships is defined as a “couple living together on a genuine domestic basis” (Family Law Act, 1975). There are some major differences between a de-facto relationship and a marriage. For example, a same-sex couple with children who have lived together for several years and decide to separate, go to the Family Court to decide over their assets and child custody arrangements. In this

case, the judge can decide whether the couple are technically in a de-facto relationship or just cohabiting. However, if the couple were married the judge's opinion on the nature of their relationship would be deemed irrelevant. As partners who cannot legally marry in Australia, same-sex couples must meet a number of prerequisites in order have access to the legal rights granted to de-facto relationships. Same-sex couples who live apart due to work, who have recently moved to Australia or from another state, or who have just recently met may find it difficult to qualify as being in a de-facto partnership.

In Western Australia, de-facto partners can be listed on death certificates if they provide information about the relationship in time for the death to be registered. However, if they miss this deadline they must have the permission of the next-of-kin to have their name subsequently added. Enshrining same-sex marriage in law eliminates the legal uncertainty same-sex couples experience in these circumstances by allowing them to have immediate access to spousal rights and protections. It also guarantees these rights against any potential challenges from doctors, bureaucrats, estranged parents or commanding officers (Croome, 2015, pg. 21). Overall, providing civil unions, registered relationship or de-facto partnerships to same-sex couples whilst denying them the right to marry creates a tiered relationship structure that privileges heterosexual relationships over same-sex relationships.

1.2 Birth of the same-sex marriage plebiscite

After several failed attempts to legislate for same-sex marriage since the Howard government's amendments to the Marriage Act in 2004, there was renewed debate on the issue following Ireland's constitutional referendum that established same-sex marriage across the country on the 22 May 2015. Several Coalition members voiced their support for a conscience vote on the issue with Labor MP Anthony Albanese stating that "it is my judgment that there are now majorities in favour of marriage equality in both the House of Representatives and the Senate" (Farr, 2015). Capitalising on this momentum, Opposition Labor leader Bill Shorten introduced to the federal Parliament on 1 June 2015 the *Marriage Amendment (Marriage Equality) Bill 2015*. There was further momentum after the US Supreme Court's ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* in July 2015, which legalised same-sex marriage across the country. In July 2015, details of a cross party bill co-sponsored by LNP MPs Warren Entsch and Teresa Gambaro and seconded by Labor backbencher Terri Butler, were revealed. In response, the then Prime Minister called for a joint party room meeting of the Liberal and National parties on 11 August 2015. After a six hour meeting 66 Coalition MPS voted against a free vote being held on same-sex marriage legislation with 33 MPs for it. Shortly after the meeting, Tony Abbott announced the party room's "strong disposition" to hold a national plebiscite on the issue sometime after the 2016 federal election (Henderson, 2015). In defiance of Mr. Abbott, on 14 September 2015, Minister for Communications Malcolm Turnbull, a strong supporter of same-sex marriage, challenged Tony Abbott for the leadership of the Liberal party and became the 29th Prime Minister of Australia. Despite his personal opposition to holding a plebiscite on the issue, Turnbull reiterated that it would remain Coalition policy after the next federal election. After subsequently winning the election with a slim majority, Turnbull revealed that a plebiscite would likely be held in early 2017, despite acknowledging the possibility of the legislation failing to gain enough support in the Senate. On 14 September 2016 Malcolm Turnbull

introduced to the House of Representatives the *Plebiscite (Same-Sex Marriage) Bill 2016*, outlining the details of holding a plebiscite on the issue. However, with Labor officially announcing on 11 October 2016 it would be opposing the plebiscite legislation, the bill was eventually defeated in the Senate at the second reading stage on 7 November 2016.

1.3 Research Topic

The overall objective of this thesis is to critically analyse the dynamics of agenda denial in the same-sex marriage debate in Australia through exploring how low-cost, medium-cost and high cost-strategies are used by the religious right in order to win the agenda conflict and attain long term success in halting policy reform in this area.

1.4 Research Scope

It is crucial to explicate an awareness of what is possible within the limitations of a 20 000 word thesis framework. Therefore, this research paper will only aim to analyse and describe the cultural and symbolic strategies employed by the Christian right during Australia's debate on whether to hold a national vote on same-sex marriage in the form of a compulsory plebiscite. This analysis will begin at the time a plebiscite was proposed by the then Prime Minister Tony Abbott on 12 August 2015 immediately after the Coalition's party room meeting up until the defeat of *Plebiscite (Same-Sex Marriage) Bill 2016* in the Senate on 7 November 2016. The theoretical framework of Agenda Denial postulated by Cobb and Ross (1997) will be used as the methodological approach for this area of research, and will be discussed further in the following chapter.

1.5 Research Justification

On February 2 2017, the anti-gay marriage lobby group Marriage Alliance posted an advertisement on their social media pages depicting a woman with a rainbow noose

around her neck, as part of their campaign opposing same-sex marriage. The advertisement states that “same sex marriage increases PC bullying in the workplace”. Marriage Alliance claims that incidents of suicide will increase because people will be bullied over their views of the current definition of marriage, if the law is changed to include same-sex couples. Despite warnings from mental health groups such as Beyond Blue that it depicted harmful messages around suicide, Marriage Alliance refused to take down the advertisement. In response to complaints made to the Advertising Standards Bureau, Marriage Alliance argued that the image was a “figurative dramatisation of the pressures that employees have felt as a result of politically correct thought and speech policing in the work environment” (Ward, 2016). Despite this, the Advertising Standards Bureau believed that the depiction of a woman with a noose around her neck was an extreme depiction of violence which was not justified in the image advertised. This particular example reflects the extreme tactics the religious right will employ in order to win the agenda conflict over the same-sex marriage debate in Australia.

Since the 1950s, Australia’s levels of religious affiliation and church attendance have steadily been in decline (Crabb, 2009). Despite this, religious influence has persisted within Australia’s parliamentary protocol. This may be through church leaders’ lobbying of politicians and via the presence of church-based political parties (such as Family First, Christian Democrats). Furthermore, as Maddox (2014) argues, the religious right only represents a small constituency within Australian society. However, they are disproportionately amplified in the same-sex marriage debate.

Fundamentally, Greene (2009, pg. 705) argues that there is a “difference between attempting to be in spiritual connection with a deity and presuming to speak for the deity or presuming that the deity personally approves of whatever actions you choose to take against people when you disagree with or disapprove of them. Hence, religious and spiritual perspectives and their use are no more entitled to be free of scrutiny...in the

broader society than any other belief, particularly if there is reason to believe that their implementation will harm someone.” The agenda of lobby groups in Australia such as Marriage Alliance, the Australian Christian Lobby and the Christian right overall, has almost exclusively been focused on LGBTI issues (such as Safe Schools, same-sex adoption, religious exemptions in anti-discrimination law), most prominently the issue of same-sex marriage. Thus, this particular area of research is crucial in holding the religious right in Australia accountable for their actions and exposing their disproportionate influence and presence during the debate.

1.6 Plebiscite vs. Conscience Vote

Following the then Prime Minister Tony Abbott’s announcement in August 2015 to hold a nationwide vote after the 2016 federal election, polls showed that an overwhelming majority (70 per cent) of voters supported the proposal. This support was further reflected in a Fairfax-Ipsos poll released on July 1 2016, which found that of the 1377 respondents, 69 per cent backed a nationwide vote on the issue over a conscience vote in Parliament (Aston, 2016). After the election, a Galaxy poll commissioned by Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays of 1000 people taken from 14 - 17 July found only 48 per cent supported holding a plebiscite to determine whether same-sex couples should marry, outweighing 30 per cent who were opposed. However, this support dropped to 35 per cent in favour when respondents were told of the non-binding nature of the plebiscite, and fell further to 25 per cent after the proposed \$160 million cost was raised (Aston, 2016). Despite this sharp decline in support, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull defended the Coalition’s plebiscite proposal arguing that a “big majority of Australians support having a vote on it . . . rather than leaving it to politicians”. Furthermore, a Newspoll conducted in September 2016 showed 48 per cent of voters favoured a vote on the floor of parliament,

while only 39 per cent backed the plebiscite, with 13 per cent remaining uncommitted (The Australian, 2015).

Fundamentally, the LGBTI community were strongly opposed to the notion of a plebiscite. A survey of 5 463 LGBTI Australians found 85 per cent opposed the plebiscite. The feedback from the survey participants showed that the two most common reasons for opposing a plebiscite were feelings of anxiety relating to hate campaigns and the belief that minority rights should not be subjected to a popular vote (Karp, 2016).

1.7 Research Agenda

After the 2016 federal election a majority of MPs were now in favour of same-sex marriage with reputable polls indicating a majority of voters were also in favour of reform and holding a free vote in Parliament to resolve the issue. Furthermore, plebiscites in Australia are extremely unusual, with only three having occurred at a federal level in Australia's history¹. Conjointly, the Coalition has a long history of affording its members a conscience vote on issues of moral or ethical concern and where there are strong differences of opinion present. Previous amendments to laws on marriage and family relationships as enshrined in pieces of legislation such as the *Matrimonial Causes Act 1959*, the *Family Law Act 1975*, the *Family Law Amendment Act 1983* and the *Marriage Act 1961* were all decided via conscience vote. The Howard government's *Marriage Amendment Act 2004* was an unusual exception, due to the fact that a party vote was imposed on party members. Despite these realities, the Coalition government has maintained its policy to give Australians the opportunity to "have their say". Thus, it is the purpose of this thesis to critically analyse the religious right's strategies of choice and their overall effectiveness in delaying, or even preventing same-sex marriage becoming a reality in Australia.

¹ 1916 - Military service conscription (defeated), 1917 reinforcement of the Australian Imperial Force overseas (defeated) and 1977 to decide Australia's national anthem ('Advance Australia Fair' was chosen)

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

2.1 Agenda Setting

One of the major battles in politics is who will take control of the political agenda. There is an infinite range of issues on which a government can take action. However, with pressure from the media, advocates and other political parties, the government is constrained by time and funds. According to Kingdon (1995, pg. 3), the agenda refers to “the list of subjects or problems to which governmental officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time.” Agenda setting is the process by which a range of issues is limited and prioritised. Rochefort and Cobb (1994) observe that the study of agenda setting shows that issue creation is a complex political process. Firstly, problems must be identified, then organisations need to mobilise around particular issues and policies, in order for them to survive the multiple stages of the policy making process. It must be noted that there is a distinction between the public agenda (or the systemic, informal agenda), which represents the issues that have high visibility and public interest, and the formal agenda (or the institutional agenda), which is the list of items that decision makers have formally accepted for consideration (Cobb & Elder, 1983, pg. 85-7). Problems on the formal agenda have three characteristics: firstly, objective evidence must be present in order to show that a problem exists (this evidence can be demonstrated through statistical evidence such as survey results, government studies, public health reports or census data). Even though the validity and reliability of such evidence can be debated, it shows that there is a sense of objectivity to the problem instead of responding to the demands of a noisy minority (Cobb & Ross, 1997, pg. 7). Secondly, many but not all issues to be considered have already made the public agenda, in which the public believes a particular issue needs government action. In this case, evidence may take the form of opinion polls based on a ranking of

important issues. And the third characteristic considers whether the issue is on the formal agenda in other comparable jurisdictions with similar social systems. If it is, the questions arises as to why it has not yet made the formal agenda here.

Problem definition infers the moving from a “situation” to a “problem”, which is dependent on interpretation. As Bacchi (1999, pg. 1) notes: “any description of an issue or a ‘problem’ is an interpretation, and interpretations involve judgement and choices.” In other words, problem definition is how an issue is framed. The agenda setting process often involves a “clash of frames” between competing groups (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003, pg. 121).

2.2 Agenda Conflicts and Agenda Denial

The theoretical concept of agenda denial postulated by Cobb and Ross (1997) is a fundamental part of the agenda setting process. It focuses on how issues are kept off the government agenda by opponents of a particular issue. However, agenda conflicts are not solely based on what issues the government chooses to act on; they are also about the different ways political problems are interpreted or framed and the “alternative worldviews” that underlie them (Cobb & Ross, 1997, pg. 3-4). Agenda conflicts involve initiators who seek consideration of an issue competing against opponents who wish to keep the issue off the formal agenda (pg. 25). It must be noted, however, that neither opponents nor initiators of issues are necessarily liberal or conservative in ideology.

Agenda conflicts can assist in understanding how issues of grievance are created. Cobb and Ross (1997, pg. 12-13) argue that rational self-interest (maintaining or improving position in society) of proponents and opponents is limited in explaining their motivation. Rather, an analysis that emphasises that agenda conflicts are about how certain issues are interpreted and their connection to competing worldviews is sufficient in explaining the motivation of both proponents and opponents in the process of policy innovation.

Interpretations conveyed by proponents and opponents address how people should live their lives, how society should act, and in what areas government should intervene. At this level, agenda conflicts analyse how opponents and initiators associate specific issues around their general worldview. For example, initiators argue how a new issue is consistent with long standing values in society. On the other hand, opponents argue how an issue is in conflict with these long-standing worldviews. Cultural and symbolic factors are evident at this level. As Cobb and Ross (1997, pg. 13) note: “when issues are tied to culturally salient ideas about identity, the structure of a conflict and the ways in which it develops go beyond simple self-interest, as individual and collective action become linked”. Symbolic processes explain the commitment and perceived threats that characterise agenda conflicts. Part of this process involves participants in conflicts linking their position on an issue to a social or cultural identity that they consider to be at risk. Connecting political positions to cultural concerns is an effective way for all sides in agenda disputes to mobilise their supporters (Edelman, 1964). Cultural and symbolic processes are evident when different definitions of an issue are used and reflect the competing cultural images of the same issue. The strength of culturally linked issue definitions usually determines whether the issue attains access to the formal agenda or not (Cobb & Ross, 1997, pg. 14). Culture reflects how particular beliefs frame problems and how they are discussed in terms of how they are solved. The cultural and symbolic strategies used by opponents of an issue can limit the serious consideration of an issue by government. Agenda setting does not simply analyse what resources are available, but how they are used to define a particular problem in order to become worthy of consideration in a particular cultural context. According to Cobb and Ross (1997, pg. 17) there are two types of opposing groups: public officials and affected groups. Factors such as “ideology, information, conflict, comfort and politics” encourage public officials to avoid considering new issues. Cobb and Ross (1997, pg. 18) note that in agenda conflicts the

“affected groups” believe that the initiators of an issue and their aims threaten their own core values or identity. They further argue that if a group believes their way of life is being threatened, they will strongly maintain the position for the status quo. As Cobb and Ross (1997, pg. 18) point out, governments not only distribute economic benefits to their citizens, but also confer legitimacy on some groups or endorse their practices. Issue containment, sometimes called issue narrowing, is part of the agenda denial process and is used when opponents realise that they cannot completely ignore or defeat a particular issue. Issue containment refers to a set of tactics used by opponents in order to limit or constrict an issue to the narrowest terms possible (Cobb & Ross, 1997, pg. 19). It is an effective way to diminish an issue’s political relevance, the number of people affected and also the resources at stake. It must be noted that containment, although related to many of the tactics used to achieve agenda denial, is not denial itself. Although strategies such as postponement, attack posturing and violence are found in issue containment, containment is the only way full agenda denial can be achieved (Cobb & Ross, 1997, pg. 20).

2.3 Strategies of Agenda Denial

There are several factors which shape the use of material and symbolic resources in agenda conflicts. Firstly, opponents usually have the advantage. The agendas of legislatures, executive branches of government and courts are almost always full, and opponents only have to convince relevant decision-makers that no action is needed on an issue. On the other hand, proponents must convince them to act on a particular issue whilst dispensing resources in the process. Secondly, time is usually in the opponents’ favour. The typical half-life of an issue is relatively short and opponents take advantage of this fact in their aim to resist any movement of an issue progressing towards being considered by policy makers. In a short time, public interest diminishes and the issue, which was once compelling, is considered old and uninteresting. Thirdly, the role of the

media in agenda conflicts is crucial. Proponents need to gain visibility and attract supporters in order to put issue on agenda and gain coverage that benefits their cause. If initiators are successful in gaining media coverage, opponents focus on the negative characteristics of the issue or the proponents themselves. Finally, short-run political trends must be considered. These shape how each side of the conflict believes it can be successful and how they may characterise the other side's position.

The dynamics of agenda denial involve low-, medium-, and high-cost strategic options that opponents use. Cobb and Ross's working assumption is that opponents will use the lowest possible cost strategies first in order to achieve their desired policy outcomes and then progressively turn to higher cost strategies in the face of lack of success. Furthermore, opponents avoid expending resources that are deemed necessary in defeating the initiating group in the early stages of the conflict, due to the fact that it is counterproductive, costly and time-consuming. The strategies at an opponent group's disposal include symbolic and cultural strategies, which are used to define or frame an issue in a certain way in order to win the agenda conflict and attain long-term success (Cobb & Ross, 1997, pg. 25). Conceptually, low cost-strategies involve the refusal to acknowledge a problem exists. This is usually the first strategy used by opponents in the agenda conflict against issue initiators. However, if the problem persists, Cobb and Ross (1997, pg.28) argue that "ignorancing" the problem is no longer sufficient. Thus, opponents then turn to outright denial that the problem is of any major concern. This involves minimal recognition of the grievance, but then the reaction of opponents is that it is a problem worthy of consideration. "Antipatterning" is a variation of denial postulated by Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993). In this case the issue or problem is admitted, however opponents argue that it is an isolated incident and not part of a wider problem. They then argue that "the incidence of the phenomenon has been exaggerated or its nature misunderstood" (Ibarra & Kitsuse 1993, pg. 44). This puts pressure on initiators to prove that their concerns

extend beyond that of a single occurrence and that the issue is of broader social significance and deserves attention and resolution. Additionally, parallel to denying a problem exists is denying the legitimacy of the initiating group. One of the key features of utilising low cost strategies is non-confrontation. This involves minimal to no communication between opposing sides. In this case, initiators will then have to expend more resources to have recognition of grievance.

Attack posturing is one of two medium-cost strategies used by opponents which raise the level of agenda conflict. It involves utilising verbal assaults against initiating groups or an issue in order to benefit opponents. The aim of opponents is to link the initiating group or the policy issue to negative characteristics in order to raise public doubt (Cobb & Ross, 1997, pg. 29). As a consequence, the initiating groups are unlikely to mobilise more supporters and thus, the issue fails to get on the formal agenda. Also, opponents may dispute facts presented by initiators in the debate, arguing that they lack credibility. In order to analyse issue attack strategies, Cobb and Elder (1983, pg. 112-24) provide five issue characteristics. They include: ambiguity, social significance, temporal relevance, complexity, and no categorical precedence. Defining a particular issue in these terms is effective in expanding the amount of attention the issue receives. On the other hand, attacks on group legitimacy usually focus on the group's leaders and their behaviour and/or comments. This involves opponents questioning the leaders' ethics, morals, agenda and motivations. Another tactic used by opponents is claiming victim status. Initiators will claim they have been victimised. Opponents will then seek to reverse roles claiming they are being victimised by the initiators themselves (Cobb & Ross, 1997, pg. 33). The final attack strategy is deception, which involves lying, spreading false rumours, peddling false stories in the media, and disseminating information known to be false or inaccurate. Cobb and Ross (1997, pg. 33) argue that this strategy is most successfully achieved when an

opponents' position is "sheathed in a scientific facade" or, in other words, cherry-picking studies or misrepresenting a study's findings.

An alternative medium-cost strategy adopted by opponents is to utilise symbolic placation. Opponents admit the existence of the problem but oppose or block any proposed solution advocated by the initiators. It also involves "downsizing of issue" and language which is adversarial is abandoned in favour of language which emphasises mutual interest. Symbolic placation also involves each side exercising caution in order to persuade the other, rather than engage in a conflict which uses confrontational strategies (Cobb & Ross, 1997. pg. 34). Government officials are most likely to use symbolic placation strategies as they understand the importance of giving voters the impression of "coping" with an issue that they see as significant (Edelman, 1964). Furthermore, Coleman (1957) argues that officials may emphasise the interests of the wider community or invoke community norms and values to reduce the amount of solutions available. Symbolic placation strategies are most successful in one of two situations: when the interests of the initiators and opponents are so far apart that the former concludes that the chances of success are slim, or when a commitment to community norms is high, but feelings towards the certain issue are not (Cobb & Ross, 1997, pg. 34). Cobb and Elder (1983, pg. 127) note that establishing a committee or study is the most common symbolic placation strategy as it has the potential to weaken the momentum initiators have developed. In addition, the strategy of tokenism or showcasing involves opponents focusing on one small part of an issue in order to show their commitment to dealing with the broader issue. This also involves public officials redefining the issue in more narrow terms and then addressing those who now qualify under the redefined issue. Co-opting an initiator's symbols and then associating them with their own actions is another symbolic placation strategy at an opponent's disposal (pg. 37). Lastly, postponement of an issue involves opponents of an issue recognising the grievance expressed by initiators but contending

that due to a lack of personnel, time or money, it is impossible to adequately consider the issue. This is similar to a strategy Ibarra and Kitsuse call “declaring impotence”, which expresses sympathy for the grievance or issue while at the same time “pointing to an impoverishment of resources at hand for dealing with the issue” (1993, pg. 39).

The last group of strategies employed by opponents are high-cost strategies. These strategies involve the great expenditure of resources by opponents and, thus, not used lightly. High-cost strategies are used when other tactics have failed and opponents believe the issue is of sufficient importance to continue opposing its consideration by government. Strategies involve economic, electoral, legal threats, economic and legal sanctions, arrest, imprisonment and even organised violence against members of the initiating group. One strategy is to make an issue illegal. Public officials may also threaten legal incarceration against initiators when they use extralegal tactics such as sit ins or street blockades in order to draw more attention to their grievance. High-cost strategies can be damaging to both initiators, as legal assistance is expensive and time consuming, and to opponents (this strategy may make initiators martyrs and draw more support for their cause). At the far end of the continuum is physical violence. Opponents run the risk of losing support if prolonged publicity designates outsider groups into victim status.

Overall, Cobb and Ross (1997, pg. 43) explain that the group of actors who successfully link the issue to a “culturally rooted worldview” usually win the agenda conflict. In order to be successful, cultural strategies are used to associate the issue or grievance with powerful symbols and values (pg. 43). Fundamentally, opponents have a wide range of strategies at their disposal to reduce the impact of the initiators’ arguments. If opponents are successful, they will reduce a particular issue so that it is only relevant to its small group of adherents, thus preventing it from garnering more supporters to its cause. This combination of tactics, teamed with its resource potential of opposing groups, explains why so many issues fail to reach the formal agenda.

Overall, the political theory of agenda denial is a useful theoretical framework approach the Christian right's influence in Australia's same-sex marriage debate. The following chapters will discuss the strategies employed by the Christian right to deny agenda access to the initiating group, or proponents of same-sex marriage. Examples of the opponents who use them, their effect in influencing their position in the agenda conflict and the extent to which they use them, will be outlined. The most prominent opponents in the same-sex marriage debate to be analysed in this thesis will be: the Australian Christian Lobby, Australian Marriage Forum, Marriage Alliance, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, FamilyVoice Australia, the Australian Family Association and the conservative faction of the federal Liberal party. A more detailed analysis of these opponent groups will be outlined in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 What is the Religious Right?

According to scholar of the US Christian Right, Sara Diamond (1995, pg. 6) the term “right-wing” refers to “a consistent set of principles in three realms of social endeavor: the economy, the nation state in global context (military and diplomatic), and the moral order of behavioral norms and hierarchies on the bases of race and gender.” Maddox (2005a, pg. 218, 280) states that the specific term “religious right” connotes the promotion of neo-liberal economic positions and also supporting the patriarchal, heterosexual family structure paradigm, which is inherent in social conservatism. Cultural historian Timothy Jones argues that, after the sexual revolution, Christian political organisations became primarily concerned with issues surrounding sexual politics. He labels this movement as the “New Christian Right” (Jones, 2016). Edwards (2007, pg. 260) describes the “religious right” as a social movement with a particular interpretation of Christian dogma emphasising absolute authority of the Bible, and literal interpretations of the biblical text. As Peter Gomes, Harvard University dean of the College of Divinity, explains: “the legitimating of violence against homosexuals, Jews, women and Blacks, as we have seen, comes from a view that the Bible stigmatizes these people and therefore they are fair game...If the Bible expresses such a prejudice, then it can’t be wrong to act on that prejudice...Every anti-Semite and racist has used that argument with demonstrably devastating consequences, as our social history all too vividly shows (Gomes, 1996, pg. 144–172). Additionally, Edwards (2007) believes the Christian right are a well organised political movement who are increasingly looking to exercise power and influence in public policy. Also, they share similar values to the political right, specifically their hostility towards multiculturalism, feminism, environmentalism and support for the notion of “small government”.

3.2 The Religious Right and the Abortion Debate: Lessons to be Learned

Gleeson (2011) argues that influence of right-wing Christian lobbyists was limited during the abortion debate when Tony Abbott was health minister from 2004 - 2006. Despite Maddox and others suggesting that “the influence of the right-wing Christian lobbyists is growing, and is disproportionate to their representation in the wider community” (Lohrey, 2006, 42–3), Gleeson argues that this influence was misunderstood by politicians such as Abbott and political commentators. Furthermore, Gleeson suggests that the outcome of the debate over the abortifacient RU486 was not due to the failed political tactics of Abbott but rather on the absence of a powerful religious constituency on which he called (Gleeson, 2011, pg. 474).

Tony Abbott’s strategies to place the abortion issue on the public agenda involved the encouragement of church lobby groups and conservative allies within the parliament. Despite the fact that it failed to advance Abbott’s anti-abortion agenda, such an alliance between the churches facilitated some conservative policies such as the non-recognition of same-sex marriages (Gleeson, 2011, pg. 474). It is critical to identify any similar political role church groups and leaders play in elections and the policy debate surrounding same-sex marriage, and to understand how they influence policy outcomes.

In addition, it is important to understand the political forces at work during the same-sex marriage debate in order to assess what specific agenda is being pursued: an overall social conservative agenda facilitated by the religious right or one driven by personal political gain. Maddox (2005a) suggests that, Abbott was less concerned about the abortion issue than positioning himself as the alternative conservative leader of the Liberal party to replace Prime Minister John Howard, in the midst of speculation surrounding the Treasurer Peter Costello’s political future. Maddox (2005a, pg. 104) states that Abbott “had to go a long way, to what was previously the political fringe” of the abortion issue in order to position himself as more right-wing than Costello, and therefore sending a “dog whistle”

to the conservative political faction the Lyons forum that “once Howard goes, I’m your man”. However, Gleeson (2011, pg. 476) argues that Abbott’s “dog whistling” was also aimed at Christians and church leaders in order to mobilise against abortion, and to create a public discourse around an issue that, according to Maddox (2005a, pg. 2013), had “quarantined” consensus for 25 years, therefore ensuring he owned the issue.

3.3 Ontology and objectivity of marriage: exploring notions of the sacred and profane, nature and masculinity, nominalism and realism

The arguments made about gays and lesbians undermining the institution of marriage reveal an unease about heterosexual marriage, the nuclear family and the nature and role of masculinity in modern Australian society (Edwards, 2007, pg. 247). Furthermore, concerns surrounding the authority of masculinity are linked to concerns about challenges to the notion of an “objective epistemological order”. Edwards (2007) invokes Durkheim’s theory of the sacred in order to explain the religious right’s argument that nature and marriage are sacred.

In Durkheimian terms, marriage and nature are sacred and thus, must be protected from being in contact with things considered profane. Defining heterosexual marriage as sacred shows an attempt to uphold an epistemological order linked to masculine authority (Edwards, 2007, pg. 247). The notion of sacredness is inherently ideological as it symbolises institutions, values and relationships. Therefore, sacred ideas, things, places or people have social authority. As Edwards (2007, pg. 248) argues: “they specify social relationships, underpin and shore up social institutions and confer status and privilege”. Labelling things as sacred ensures that their ideological function is immune to criticism. According to Edwards (2007), the religious right defines heterosexual marriage as sacred, and thus needs to be protected from things considered profane which threaten its sanctity. Therefore, this “unimpeachable demarcation” is challenged when the definition of marriage

is altered to include same-sex relationships as they are considered a profane form of sexual relationships (Edwards, 2007, pg. 249). It is important to note that the sacred and profane are relational concepts; the existence of the sacred requires the existence of the profane and thus, they acquire meaning through their relationship with each other.

According to Durkheim, the notion of sacredness is: "...par excellence that which the profane should not touch, and cannot touch with impunity" (1965, pg. 55–56). In this sense, the religious right argues that marriage is sacred and thus, allowing same-sex marriage to occupy the same conceptual space as heterosexual marriage "pollutes" the institution as it violates the separation of the sacred and profane. In relation to the religious right's criticism of gay marriage, nature is in the domain of the sacred as it is different from human produced culture and, therefore, it can be separated from human activity (Edwards, 2007, pg. 255). This "autonomous existence" of sacred ideas is crucial to maintaining their coercive power, otherwise the social order they sustain will be vulnerable to challenges. Thus, the notion of sacredness has two components: the ability of commanding behaviour, and also the idea that threatening sacred entities has adverse consequences. Therefore, the moral panic about gay marriage reveals the sacredness attributed to heterosexual marriage by the religious right (Edwards, 2007, pg. 256). In summary, the religious right often invokes the threat that if the inviolability of marriage is broken, interpersonal and social upheaval will occur.

Durkheim's theory of the sacred and profane (1965) is useful in understanding its power and influence and its relationship with notions of pollution. It can also help explain the religious right's vehemence that gay marriage is polluting and dangerous. However, it is limited in attempting to explain the political factors that have led to the prominence of the religious right in Australia. Also, a Durkheimian perspective fails to offer an explanation of the strategies employed by the religious right in denying access to the agenda in relation to same-sex marriage and in influencing its policy outcomes.

The religious right's defence of heterosexual marriage also reflects an unease over its apparent precarious state. Disquiet over marriage and family also reveals a deeper fear of the role of masculinity in contemporary Australian society. Edwards (2007, pg. 249) notes that the Christian right's arguments against same-sex marriage embody the overall fear that the status and function of masculinity are becoming redundant. In other words, heterosexual men are losing their authority and influence.

According to the National Marriage Coalition (NMC), marriage is an objective ontological phenomenon that is fixed and immutable (NMC, as cited in Edwards, 2007). According to its objectivist epistemological framework, if the ontology and objectivity of marriage is challenged, moral relativism will occur, resulting in social upheaval. Furthermore, a denial of the objective framework in relation to marriage and family will result in the weakening of the authority of those who seek to protect these institutions. Thus, Edwards (2007, pg. 249) suggests that epistemological challenges on the objectivity of marriage also affect the status of male authority.

Edwards (2007) argues that "vigorous heteronormativity" is inherent in NMC's arguments against same-sex marriage. According to the NMC's reasoning, heterosexuality is normative because it is "natural". The concept of nature used in this context signifies an "objective and immutable epistemological, moral and social order instituted by God" (Edwards, 2007, pg. 249). Furthermore, the religious right believe nature is inherently teleological; that it has been designed for a purpose and that it is a template for a moral and social order. For example, a spokesperson for the NMC David van Gend argued that "male-female pair bonding" is a biological fact of life (van Gend, 2004b). Inherent in this argument is the belief that biological differences ensure that there is a psychological, emotional, and social division of labour that benefits the wellbeing of children. As Horn (2003, pg. 3, as cited in Edwards, 2007, pg. 250) states: "Moms and Dads do things differently...fathers are much more likely to be physical with their children...Moms are much

more likely to verbally stimulate their kids.” van Gend (2004, as cited in Edwards, 2007, pg. 250) also argues that nature doesn’t include same-sex relationships in its design as there is no biological imperative for sex between two men or two women. Thus, prohibiting same-sex marriage is not excluding gay couples as nature has not prescribed its existence: “by its very nature, homosexuality has excluded itself; it has stepped out the circle of life — the timeless, endless natural circle of male and female...” (van Gend, 2004b).

The notion of fatherhood is also invoked by the religious right as a primary defence of marriage. They argue that the formal definition in its current form ensures that children will have better relationships with their fathers than those whose parents are not married. Edwards (2007, pg. 251) suggests that concerns raised by the religious right in regards to children’s relationships with their fathers reveals a deep-seated unease about families headed by women. Furthermore, the emphasis on fatherless families highlights an unease about the masculinity of fatherless sons, and the fear that young men will become redundant in the eyes of women and society in general (Edwards, 2007, pg. 252). It is important to note that the religious right believe that marriage, and not mere cohabitation, is necessary to ensure good relationships between fathers and their children. This reflects a biological argument which stipulates that marriage is an “indispensable element” in the regulation of human sexuality and the restraint of sexual activity (Edwards, 2007, pg. 253).

According to the Australian Family Association (as cited in Edwards, 2007, pg. 253), members of the religious right hold a realist view of knowledge whereas “liberals”, “feminists” and the “intelligentsia” adopt a nominalist perspective. Realists give authority to knowledge that is objective because it is not a human construct. On the other hand, nominalists do not give authority to an objective epistemological order. Thus, nominalists critique the social order realists believe it prescribes (AFA). Realists such as Muehlenberg, previously a principal spokesperson for the NMC, argues that marriage and family are part

of nature and that human beings must obey the laws governed by nature. Marriage is not a social construct: "...one of the most basic and universal human institutions. And from a biblical point of view, it is one of the most crucial...It precedes the state and all other divinely ordained institutions" (Muehlenberg, 2004, pg. 1). Furthermore, it is argued that redefining marriage will threaten the nation state. Fowler (2004, pg. 5) elucidates: "the fate of nations hinges on its families. And the fate of families hinges on the honour and dignity accorded to marriage". Thus, it is evident that the religious right believe the "natural" family unit and ultimately the entire social fabric will be undermined, if concepts such as marriage and the family are broadened. As Freidland (2002) notes, the religious right's claims in this regard cannot be separated from nationalist anxiety.

According to Nussbaum (2004), the notion of disgust has renewed interest among conservative commentators. Despite women's bodies often being the subject of disgust, Nussbaum argues that gay men and their bodies are now objects of disgust. The idea that men being anally penetrated is what inspires this disgust. To males, the concept of non-penetrability is a "sacred boundary against stickiness, ooze and death" (Nussbaum, 2004, pg. 30-31). It is not just the central idea of contamination via anal penetration that is expressed here, but rather the more general idea that the male receives the "pollution" of bodily fluids (semen): and close proximity to a contaminated body which is then self-contaminating (Nussbaum, 2004, pg. 31). Evidently, the concept of disgust protects the sacred. Nussbaum argues that a strong correlation exists between attitudes of disgust and anti-gay attitudes including towards same-sex marriage. Projecting disgust on subordinate groups (in this case gay people), is a common tactic used to demonise them and stigmatise them as inferior or sick (Nussbaum, 2004, pg. 31). However, it is important to note that that projective disgust should not be used to formulate policy solutions. This is due to "the emotion's normative irrationality and its connection to stigma and hierarchy" (Nussbaum, 2004, pg. 31). Furthermore, using the rhetoric of disgust to

conclude that a certain policy (such as same-sex marriage) is wrong, is unhelpful as it prevents the possibility of finding better reasons to support its implementation. This can then create the misleading impression that the policy has already been well defended. Thus, legitimising policies using the notion of disgust is dangerous as it ignores rationally based arguments and also encourages social hierarchies that are not defensible, in an overall pursuit of equality of subordinate groups (Nussbaum, 2007, pg. 31).

3.4 Valuative Frameworks and Religious Belief

Greene (2009) argues that it is problematic that religious doctrine is selectively used to justify behaviour against minorities that maintains an oppressive social hierarchy rather than challenges it. In homophobic cultures, selective Bible verses have been used to oppress gay men and women (Greene 2009). Greene (2009) believes that every socially dominant group in history that has committed genocide against a subordinate group has done so using valuative frameworks which are often influenced by religious belief or conviction. Historically, all dominant groups had values to support their behaviour against subordinate groups and were often described as a “religious mandate”. In this context, dominant groups sought to impose their agenda on subordinate group members. For example, some valuative frameworks consider LGBTI people as immoral, defective, inferior or even dangerous; thus, dominant groups will fail to condemn the harm inflicted on them. According to Greene (2009), in the context of patriarchal values and where same-sex relationships are still not considered equal to heterosexual ones, religious beliefs and doctrine are used to uphold the status quo. Greene (2009) concludes that, despite the fact that valuative frameworks and religious beliefs can be positively used to bring together families and differing social groups to better understand one another, they can also be used to justify “destructive social pathologies” such as “splitting, projection, fear, scapegoating, and even violent attacks” on groups that are deemed inferior (in this case

LGBTI people). In order to respect differing valuative frameworks, the way the value is being used and its effects on particular social groups when used in particular ways, and not the value's content must be considered (Greene, 2009). Overall, valuative frameworks and beliefs must be critiqued if they are used to cause others harm.

3.5 Religion in the Political Sphere: Liberal Consensus Model vs. Pluralist Model

According to Warhurst (2007), the intersection of religion and politics involves: “constitutional issues, voting behaviour, party composition and electoral competition, faith-based public administration, advocacy and lobbying by churches, mutual criticism by churches and the state, and the public presentation of religious values”. Thompson (2002, pg. 260) notes that Christianity is the most common religious affiliation in Australia and has been the major religious influence in the country since European settlement. Authoritative commentators such as Maddox (2001) argue that in the past, politicians rarely chose “to display their religious faith in an ostentatious way” and refrained from using their religious beliefs to inform their policy decisions (Warhurst, 2007, pg. 20). Furthermore, many scholars in this area of research (Maddox 2005; Brennan 2007; Lohrey 2006; Warhurst 2007) have observed a noticeable change in the intersectionality of religion and politics in early twenty first century Australia. For example, Brennan (2007, pg. 9) argues that “religion once again has a place at the table of public discussion on law and policy”. Warhurst (2007, pg. 23) notes that senior Howard government ministers were “active, in word and deed, in emphasising . . . their religious credentials and beliefs”. Scholars have also attempted to explain the reasoning behind why politicians are increasingly referencing religion in the political sphere in recent years. Warhurst (2006, pg. 6) outlines three possible reasons: the clash between Islamist extremism and Western Christian nations, the “particular personalities” occupying leadership roles within the Coalition, and decreasing sectarianism. Maddox (2004, pg. 1) suggests that politicians have used religion

as a tool to fuel division pitting “us” (the marginalised) against “them” (self-serving special interest groups). Furthermore, she argues that in the post 9/11 environment, John Howard has “whipped up” anti-Muslim rhetoric (them) by suggesting that Australia was founded on Christian principles (us) (Maddox, 2004, pg. 1). Maddox also offers an alternative explanation for increased references to religion by politicians. She suggests that prominent Howard government ministers have used “ambiguously Christian rhetoric” in order to appeal not to just the Christian right, but also secular audiences that need a “safe reference point in an uncertain world” (Maddox, 2005, pg. 46). As Crabb (2009, pg. 271) suggests: “it is less about the desire to express personal beliefs, and more about a pragmatic choice to utilise religion in an instrumental manner”.

In Rawls’s (2005) “liberal consensus model”, public political discourse and decision making should be limited to those arguments defensible by reason and not informed by any religious or non-religious doctrine. Rawls (2005) argues that this model is necessary in liberal democratic societies where “incompatible and irreconcilable religious, philosophical and moral ideologies coexist”. Alternatively, there is the “pluralist model” proposed by political philosophers such as Nicholas Wolterstorff. In this model, religion is allowed to be expressed in the public sphere and individuals acknowledge when their opinions are informed by their religious beliefs. Brennan (2007, pg. 9) notes that this is beneficial due to the fact that citizens’ “religious view of life and the world contributes to their perception, understanding and search for the true and good”. This model also ensures that citizens are able to establish the “true” basis for a policy maker’s decision, rather than the motivation they create in order to be deemed acceptable to the public (as would be the case in Rawls’s model). For example, a government minister would express his opposition to same-sex marriage because it was inconsistent with their religious beliefs, rather than citing, out of context, a social science study’s conclusions on same-sex relationships or parenting. There are several factors which enable the pluralist model to be successful in a

modern democracy. Firstly, all religions should be permitted to contribute to public policy debates. Secondly, no religions should be privileged over others and finally, citizens should judge a speaker's arguments based on reason, rather than whether they are affiliated with the same religious faith as themselves (Crabb, 2009, pg. 273).

Crabb (2009) argues that during the twentieth century religious contributions to public debates in Australia came predominantly from church leaders. However, an increased prominence of religion in politics in the twenty-first century has seen an end to church leaders' monopoly of religiously informed viewpoints. Crabb (2009, pg. 273) argues that the shift from the Rawls model to a pluralist model can be interpreted as either the rebalancing of a "historical anomaly" which excluded religious beliefs from public discourse or the negative intrusion of irrational religious beliefs that do not belong in the political sphere. Crabb (2009) suggests that this shift has been accompanied by the privileging of certain religious beliefs over others. This challenges the reason-based decision-making inherent in Rawls's model and thus conflicts with ensuring the pluralist model's success. She cites a range of policy initiatives as evidence to support this contention. For example, the federal government provided funding for the National School Chaplaincy program, which favoured religiously affiliated people over trained counsellors and youth workers "to support the spiritual wellbeing of students" (DEST 2007). Also, Crabb argues that policy decisions that are informed by one particular set of religious beliefs ignores the diversity of views in the community, and are also difficult to challenge as the person invoking religious doctrine believes in a "truth", which can only be accepted through faith alone. Thus, if viewpoints cannot be disproved, democratic debate is hindered (Crabb, 2009, pg. 275). Fundamentally, Crowe (2005, pg. 31) argues that canonical texts are not recognised "as having any inherent claim to moral authority" in the broader Australian community. On the other hand, if policy decisions are based on broader considerations it allows people of diverse backgrounds to come together and reach a consensus, ensuring that they accept

the justification for a policy decision. Furthermore, if policy decisions are made via a consensus of rational and reasoned-based discussion, it can benefit both religious and non-religious people. Also, the legitimacy of policy decisions based on faith is challenged when church leaders take a different public stance from that of politicians who are members of their denomination. Crabb (2009, pg. 275) notes that this can then lead to a discussion which focuses on theological interpretation rather than focusing on whether the policy is appropriately designed and beneficial to the population. In addition, the legitimacy of representative democracy is also reduced when politicians justify basing their decisions on religious beliefs, since they risk representing their denomination, rather than their electorate.

Overall, Crabb (2009) concludes that from 2001-2006 the prominence of religion in politics has increased. She suggests that since the terror attacks on 9/11, politicians have tried to create a “new sense of national solidarity” by referring to the Christian beliefs held by the majority of the Australian population in response to the changing national security environment. Also, the increased references to religious beliefs by politicians have also increased in the same time period. Crabb (2009) argues that the framing of the September 11 terrorist attacks as a religious paradigm resulted in the weakening of the Rawlsian liberal consensus model. Lastly, Crabb contends that decreasing sectarianism and “particular personalities” of Coalition ministers is insufficient in explaining the normalising of Christian terminology and ideas in political discourse in the early twenty-first century.

3.6 Politics of the Australian Christian Right

Smith and Marden (2012) offer a critical assessment of the politics of the Christian right in Australia and also give a critical analysis of whether the religious values espoused by the Christian right are compatible with a democratic political culture. In addition, they analyse the extent to which theologically based political values embrace an “inclusive

liberal democratic polity". They argue that there has been a conservative shift in Australian political culture, with the Christian right having more access to public debates and political leaders than before the election of the Howard government in 1996. The authors note that the Christian right are similar to religiously-inspired terrorist organisations in their desire to implement their fundamentalist aims, but differ in their tactics. Instead of strategic violence, the Christian right aim to achieve their political objectives from within democratic institutions. Smith and Marden (2012) argue that it is not the values of the Christian right that are problematic, rather how these values shape political outcomes. One of the main values espoused by the Christian right is the right to freedom of religion. Smith and Marden (2012, pg. 304) suggest that due to the long history of religious persecution, the Christian right believe that this right is now under threat and that they are being excluded from public debate by a "hostile secular political culture". However, it is the Christian right's demonisation of communities (religious and non-religious) and their access to politicians, which has led to criticism. Also, if their political behaviour is informed by their religious values, then the political action associated with the Christian right is privileged by the right to religious freedom, while political action informed by secular values is not (Smith & Marden, 2012, pg. 305).

In his study of millenarian sects, Norman Cohn (2004) offers a useful insight into the ways social anxiety, poverty and utopian fantasy lead to a political vision based on a "revolutionary eschatology"². His work is crucial as it highlights how religious based ideas can result in the identification of an enemy. The doctrine of pre-millenarianism envisages an age of "blessedness" that lasts one thousand years, starting with the second coming of Christ. As Cohn (2004, pg. 15) notes: "traditional beliefs about a future golden age or messianic kingdom came to serve as vehicles for social aspirations and animosities." Furthermore, Gray (2007) has warned of the dangers of apocalyptic utopian political

² Eschatology is the branch of theology concerned with death, judgement, the destiny of the soul and humankind.

behaviour. He notes that right-wing utopianism began as a secular movement, but as it became more militant, it also became less secular.

Hedges (2007) has noted fascist elements within certain schisms within Christianity. He has focused on the small Christian movement known as dominionism³, which are specifically influential in American politics. This movement differs from traditional evangelicalism in the way that it strives to redefine Christian democratic values to support an ideology, which aims to see a radical church holding political power. Hedges (2007, pg. 207) argues that “...the radical Christian Right is a sworn and potent enemy of the open society. Its ideology bears within it the tenets of a Christian fascism.” Smith and Marden (2012, pg. 208) argue that religious fundamentalism and totalitarianism are a threat to the continuation of a robust, liberal democracy. Alarming, dominionist ideology and apocalyptic fantasies that define the Christian right in the US have an influence on the Christian right in Australia. This is made evident via the political and religious alliances between Christian right organisations in Australia and the US and their shared interests. Maddox has observed that the Christian right (drawing on links to Christian right organisations in the US) draw upon wedge issues to gain political traction. Smith and Marden (2012, pg. 313) argue that in the face of lack of success their attention is then diverted to other issues or the issue is reframed to appeal to a broader public audience. As a result, the Christian right are given a greater say in public debates which then normalises their contribution on a range of key policy issues. For example, the reframing of issues as “family values” broadens their public appeal. Smith and Marden (2012, pg. 314) note that “the campaign for recognition and adoption of family values as the proper platform for public policy is conditioned by the need to disguise much of the religiosity that informs it.” They also suggest that family values affirmed by the Christian right are linked to a literal interpretation of scripture and also a faith that the Bible is the word of God and thus,

³ Dominionists are usually postmillennialist: they want to take dominion (i.e. government) so as to turn the world into a place fit for Jesus to rule as a direct theocracy.

absolute truth. The Australian Christian Lobby, the Fatherhood Foundation and the Australian Family Association, which formed the National Marriage Coalition (NMC), all subscribe to a broad values framework; however, they are all underpinned by a conservative Christian faith and supported by politically active Pentecostal churches (Smith & Marden, 2012, pg. 315). The NMC strived to protect and preserve family (Christian) values, which they believed were pivotal to the salvation of society which had been polluted with the “scourges of modernity”, such as postmodernism and secularism (Smith & Marden, 2012, pg. 315). They also considered same-sex marriage as one of the greatest threats to the traditional family unit and that marriage needed “protection” and saving”. This is made evident by comments made by Mary Louise Fowler (from the Australian Family Association) at the National Marriage Forum at parliament house in Canberra in 2004. She stated that if the Marriage Amendment Bill 2004 was not passed through parliament it threatened to “drive a knife deep into the flesh of marriage and family”.

It is important to note that disregarding evidence-based reasoning and argument typifies the Christian right’s tactics to justify their policy agendas. Instead of drawing upon scripture to support their arguments on policy issues, the Christian right, in an effort to broaden their appeal, camouflage their religiously based opposition in social science. However, research evidence is often used deceptively. For example, on the ABC’s Q&A program in February 2016, ACL’s Managing Director, Lyle Shelton, argued that the Safe Schools program encouraged appearance modification for transgender people such as penis tucking for boys and chest binding for girls. He cited a study, to support his contention that sex reassignment surgery resulted in higher suicide rates among the transgender population. The study, led by researcher Cecilia Dhejne, was conducted from 1973 to 2003, and tracked 324 sex-reassigned people in Sweden to measure their rates of morbidity, mortality and criminality after the surgery. Q&A’s The fact checking unit found

that the study did show higher rates of suicidal behaviour among its transgender participants, but concluded that sex-reassignment surgery was not necessarily a causal factor. In fact, the researchers wrote that the lives of transgender people may have been worse without having access to surgery (Kolves, 2016). This supports Smith and Marden's (2012, pg. 319) contention that the Christian right present social science in the same way as their faith - as absolute truth and immune to any fallibility. Citing dubious "scientific" information reflects the Christian right's bias and cognitive dissonance of their particular ideological viewpoints on issues such as marriage and gender. As Crabb (2009, pg. 275) argues, there a range of problems associated with basing policy positions on religious belief instead of a rational and reason-based assessment of the benefits they may incur. Firstly, it ignores the diversity of views in the community (religious and non-religious) and secondly, religious beliefs are difficult to challenge as the proponent believes in a "truth" that can only be accepted through the lens of their faith position. Consequently, this can hinder democratic debate as their viewpoints cannot be disproved or critiqued.

Overall, the Christian right in Australia, through strategic lobbying of federal parliamentarians, have successfully ensured the current civil definition of marriage has been maintained, despite the fact that only a minority of the population support maintaining the status quo. The amendments made to the *Marriage Act 1961* in 2004 have followed the demonisation of minority sexualities, which are considered to be "predatory pathologies" and "lifestyles" which will bring about the destruction of civilisation. The Christian right consider the nuclear family as virtuous, whilst other family structures (such as same-sex parented families) are considered dysfunctional and detrimental to society. According to Smith and Warden's analysis, the Christian right believe that the "weakening" of the institution of marriage to include same-sex couples is the cause of social breakdown, economic decline, moral deviance and, on a grander scale, a gentrifying population, the Global Financial Crisis and the rise of neopaganisms⁴ such as global warming (Smith & Marden, 2012, pg. 325).

⁴ Neopaganism refers to a modern religious movement, which draws upon rituals and beliefs from pre-Christian Europe and North America.

Despite the fact that the right to practice such a dogmatic faith is protected in the Australian constitution, it should not translate into the right to inform public policy. Overall Smith and Marden (2012) argue that the politics of the Christian Right in Australia, is incompatible with the values that underpin a democratic political culture.

3.7 Identifying the Scholarly Gap

Currently, there is limited scholarly research conducted on the religious right's influence on LGBTI policy in Australia within a public policy framework. Rather, there is a heavy focus on the religious right's influence on sex education, special religious education in schools, abortion and voluntary euthanasia in Australia. This research project will attempt to analyse in more detail how the religious right in Australia utilise the notions of pollution, sacredness and profanity to wield social and political power and influence in the same-sex marriage debate. In addition, an analysis of the link between an objectivist epistemological order and dominant forms of masculinity will also be relevant. In order to effectively analyse and describe the religious right's strategies to deny agenda access in relation to same-sex marriage debate in Australia, it is important to understand the symbolic classification systems used to suit their world view and their relationships with cultural values, dominant social relationships and epistemological debates.

CHAPTER FOUR: OPPONENTS IN THE AGENDA CONFLICT: THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT

According to Maddox (2014) there has been a rise in conservative Christian political lobbying and mobilisation since the Howard government came into office in 1996.

Parachurch organisations such (the most influential among them being the Australian Christian Lobby) promote neoliberal economic positions and the patriarchal, heterosexual family structure paradigm. These organisations are analysed under the broad term religious right or Christian right.

4.1 The Australian Christian Lobby

The Australian Christian Lobby was established in Canberra in 1995 as a registered company and was founded on the model of the Christian Coalition of America. It was founded by Queensland businessman and Christian Outreach Centre (COC) megachurch lay leader John Gagliardi, and retired baptist minister, turned lobbyist, John McNicoll (Hey, 2010). According to its website, the ACL describes itself as “non-party partisan” and a “grassroots movement of over 80,000 people seeking to bring a Christian influence to politics” (ACL). It has previously boasted credibility with church leaders, politician and the media and also states that it “does not seek to be the peak political voice for the church, but to facilitate a professional engagement of church with the state which allows for the voice of the church and individual Christians to be effective in the public square” (Maddox, 2014, pg. 132). The group changed its name from the Australian Christian Coalition to the Australian Christian Lobby in 2001 in order to distance itself from the American model, as the managing director at the time, Jim Wallace, was uncomfortable with the idea that it did not fully engage with both sides of the political divide. Some critics of the lobby, including former staff, have revealed that the absence of any mechanism for churches or individual Christians to contribute to the ACL’s policy

positions means that the ACL's views are those of the managing director and the board (Crittenden, 2008). Despite this, the ACL's leaders insist that their organisation speaks on behalf of "the church" and "the Christian constituency". Furthermore, the ACL claims it is "non-denominational". Maddox (2014, pg. 134) observes that this term may reassure politicians and journalists, however the term "contains sufficient slippage to convey a much more specific connotation to some Christian insiders". In 2013, Lyle Shelton who was a former Pentecostal youth pastor, city councillor, and candidate for rural conservative National party, replaced Jim Wallace as Managing Director.

The ACL uses face-to-face lobbying, media releases, a social media presence via Facebook and twitter. Overall, this had led to achievements such as: persuading an atheist Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, who was in a non-traditional relationship, to maintain her opposition to same-sex marriage; doubling investment in the National School Chaplaincy program, which involved evangelical chaplains in public schools; and preventing the removal of religious exemptions from anti-discrimination law, which permits religious organisations to discriminate against clients or employees based on their religion, LGBTI status, marital status. According to Maddox (2014, pg. 132), the ACL has managed to maintain its influential position in the political sphere due to the lobby successfully presenting itself as "politically, theologically and culturally middle-of-the-road". This strategy of agenda denial has proven to be successful in delaying and preventing the legislation of same-sex marriage in Australia. However, she argues that some of the ACL's positions embody the definition of right-wing extremism, and the organisation only represents only a minority of Christians. Maddox (2014, pg. 132) contends that the ACL fundamentally argues "anti-egalitarian stances" with close ties to a strand of anti-

democratic, neo-pentecostal thought that she denotes “theocracy by plutocracy”.⁵

Commentators such as Chrys Stevenson have accused the ACL of subscribing to the Christian-supremacist theology of dominionism (Stevenson, 2011). As Sara Diamond points out, this political and religious theology holds “that Christians alone are Biblically mandated to occupy all secular institutions until Christ returns” (Diamond, 1995, pg. 246). It is also an exercise in establishing a “disproportionate effect on the culture” (Yates, 2017).

According to its annual report in 2011, the year had been “almost entirely dominated by the issue of same-sex marriage” (Wallace, 2010), with 2012 similarly “a year sadly dominated by the very selfish agenda of same-sex activists to redefine marriage” (Wallace, 2012).

Many ACL personnel have connections with right-wing parties. The founder, John Gagliardi, worked as an advisor to John Gorton (Liberal Prime Minister from 1968-1971). ACL chairman Tony McLellan was the director of the Menzies Research Institute, the Liberal party’s public policy think tank, which former Prime Minister John Howard described in 2006 as “an organisation with a unique place in the Liberal family” (Howard, 2006). The current Managing Director Lyle Shelton was a candidate for the Liberal party’s conservative Coalition partner, the National party in the Queensland state election of 2006. In addition, the ACL’s Queensland Director Wendy Francis stood as the lead Queensland Senate candidate for the conservative political party family first in the 2010 federal election. Maddox (2014) argues that the ACL’s claims to be a centrist and non-partisan lobby group are “tenuous” as they consistently promoting right-wing policy positions. The ACL embodies a “free-market economic orientation” due to its business-heavy board, business-orientated training, offering assistance to business people with political

⁵ Maddox is referring to the ACL’s co-founder and its first president, John Gagliardi’s book *The Marketplace: Our Mission*, in which Gagliardi states that the need for Christians working in business (or “kings”) to take over “spheres” of government, such as business, politics, media, arts and entertainment, church, family, and education. This is known as the “Seven Mountains strategy”. Instead of the use of violence to implement this strategy, Gagliardi mentions the expectation of authority being bestowed via a “transfer of wealth”; which Maddox dubs “theocracy via plutocracy”.

connections to the lobby (Maddox, 2014, pg. 140). Also, the ACL's persistent focus on "the moral order of behavioural norms" in relation to issues surrounding gender is particularly evident through their strident opposition to same-sex marriage. It is important to note that political scientists designate social and political movements as either left-wing or right-wing based upon criteria which determine whether they advocate for fundamental human equality (left) or inequality (right). ACL's campaigns against same-sex adoption, same-sex marriage, surrogate parenting assume that heterosexuals are superior to gay people as parents, emphasising that children need to be raised by their biological parents. This ideological position will be crucial in understanding the ACL's use of cultural strategies inherent in the agenda denial framework, in the same-sex marriage debate. In addition, the billboard censorship campaigns in which the ACL express their strong opposition to the public depiction of homosexual couples embracing, reflects a deeper held belief that heterosexual couples and their relationships are superior to homosexual ones and that public displays of affection between same-sex couples are considered explicit or deviant. This was made evident when the ACL Queensland director who launched billboard campaign argued that her objection to the same-sex couple advertisement depicted "some sort of act of foreplay" and was based on the "sexual nature of the ads" and not because the subjects were both male. Despite these criticisms, the billboard showed two fully clothed men, one wearing an engagement ring, embracing in a pose similar to publications from ACL affiliated organisations depicting heterosexual couples promoting heterosexual marriage.

The ACL has been labeled "extremist" in relation to their views on sexuality. On the other hand, the former Managing Director Jim Wallace has previously called criticism of the ACL as "extreme" and similar claims on the organisation as "hate speech" (ACL, 2012). Maddox (2014) argues that denying being extremist whilst labelling critics as extreme is a common tactic used by the ACL in successfully presenting themselves as "culturally

middle-of-the-road". Furthermore, in her analysis of the American Christian right, Sara Diamond criticises progressive commentators for flippantly using terms such as "extreme" or "radical" as "pejorative terms", as they "reveal their originators' sympathy for the political status quo but elucidate little else" (Diamond, 1995, pg. 5). Instead of using pejorative terms to describe the political right, political scientists use technical definitions. These definitions fall into two groups. The first group argues people on the right believe human beings are fundamentally unequal, positioned in a social hierarchy. Centre "rightists" or "conservatives" believe this position is based on hard work and discipline. On the other hand, the "extreme" or "far" right argue that membership to the elite group is dependent upon an individual's innate qualities such as being born into a particular family or class or holding certain "genetic traits" (Woshinsky, 2008, pg. 154–56). Maddox (2014, pg. 142) argues that the ACL's belief that marriage between a man and a woman is "set by biology" illustrates that heterosexuals' supposed superiority over homosexuals in parenting ability and as couples visible in the public sphere is "construed as natural". Wallace has also made the suggestion that homosexuals are physically weaker than heterosexuals in comments made at a forum at the University of Tasmania. He referred to "evidence" which apparently showed that "the homosexual community's own statistics for its health" showed "higher rates of drug-taking, of suicide," and that "the life of a male [was] reduced by up to 20 years," compared to their heterosexual counterparts. He suggested that these problems were intrinsic to "the homosexual lifestyle," and that "normalising the lifestyle by the attribution of marriage, for instance," would encourage people into it. He also expressed the view that smoking is healthier than the "homosexual lifestyle" arguing that the life expectancy for gay people was 10 years shorter than that of smokers, and that "we're going to owe smokers a big apology" for teaching kids at school about the adverse health effects of smoking (SMH, 2012). The dissemination of deceptive information is a common attack strategy used by opponents in the agenda conflict. Wallace's comments

were widely reported in the media, and Cobb and Ross (1997, pg. 33) argue that this increases its effectiveness as a “potent weapon” in denying proponents of same-sex marriage access to the agenda. Maddox (2014, pg. 142) believes that Wallace’s comments regarding gay people’s inherent weakness were slightly ambiguous in specifying a biological determinist view. She argues that the term “lifestyle choice” implies a choice (a conservative position, according to Woshinsky). However, Wallace further argued that even marrying one’s partner did not change the suicide rates or levels of excessive drug use, which implies something more intrinsic (an extreme position, according to Woshinsky). The following day, Wallace expressed a more unambiguous biologically determinist view, suggesting that the love shared between a gay couple is not equal to that shared between a heterosexual couple due to “the consequences of gay love, health consequences, are, you know, quite pronounced and disastrous” (Hawley, 2012).

Maddox (2014, pg. 147) argues ACL is not a mass movement. The right-wing positions on a range of issues only represent a small constituency. This is made evident by progressive church leaders distancing themselves from Wallace’s remarks, and also the presence of the Christians 4 Equality group which advocates for same-sex marriage. Despite the ACL’s claims that it represents a “Christian constituency” on “issues of concern to Christians,” reputable polling has found that more than half of Christians support same-sex marriage. Therefore, Maddox contends that the ACL only advocates for a minority of Christians. They have gained influence with state and federal political leaders despite a sharp decline in regular church attendance among Australians. Furthermore, Maddox (2014, pg. 147) also argues that the ACL’s strong influence has been assisted by journalists who are “untutored in religious subtleties”, and as a result treat the ACL as a peak Christian body. They gained further legitimacy from both major political parties, which accepted its online “Make it Count” forums as legitimate pre-election engagements. This

influence enjoyed by the ACL will be crucial in understanding their success in employing a range of strategies in the same-sex marriage debate, in order to win the agenda conflict. Its connections with conservative parties, business-like structure, neoliberal economic positions, and its hierarchical view of society structured on gender and sexuality, position it on the right of the political spectrum. Also, its belief of a fundamental inequality between heterosexuals and homosexuals, and opposition to public representation of gay couples is further evidence that it meets the criterion of a right-wing political movement. Its biological determinist view of sexuality also suggests that it leans to the “extreme” right according to technical definitions conveyed by Woshinsky.

4.2 Marriage Alliance

According to its website, Marriage Alliance "is an independent alliance bringing together individuals and organisations supporting a common cause. We exist to voice the opinion of the silent majority of Australians that respect same-sex attracted people, but do not want to change the current definition of marriage" (Marriage Alliance). Launched on 2 July 2015, Marriage Alliance also claims it is a “grassroots movement”, despite evidence indicating that it has direct links to the Australian Christian Lobby and that the organisation’s spokesperson, Sophie York and other key members have ties to the Liberal party.

Cornerstone Web Solutions is a North Sydney based company, which hosts content for websites owned by the Australian Christian Lobby. Cornerstone’s founder, Scott Matthew, is Facebook friends with a number of ACL staff, including Managing Director Lyle Shelton, Queensland State Director, Wendy Francis, former Managing Director Jim Wallace and former staffer, Martyn Iles. The company has bought more than 100 domains over the last several years, with the ACL owning “whatisthemarriageact.com” as well as “aclwatch”, which has been purchased in order to defend itself from people fact-checking

the organisation (Taylor, 2016c). Furthermore, the company Show the World has hosted services for Australian Marriage Forum, Marriage Alliance, a Greek Orthodox website against same-sex marriage, and the “You’re Teaching Our Children What?” website. According to Taylor (2016c), “the websites were hosted in the same IP address range owned by Cornerstone in Macquarie Telecom’s data centre in Sydney.” Marriage Alliance and Australian Marriage Forum began removing their services from Cornerstone when people were starting to investigate the links between the groups. After reports had surfaced revealing that Marriage Forum’s website was registered under Lyle Shelton’s name, the organisation moved its .org website to Amazon and changed the registrant to David van Gend. However, the .org.au site remains on Cornerstone’s servers.

Also, Marriage Alliance recently diverted responsibility for its services to a company with links to a largest US anti-gay group, National Organization for Marriage (NOM). Taylor (2016b) has observed that Marriage Alliance’s new website was created by a US communications and marketing agency called OPUSfidelis. It is a Catholic aligned organisation which ran NOM’s social media accounts since 2011, including Facebook and Twitter. Furthermore, OPUSfidelis has also worked on a same-sex marriage referendum in France in 2013, which marked the beginning of NOM’s desire to create a global organisation called the “International Organization for Marriage”. Its primary aim was to bring together anti-gay marriage groups across the globe in a conjoined effort to prevent same-sex marriage being legalised in other jurisdictions. As NOM President Brian Brown elucidates: “we’re working with everyone that we can that believes that marriage is the union of a man and a woman all around the world” (Feder, 2015). It is also important to note that in 2015, it was revealed that the man leading OPUSfidelis was the Executive Director of the International Organization for Marriage. Therefore, Marriage Alliance’s website is being hosted by a marketing organisation which is led by the CEO of NOM’s international arm to prevent same-sex marriage being implemented in countries outside of

the US (Taylor, 2016b). The extensive resources and personnel at Marriage Alliance's disposal, indicates that the organisation's strategies of agenda denial will be influential in the same-sex marriage debate.

In early 2016, Marriage Alliance was scrutinised for allegedly accessing Liberal Party members' emails to distribute anti-marriage equality material. Despite Marriage Alliance denying any wrongdoing, the issue was referred to the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner. The Commissioner subsequently decided not to pursue the complaint, arguing that Marriage Alliance was exempt from the Privacy Act due to the fact that they are classified as a small business with an annual turnover of \$3 million or less (Sainty, 2016). The organisation is also responsible for the controversial "rainbow noose ad" in their campaigning efforts against same-sex marriage. From an agenda denial framework perspective, this reveals that same-sex marriage is a sufficiently important enough issue for Marriage Alliance to employ strategies that threaten their legitimacy.

4.3 Australian Marriage Forum

Australian Marriage Forum (AMF) is an organisation based in Queensland that has been set up to "encourage Australians to discuss the issue of same-sex marriage freely, openly and respectfully" (AMF). It was founded by family doctor David van Gend who has been a prominent advocate against same-sex marriage for over a decade. In a 1997 letter published in The Australian newspaper, later read out in Parliament, van Gend was quoted as saying homosexuality was "a disorder" suggesting that "lesbians should be treated with kindness and pity for their emotional disorder, but disorder should be named for what it is" (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997). Framing gay people in these terms delegitimises their calls for legal equality in the form of same-sex marriage. Thus, it is an effective strategy of agenda denial. The group averages donations of approximately \$20 000 per year. However, it claims \$40 000 was spent on advertising in 2015. van Gend has also

repeatedly claimed that being gay can be cured and has referred to being same-sex attracted as “a nightmare” (van Gend, 2004a). AMF has loose ties to the ACL through older groups such as the Family Council of Queensland (Taylor, 2016a).

4.4 Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

The Australian Catholics Bishops Conference (ACBC) is a permanent collegial assembly of the Catholic Bishops around Australia. The conference has a president and a vice-president, a permanent committee, various bishops commissions and a general secretariat. The commissions focus on a range of subjects including canon law, justice, ecology and development and pastoral life. The ACBC has proven to be a significant lobby group in the agenda conflict surrounding the issue of same-sex marriage. The conference produced a booklet entitled “Don’t mess with Marriage”, which made the case for maintaining the current definition of marriage. The distribution of the booklet in Tasmanian Catholic schools led to the Archbishop of Hobart Julian Porteous being referred to the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commission, which will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

4.5 FamilyVoice Australia

FamilyVoice Australia is a conservative Christian organisation based in Adelaide. It was founded in 1973 as Festival of Light Australia in order to campaign against people who were opposed to censorship. In 2008, its named changed to FamilyVoice Australia with a renewed focus on upholding Christian values and the family. This included the permanence of marriage, the sanctity of human life, the primacy of parenthood and limited government intervention. According to its website, FamilyVoice also “publishes carefully researched information on current issues affecting the family and the community” (FamilyVoice Australia). Taylor (2016a) notes that the group is run by husband and wife, David and Roslyn Phillips. In 2012, David Phillips suggested changing the

Marriage Act would lead to societal collapse: “governments have a responsibility to ensure Australia does not become a basket case as Greece has become. For that reason, governments need to commend, privilege and protect the institution of marriage as we know it.” Its financial documents reveal that the organisation is a large charity, receiving \$1.1 million in donations in 2015 (Taylor, 2016a). Also, it has admitted receiving financial support from Frank Seeley, who is the founder of Australian air-conditioning manufacturing company Seeley. He is on the FamilyVoice South Australia Advisory Board and has claimed that “anything that erodes the family will undermine the broad spectrum of business” (Taylor, 2016a). The large amount of donations and financial support that FamilyVoice receives, indicates that they have the resource potential to employ a range of medium-cost strategies in the same-sex marriage debate.

FamilyVoice argues that marriage is God-ordained and is the voluntary union of one man and one woman only. They also suggest that marriage is the place for a sexual union given by God, and for the birth and nurture of children (FamilyVoice Australia).

4.6 Australian Family Association

The Australian Family Association is a conservative political organisation with the stated aim of providing “a forum and a vehicle for those individuals and organisations in the community concerned with the strengthening and support of the family” (Australian Family Association). It was founded in 1980, and is a not-for-profit, voluntary, and non-partisan organisation. The Association strongly believes in marriage as it is currently defined in the *Marriage Act 1961*. It holds “National Marriage Day” celebrations every year, on the same day John Howard passed amendments to the *Marriage Act 1961* in 2004 to ban same-sex couples from marrying. The head of organisation, Terri Kelleher is a critic of the Safe Schools program, arguing that it “normalises homosexuality” (Taylor, 2016a). The “National Marriage Day” celebrations embodies some crucial elements in an agenda denial

framework. It denies that the issue of same-sex marriage holds any social significance and refuses to acknowledge the initiating group advocating for change.

4.7 Conservative Wing of the Liberal/National Party

The influence of the religious right on the policy outcomes of the Safe Schools Coalition Programme, is useful in determining influential members of the religious right in the current Coalition government. Prominent Catholic members of the religious right include: Kevin Andrews who was the former Defence Minister in the Abbott Government; the Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce and current Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources; Mathias Cormann, the Minister for Finance; LNP Senator Matt Canavan, who was elevated into Cabinet as Minister for Resources and Northern Australia; Assistant Minister for Social Services and Multicultural Affairs, Zed Seselja; the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection Peter Dutton; and finally, the former Prime Minister Tony Abbott, who has consistently been a vocal opponent of same-sex marriage. Both Peter Dutton and Tony Abbott were instrumental in formulating the plebiscite on same-sex marriage.

Among the non-Catholics there is far-right wing backbencher Eric Abetz, who is aligned with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, which use the mission statement “pray, multiply, train and align”; Scott Morrison, who attends Shirelive Church, which is aligned with the Pentecostal Assemblies of God and is a socially conservative church regarding issues of sexuality and marriage; and finally, Nationals MP George Christensen, who has been a supporter of far-right fascist movements such as Reclaim Australia. Other members of the conservative wing include: Andrew Hastie, Ian Goodenough, Senator Jonathon Duniam, Scott Buchholz, Rick Wilson, Nicolle Flint, Tony Pason, Assistant Minister to the Treasurer Michael Sukkar, and finally, Angus Taylor. These

list of politicians meet regularly to discuss how to implement conservative policies and principles.

CHAPTER FIVE: LOW-COST STRATEGIES

5.1 Denial that policy problem exists or has any social significance

One of the most common tactics employed by Christian right groups was to claim that LGBTI couples already enjoy full legal equality under the law. In an opinion piece for the Herald Sun, Managing Director of the Australian Christian Lobby Lyle Shelton stated that: “the little-known reality is that since 2008 same-sex couples have enjoyed full equality under the law. There is no discrimination and the overwhelming majority of Australians bear no ill will in their hearts towards their gay friends” (Shelton, 2016g). Shelton was referring to the 85 Commonwealth laws that were amended in order to eliminate discrimination against same-sex couples and their children. The reforms came in two pieces of legislation, *Same-Sex Relationships (Equal Treatment in Commonwealth Laws-General Law Reform) Act 2008* and the *Same-Sex Relationships (Equal Treatment in Commonwealth Laws-Superannuation) Act 2008*. Discrimination in law covered a range of areas including: taxation, superannuation, health, social security, aged care and child support, immigration, citizenship and veterans affairs. Shelton contends that groups such as the ACL supported these reforms and also, the implementation of state-based civil partnerships (Shelton, 2016, as cited in Stark, 2016a). In similar comments, David van Gend from Australian Marriage Forum in an interview with the Sydney Morning Herald argued that same-sex couples had the same legal rights as de-facto couples “with no discrimination whatsoever” (van Gend, 2016, as cited in Stark, 2016b). Shelton and van Gend’s comments were an effective way to reassure the public that their opposition to same-sex marriage were not based on feelings of homophobia or prejudice towards gay couples. Fundamentally, it emphasised their denial in recognising that refusing same-sex couples the right to marry was not a policy problem worth considering.

In a press release following the July 2016 federal election, Lyle Shelton expressed agreement with the Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce that same-sex marriage was a low order issue with voters: "for the past two elections Labor has fronted the people with a promise to legislate a new definition of marriage within 100 days. For the past two elections, Labor has recorded two of its worst primary votes in its history" (Shelton, 2016d). Shelton also stated that same-sex marriage was "radical social policy" that did not win votes at the federal election.

5.2 Refusing to acknowledge initiating group advocating for change

In response to questions on same-sex marriage in May 2016, David van Gend suggested that "homosexuality is clearly not normal in a statistical sense, since only 1.2% of the Australian population identify as homosexual while 97.5% identify as heterosexual." Based on this view, van Gend argued that "we should not form public policy on marriage or sex-education based on the false view that homosexuality is 'normal'" (van Gend, 2016, as cited in Stark, 2016b). Additionally, in a speech given to an ACL conference in Brisbane in May 2015, van Gend stated that despite only 1% of all couples being same-sex couples, even fewer want to get married. He cited a Dutch study which found that one in five Dutch same-sex couples have got married, 11 years after same-sex marriage was legalised. Also, van Gend believes two thirds of teens who identify as gay will no longer identify as gay months or years into the future, noting that it was a "passing stage of confusion for most teens who say they are gay" (van Gend, 2016a). Therefore, van Gend argued that changing the institution of marriage was an "excessive" approach in order to make young people feel comfortable about themselves and their identity when most of them will no longer identify as gay in the future.

CHAPTER SIX: MEDIUM-COST STRATEGIES

6.1 Attack: Discredit proponents of same-sex marriage

6.11 Link with unpopular groups

On 20 September 2016 at a secret meeting of groups opposed to same-sex marriage in the Sydney CBD, Marriage Alliance spokesperson Sophie York labeled same-sex marriage supporters a “pagan caliphate” (Taylor, 2016b). This reinforces Smith and Warden’s (2012, pg. 325) analysis, which argues that Christian conservatives believe that the “weakening” of the institution of marriage will lead to the rise of neopaganism. The term “caliphate” is evidently a reference to the Salafi jihadist group ISIS and their aim to install a worldwide Islamic caliphate. York also abbreviated the term “pagan caliphate” to PC, an obvious reference to the often abbreviated term political correctness. This paired with the use of the term caliphate illustrates the Christian right’s belief that same-sex marriage is an exercise in political correctness, warning it will infringe on their rights to freedom of religion and freedom of expression, if it is implemented. This is a deliberate attempt to instigate fear in the general public.

The pejorative terms “rainbow political agenda” and “rainbow lobby” were also extensively used by members of the Christian right during the debate surrounding a plebiscite. When asked by BuzzFeed news to explain the meaning of the “rainbow agenda”, Lyle Shelton from the ACL suggested that it involved support for the Safe Schools program arguing that it teaches young kids “contested gender theory”, liberalising surrogacy laws so two men can have children, and using anti-discrimination law to restrict the free speech of those supporting the traditional definition of marriage. Similarly, Sophie York from Marriage Alliance believed the “rainbow agenda” encompassed changing sex and gender education in schools, and also restricting free speech. Australian Marriage Forum’s David van Gend argued that the “rainbow agenda” was “completing a revolution” in advocating

for same-sex marriage. He argued that same-sex marriage advocates were trying to capture the moral and legal high ground associated with marriage, which would then involve imposing the Safe Schools program on children, allowing “cross-dressing” males to enter the girls bathroom, and bankrupting religious bakers who refused to offer their services to a gay couple celebrating a wedding. van Gend also believed that the “rainbow agenda” involved prosecuting religious leaders for expressing official church teachings regarding marriage, removing the terms “mother” and “father” from birth certificates, and changing “husband and wife” into “Partner A&B” (Sainty, 2016). In similar comments, Lyle Shelton stated that Labor leader Bill Shorten had made the 2016 deferral election a “rainbow election”, where Australians had a choice to vote for gender fluidity being taught in schools and litigation against opponents of same-sex marriage (Shelton, 2016b).

The term “gay agenda” has been historically used by the Christian right and has also been used in the same-sex marriage debate. The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) describes the term as a “rhetorical invention of anti-gay extremists seeking to create a climate of fear by portraying the pursuit of civil rights for LGBT people as sinister” (GLAAD).

Heterosexual bias in language such as pathologising homosexuality is also a tactic used by the religious right. Using the term “homosexual” to describe gay men is a deliberate attempt by opponents of same-sex marriage to perpetuate negative stereotypes because of its historical associations with pathology, psychological abnormality and criminal behaviour (American Psychological Association, 1991).

The religious right’s previous attempts to discredit the Safe Schools program as Marxist ideology, came after comments made by co-founder of Safe Schools Roz Ward in a speech at a Marxism conference in 2015, were revealed. Ward was quoted as saying: “to smooth the operation of capitalism the ruling class has benefited ... from oppressing our bodies, our relationships, sexuality and gender identities alongside sexism,

homophobia and transphobia” (Ward, 2016). Furthermore, she provided a Marxist analysis of how the capitalist class has imposed conventional notions of sex, marriage and family in order to “to break the spirits of ordinary people” (Ward, 2016). Marxist doctrine states that the capitalist class uses institutions of power in society such as the government, the courts, and the church to subjugate and “economically exploit the working class” (Byrne, 2016). In her speech, Ward suggested that through this exploitative process capitalism prevents the sexual liberation of LGBTI people. Thus, it is only when LGBTI are free from these capitalist imposed moral and cultural norms, that they can be truly liberated.

Following these events in late 2015, the Christian right, most notably conservative politicians George Christensen and Cory Bernardi, continued to discredit proponents of same-sex marriage, by labelling them Marxists. It is interesting to note that Karl Marx said nothing publicly about homosexuality, despite his fellow Communist philosopher Friedrich Engels being openly hostile to gay people and communist dictator Stalin re-criminalising homosexuality, calling it a disease (Bradley, 2016). The Christian right linking homosexuality with communism has historical roots. The US Senator Joe McCarthy was well known for his anti-Communist views in the 1950s. The “lavender scare”, which involved gay people being fired from their government jobs in the 1950s, was instigated by McCarthy. These events paralleled with what was known as the “red scare”, which involved the mass hysteria over the perceived threat posed by Communists with McCarthy infamously proclaiming to the media: “if you want to be against McCarthy, boys, you've got to be either a Communist or a cocksucker” (Morone, 2004, pg. 393). McCarthy consistently conflated homosexuality with communism, labelling them equivalent “threats to the American way of life”. Gay people were deemed deviant and thus a security threat, thus, were not allowed to work in the federal government from 1953 up until 1995. This is relevant to the same-sex marriage debate, as Marxism is being used as a “totem of evil” in order to discredit proponents of same-sex marriage, by attaching one’s personal identity to

an ideology deemed to be evil. Bradley (2016) argues that conservatives such as Christensen and Bernardi using the “irrelevant ideology of Marxism”, reveals they are still feeling the “existential fears” that dominated much of the 1950s. He also states the “quasi-intellectual references” of Marxism used by the likes of Christensen and Bernardi, are simply a facade. They are simply defending orthodoxy, or in other words the worldview that “normality” is a white, Christian, patriarchal and heterosexual identity. As a result, ideologies or belief systems which are in conflict with this notion are labelled as heretical (Bradley, 2016).

Similarly, the term “cultural Marxism” to describe efforts to implement same-sex marriage, has also been used by Christian right individuals, such as David van Gend (2016b), to discredit proponents. According to Wilson (2015), “the fairytale of cultural Marxism provided a post-communist adversary located specifically in the cultural realm – academics, Hollywood, journalists, civil rights activists and feminists.” When socialism failed to materialise outside the Soviet Union, Marxist thinkers Antonio Gramsci and Georg Lukacs argued that culture and religion (“the opium of the people”) prevented the revolt of the proletariat (working people). They believed that Marxists should then initiate their “long march through the institutions”, such as universities, schools, government bureaucracies and the media, in order to change cultural values from above. Late thinkers of the Frankfurt School believed that capitalism not only oppressed workers in an economic sense, but also through sexual repression and other social conventions. In other words, capitalism as an economic system was not the only problem but the collection of Western traditional values in the form of the family, gender hierarchies, and “normal” expressions of sexuality. Wilson (2016) notes, that the conspiracy theory suggests that after the mostly Jewish members of the Frankfurt School in Germany were forced by the Nazis to relocate to America, the “cultural Marxists” used psychological manipulation techniques to create upheaval in the West. Their aim was to enforce ideas such as feminism, atheism,

multiculturalism and gay rights, in order to abolish traditional Christian values and free enterprise. He argues that the term “cultural Marxism” has been used by conservatives ever since, to portray themselves as victims: “it allows those smarting from a loss of privilege to be offered the shroud of victimhood, by pointing to a shadowy, omnipresent, quasi-foreign elite who are attempting to destroy all that is good in the world”. Blackford (2015) also argues that the term “cultural Marxism” is used to connote left-wing cultural criticism and left-wing cultural authoritarianism. This was made evident when David van Gend at his book launch speech in Canberra, stated that in relation to same-sex marriage, “authoritarianism and marriage are bedfellows” (van Gend, 2016a).

Finally, in a blog post on 1 June 2016, the ACL’s Lyle Shelton likened the threat of Nazism to growing support for same-sex marriage. Shelton argued that “the cowardice and weakness of Australia’s ‘gatekeepers’ is causing unthinkable things to happen, just as unthinkable things happened in Germany in the 1930s” (Shelton, 2016c). In citing German expatriate, Fritz Stern, Shelton refers to society’s guardians of particular moral and cultural standards, when referring to the term “gatekeepers”. Shelton argues, that just as the “gatekeepers”, such as the Catholic Church, were complicit to the rise of Hitler and Nazism, Australia’s “gatekeepers” are complicit to the rise of the “rainbow political agenda”, referring to a range of issues including same-sex marriage. Comparing same-sex marriage to the threat of Nazism was an effective strategy to cast proponents of the reform as “extreme” and to create an atmosphere of fear, mistrust and doubt. Maddox (2005, pg. 147) argues that branding one’s opponents and their positions as extreme, effectively places your own position in the “moderate centre”. Therefore, this strategy provides a useful defence against allegations of homophobia and prejudice in the overall agenda conflict.

6.12 Question ethics, motives, behaviour of leaders

Prominent activists of same-sex marriage have also been on the receiving end of sustained attacks by members of the Christian right. In an opinion piece for the Daily Telegraph in August 2016, Lyle Shelton criticised the founder of Safe Schools Roz Ward, for arguing that “same-sex marriage is about sending a message that ‘transphobia’ and ‘homophobia’ is unacceptable” (Shelton, 2016e). Shelton suggested that this would lead to compulsory funding for Safe Schools gender theory, which would teach Year 1 Children “that their mum really should be allowed to be a bloke” and “[their] daddy might actually be a lady who needs surgery.”

Also, according to an Australian Marriage Forum pamphlet, titled “It’s Not Marriage”, prominent LGBTI activist and writer Dennis Altman did not want to “join” marriage but “take it and remake it in [his] own sexually radical image” (Australian Marriage Forum). This was in response to previous comments made by Altman, in which he suggested that monogamous gay relationships were unlikely to exist in modern society.

The most publicised attack on same-sex marriage proponents involved questioning the ethics, motives and behaviour of LGBTI activist Rodney Croome and federal Greens candidate and transgender activist, Martine Delaney. In early June 2015, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference distributed a 18-page booklet titled “Don’t mess with marriage.” It detailed the Catholic Church’s position on the same-sex marriage debate, and was distributed to Catholic schools around Australia. A spokesperson for the ACBC stated that the booklet was a “guidance document” for “all Australians” (Burke, 2015). The “pastoral letter” described same-sex marriage as a “serious injustice” and refuted the claim that excluding same-sex couples from the institution of marriage was tantamount to discrimination (ACBC, 2015, pg. 5). Martine Delaney lodged a complaint to the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commission, arguing that the contents of the booklet could cause “immeasurable harm” (The Guardian, 2015). Croome also urged “everyone who [found] it

offensive and inappropriate, including teachers, parents and students, to complain to the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, Robin Banks” (Shanahan, 2016). Delaney was referring to the booklet’s claims that “‘messaging with marriage’... is also ‘messaging with kids’” and the comparison of same-sex relationships to friendships (ACBC, 2015, pg. 7, 11). Tasmanian Archbishop Julian Porteous, agreed to enter conciliation with Delaney in late 2015. Delaney insisted that the ACBC clarified the statements made in the booklet were ones based on theological doctrine, rather than scientific fact. This request was denied twice by Porteous. In May 2016, Delaney eventually decided not to pursue the matter, arguing that the process prevented her from speaking about the issue while the church could continue distributing the booklet (ABC News, 2016). Despite this, the Christian right accused same-sex marriage advocates, including Croome and Delaney, of impinging on their freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Porteous argued that it represented “the rise of a new intolerance against Christianity in Australian society and more generally a threat to freedom of speech” (Porteous, 2016). In addition, Lyle Shelton stated that it was a “travesty of justice” for the archbishop to be brought before the Commission, and that state-based human rights commissions were being “weaponised” to silence opponents of same-sex marriage (Shelton, 2016a).

At his book launch speech, David van Gend stated that if Labor leader Bill Shorten voted against the plebiscite legislation in the Parliament, it would be an “embarrassingly childish approach”. Also, in response to comments made by Shorten, in which he argued that young LGBTI people would be at risk if a national debate proceeded, van Gend labelled Shorten “unstatesman-like” (van Gend, 2016a).

Finally, in a blog post on the ACL’s website, Wendy Francis from the ACL stated that adults who attended the Sydney Lesbian and Gay Mardi Gras were celebrating “questionable values of sexual anarchy” and “gender denialism” (Francis, 2016).

6.13 Use deception: dissemination of false information

One of the most common strategies used by the Christian right, in order to win the agenda conflict against same-sex marriage proponents, is the dissemination of false information, in an attempt to dispute the facts of the initiating group's arguments. In an opinion piece for the Daily Telegraph, Lyle Shelton insisted that since same-sex couples are "biologically incapable" of producing children, then the current ban on commercial surrogacy would be lifted if same-sex marriage was implemented (Shelton, 2016e). This is despite the fact that commercial and surrogacy laws are regulated at the state and territory level while the *Marriage Act 1961* is regulated at the federal level. Altruistic surrogacy is permitted in all states and territories in Australia, excluding the Northern Territory, whilst commercial surrogacy is prohibited for all couples.

David van Gend argued that he opposed same-sex marriage because it would deliberately deprive a child of their biological parents (van Gend, 2016a). He also claimed that marriage was "not a social invention to be cut to shape according to political fad", rather "it is a social recognition of timeless natural reality: male, female, offspring" (van Gend, 2016, as cited in Stark, 2016b). van Gend fails to realise that marriage laws and adoption laws are not legally interlocked. As of February 2017, same-sex couples are legally allowed to adopt children in every state and territory, except the Northern Territory. According to a report released by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in 2014, 11% of Australian gay men and 33% of lesbians already have children.

On January 28, 2016, Tony Abbott gave a speech to a conservative American Christian organisation, called the Alliance Defending Freedom, which is opposed to same-sex marriage. He stated that marriage was defined as "one man and one woman open to children until just a very few years ago [and] has always and everywhere been considered the essence of marriage..." (Abbott, 2016). However, Stephanie Coontz, a professor of history and family studies at Evergreen State College in the US, told the ABC's fact check

unit that polygamous marriage was the most “culturally preferred” throughout the social history of marriage (ABC News, 2016).

At the launch of David van Gend’s book, Eric Abetz claimed that being gay is a choice that one can change. He asked the audience present: “ever notice how when some people go from the heterosexual to homosexual lifestyle they are able to be celebrated and honoured for their honesty and courage? They’ve come out. Ever thought why there is no celebration for those that decide to go from the homosexual to heterosexual lifestyle?” (Abetz, 2016). In his book “Gay, Straight, and the Reason Why: The Science of Sexual Orientation”, Neuroscientist Simon LeVay summarises the extensive amount of scientific evidence relating to sexual orientation. He concludes that far from being a choice, a person’s sexual orientation is primarily a result of the interaction between genes, sex hormones, and the cells of the developing brain and body (LeVay, 2016). Sara Diamond (1994, pg. 323) points out: “by believing that homosexuality is a wilfully *chosen* “lifestyle”, Christian moralists can more righteously *choose* to deny civil rights to the openly gay.”

Also, in an online post, Australian Family Association National President Paul Monagle, argued that the Association’s opposition to same-sex marriage was based on their belief that social science supports the proposition that biological parents are best suited to raise children (Monagle, 2015). A meta-analysis of scientific research, conducted by the respected Australian Psychological Society in 2007, refutes this claim. It found that “...parenting practices and children’s outcomes in families parented by lesbian and gay parents are likely to be at least as favourable as those in families of heterosexual parents, despite the reality that considerable legal discrimination and inequity remain significant challenges for these families” (APA, 2007, pg. 4).

In a media release published on September 1 2016, Wendy Francis from the ACL claimed that four year olds transitioning to another gender was a “package deal” with

“gender-neutral marriage” (Francis, 2016). This is despite clinical guidelines, which state that treatment of a four year old suspected of having gender dysphoria, cannot undergo treatment that is irreversible. Furthermore, no child can access medical treatment that is irreversible until they are 15 years old and only when a multidisciplinary team of doctors and psychologists recommend treatment, alongside the approval of the family court (Kelly, 2016).

6.2 Attack: discredit the issue of same-sex marriage

6.21 State issue is not of great public concern

In November 2016, Lyle Shelton claimed that the majority of Australians did not rate same-sex marriage as an important issue (Shelton, 2016g). He also referred to GetUp!’s 2015 Vision Survey, which found that the organisation’s supporters rated same-sex marriage number 16 on their list of most important policy issues. This was an effective strategy of agenda denial, due to GetUp!’s members known for advocating progressive policies.

6.22 Instigate fear within the general public

In August 2015, Marriage Alliance aired a commercial on Australian television depicting same-sex marriage as an ominous iceberg, and Australian society as a titanic-like ship heading towards it. The commercial warned that changing the meaning of marriage had “unintended consequences”, and claimed that “same-sex is not as simple as you think”. The ambiguity associated with these claims was an effective strategy in raising concern, and instigating fear within the general public.

6.23 Detrimental impact to society (people will be harmed)

The Christian right effectively used this strategy in order to instigate fear within the general public. For example, at the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee inquiry into the plebiscite in September 2015, the Victorian President of the Australian Family Association Terri Kelleher, argued that changing the definition of marriage would impinge on the freedom of speech of those who maintained their support for the traditional definition of marriage (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015, pg. 15). He also claimed that students at Burwood High School in Sydney, were “bullied” and “vilified” for not wanting to participate in Wear it Purple Day,⁶ and supporting the current definition of marriage. He also argued that supporters of marriage being between a man and a woman were being “viciously attacked” for expressing their view. These comments effectively presented opponents of same-sex marriage as victims who need protecting. Croome (2011) argues that claiming victim status is a politically convenient tactic, which aims to substitute addressing the issue at hand (same-sex marriage) and divert attention away from their arguments.

Lyle Shelton also suggested that same-sex marriage laws would weaponise state-based anti-discrimination law and state human rights tribunals, asking readers “is this the Australia we want?” (Shelton 2016g). In similar comments, David van Gend insisted that if same-sex marriage became law then LGBTI activists would “use the big stick of anti-discrimination law” to normalise homosexual behaviour in schools and silence conscientious dissenters in the churches (van Gend, 2016, as cited in Stark, 2016b). He further argued that same-sex marriage was “about sexual radicals getting the legal clout to push their values down society's throat” (van Gend, 2016, as cited in Stark, 2016b).

Capitalising on their success to abolish the controversial Safe School program's federal funding in March 2016, the Christian right has invoked the language of human

⁶ Wear it Purple Day is an annual day in support of fostering supportive, safe and accepting environments for young LGBTI people.

rights course, and more specifically, the human rights of the child. This strategy is effective in their effort to convey the detrimental impacts of same-sex marriage on the rest of society. van Gend (2016, as cited in Stark, 2016b) argued that if parents voted for same-sex marriage in the event of a compulsory plebiscite, then they would be voting for Safe Schools “on steroids” and “agreeing to relinquish control of their child's moral education to sexual radicals.” Lyle Shelton also maintained that Safe Schools is same-sex marriage’s “fellow

traveller” (Shelton, 2016f). In their newspaper advertisement, the Australian Marriage Forum claimed that the Safe Schools program was “radicalising” kids and usurped parental authority, and is the main objective of the “homosexual revolution”. In similar comments, Monagle from the Australian Family Association stated that: “once you separate marriage from its biological foundation, you can define it as anything you want and the right of children to know their natural parents will be trampled” (Monagle, 2016).

The Australian Christian Lobby also warned that federal Labor’s plan to install a “discrimination commissioner for gay and gender fluid ideology” would only “serve to escalate vexatious, farcical and divisive cases that run against Tasmanian Archbishop of Hobart Julian Porteous” (Shelton, 2016b).

In response to Roz Ward advocating for genderless bathrooms in Victorian schools, the Victorian Director of the ACL Dan Flynn argued that: “if you take gender out of marriage you take gender out of sex education and you take gender out of school toilets” (Flynn, 2016).

6.24 Negative spillover (future generations will be disadvantaged)

One of the most controversial comments in the same-sex marriage debate, involved Lyle Shelton linking children of same-sex couples to the Indigenous Stolen Generation:

“same-sex marriage requires breaking the primal bond between a mother and her baby.

That is just a fact. Stolen Indigenous children were regrettably removed from their mothers

and fathers and on the whole placed in loving families” (Shelton, 2016, as cited in Stark, 2016a). In addition, an Australian Marriage Forum flyer claimed: “we are sacrificing our children to a rainbow ideology that future generations will surely condemn us for and wonder how we let it happen.”

6.3 Medium-cost strategies: symbolic placation

6.31 Create a commission to study problem

On 20 August 2015, the Senate referred the issue of conducting a popular vote on the issue of same-sex marriage to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee. The terms of reference included *Marriage Equality Plebiscite Bill 2015*, which was currently before the Senate at the time, and whether holding a public vote was an appropriate method to address matters of equality and human rights. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). The committee recommended that “a bill to amend the definition of marriage in the *Marriage Act 1961* to allow for the marriage between two people regardless of their sex is introduced into the Parliament as a matter of urgency, with all parliamentarians being allowed a conscience vote.” However, the Deputy Chair, Senator Ian MacDonald from the Liberal party, stated that the government Senators did not support this recommendation, arguing that the issue of same-sex marriage should be addressed by a compulsory national plebiscite. Evidently, the committee was purely an exercise in defusing the conflict and weakening the momentum proponents of same-sex marriage had developed. It is an effective symbolic strategy because it suggests that the influential Christian right members in the government are addressing the problem without actually resolving the issue.

6.32 Postponement

Finally, postponement is a symbolic placation strategy in which opponents of the same-sex marriage argue that although proponents of reform have a valid grievance, the issue cannot be immediately resolved. The initial proposal to hold a plebiscite on the issue of same-sex marriage exemplifies such a strategy. Following a six hour party room meeting, the then Prime Minister Tony Abbott stated that at the next election, the Coalition's policy will be to hold a national vote on the issue in the subsequent term of Parliament. Following the the *Plebiscite (Same-Sex Marriage) Bill 2016* defeat in the Senate on 7 November 2016, Lyle Shelton maintained that "it's a plebiscite or nothing" (Shelton, 2016g).

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

7.1 Key Findings

It was found that the Christian right successfully used medium-cost strategies to deny agenda access to proponents of same-sex marriage. Most notably, the Christian right predominantly used attack strategies in order to achieve their success. Tactics which discredited the initiating group included linking them with unpopular groups, questioning their behaviour, ethics and motives and disseminating false information under a “scientific facade”. The most commonly used attack strategies involved discrediting the issue itself. This was due to the fact that same-sex marriage proponents had gained greater legitimacy with reputable polling consistently showing a majority of the public supporting same-sex marriage over a ten year period. It was found that specifically stating the apparent detrimental impacts same-sex marriage would have on society, was the most commonly used tactic during the same-sex marriage debate. The Christian right effectively framed same-sex marriage as an issue which threatened freedom of speech, freedom of religion, parental choice, and the rights of the child. Prominent members of the Christian right consistently referred to the content of the Safe Schools program as “contested gender theory” and “rainbow ideology”, in an effort to raise concern and instil doubt in the general public about the consequences of redefining marriage. High-cost strategies were not used during the debate period due to the Christian right’s success in employing the above medium-cost strategies to prevent and delay same-sex marriage being implemented.

It is also interesting to note that not all Christian right groups were found to be influential in the debate. The Australian Christian Lobby, Marriage Alliance, the Australian Marriage forum, with their affiliated spokespeople, were highly visible in the agenda conflict, with the use of medium-cost attack strategies. This may be due to their strong

links with each other and to wealthy Christian right lobby groups in the US. On the other hand, FamilyVoice, the Australian Family Association and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference failed to garner a strong political presence in the debate. This may be due to the lack of resources and personnel at their disposal, which are essential for raising the level of conflict and using medium-cost strategies.

7.2 The Secular State

Philosopher Richard Rorty has observed that “in political discussion [religion] is a conversation-stopper” (Rorty, 1999). The notion of secularism was firstly defined by UK activist and freethinker George Jacob Holyoke in the 1840s. He argued that on moral matters, reason and empirical evidence should be applied instead of theological doctrine or religious belief. He also believed that secularism does not mean that people are required to give up a belief in God, rather people’s individual beliefs are personal thus, they shouldn’t be used to inform decisions on public policy issues. Lindsay (2014, pg. 51) outlines a number of prerequisites for democratic discourse to function successfully. Firstly, people need to express their views, provide their reasoning, and be open to persuasion. And secondly, participants in the policy discussion must be able to analyse, evaluate and debate the reasoning behind people’s views. In other words, “there must be a commitment to reason together in terms that everyone can understand”. Furthermore Lindsay notes that this is not possible if religious doctrine is used to inform policy in a society, which is religiously pluralistic with many who are also non-believers. Overall, Lindsay (2014) argues that in order for democratic discourse to be successful, religious doctrine should not be used to inform policy decisions as it is inconsistent with democratic discourse.

If citizens or lobby groups attempt to base their decisions on religious doctrine they are attempting to impose their beliefs on the rest of the population via the state. This

rejects the fundamental notion of what a secular state is. Arguments in public debates should use accessible, secular terms or, as referred to by Lindsay, a “common language” that everyone understands. If public policy is based on religious doctrine, then that policy can only be evaluated through the theology of that particular religion. This means that in order to assess the merits of the policy, one has to adopt the “sectarian religious vocabulary” or the proponent’s religious point of view (Lindsay, 2014). On the other hand, if public policy is discussed in secular terms, then it is accessible to every citizen. This incorporates language that describes all different aspects of an issue such as the problems, proposed solutions and methods for evaluation (Lindsay, 2014, pg. 55). In order to keep religious doctrine out of democratic discourse, appealing to the believer’s prudence, self-interest, commitment to democracy, and moral sensibilities is needed (Lindsay, 2014, pg. 54). Prudence is needed because in a religiously diverse society such as ours, progress will not be achieved if people base their decisions on public policy issues on the grounds of their religious beliefs. Also, self-interest is needed because if religious beliefs are allowed to dictate public policy, then the religion which attracts the majority of adherents will win the policy debate. It is important to note that keeping religious doctrine out of democratic discourse relies on the voluntary behaviour of believers, as any legislation which restricts what people can or cannot say in a public policy debate contravenes their right to freedom of speech. Political philosopher John Rawls previously echoed this main contention in his work “Theory of Justice”. In this book, Rawls argued that when discussing policy issues, especially with regards to limitations on freedom of conscience, “ways of reasoning” on such issues “should be of a kind that everyone can recognise” - he also noted that the reasoning “must be supported by ordinary observation and modes of thought (including the methods of rational scientific inquiry where these are not controversial) which are generally recognised as correct” (Rawls, 1971, pg. 213). In his later work *Political Liberalism*, Rawls was more explicit in his argument. He suggested that

in policy discussions we should “appeal only to presently accepted general beliefs and forms of reasoning found in commons sense, and the methods and conclusions of science when these are not controversial” Rawls, (1996, pg. 224). American constitutional law scholar Bruce Ackerman also strongly argues that religious belief should be excluded from political debate. According to Ackerman, no one “has the right to vindicate political authority by asserting a privileged insight into the moral universe which is denied the rest of us” (Ackerman, 1980, pg. 10).

Despite J. Caleb Clanton (2008) offering counterarguments for including religious belief in political debates, he acknowledges that the problem of a “deliberative stalemate” may occur if religious beliefs enter the public debate. He argues that in this instance, a *modus vivendi* exists in which a temporary policy is formulated by “weigh[ing] the competing interests on all deliberative sides, and try[ing] to gerrymander some sort of policy which is maximally sensitive to as many interests as possible”. This may potentially lead to a policy being formulated that is “maximally sensitive” to the religious group with the most power. Consequently, political pressure along religious lines will substitute democratic discourse (Clanton, 2008).

The Christian right’s attempts at hiding their religious and moral arguments against same-sex marriage behind a trojan horse of secular language proved to be successful. Framing the issue as one about freedom of speech, freedom of religion or the rights of the child is used to appeal to a broader public constituency. The use of deception and the dissemination of false information “sheathed in a scientific facade” illustrate the need for public policy being formulated based on secular concern and empirical evidence. Therefore, it is the argument of this thesis that in order for democratic discourse to function successfully, the Rawlsian “liberal consensus model” must be adhered to.

7.3 Religious privilege

Conveying a persecution narrative and claiming victim status, were key strategies of agenda denial that were employed by the Christian right. They claimed that their “religious freedom” was under threat if same-sex marriage was legalised. According to Croome (2017, pg. 7), “‘religious freedom’ attempts to euphemise and legitimise discrimination against sexual and gender minorities”. Furthermore, Croome argues that referring to the full civil rights of LGBTI people as “identity politics” and their dignity as “political correctness” legitimises attacks on both of these fundamental ideals.

Also, invoking “religious freedom” in the same-sex marriage debate is closely associated to an exaggerated sense of victimhood. Croome also argues that the religious right emphasise as much as the apparent “persecution” they suffer for their beliefs at the hands of a “militant rainbow agenda” as they do on the “freedoms” they aspire to. Perceiving your freedoms and beliefs to be under threat, ensures that you are more likely to defend them.

An analysis of the historical and ideological origins of the religious privilege movement is critical in understanding the threat it poses to LGBTI rights in Australia. The new religious privilege movement gained momentum after same-sex marriage laws were being implemented in some US states. Their aim was to make it legal for those opposed to same-sex marriage to refuse the provision of commercial wedding services to same-sex couples, and refuse to recognise their legal marriages or even refuse to register them (Croome, 2017, pg. 8). Croome (2017, pg. 9) states that the religious privilege movement had its religious origins in the “puritan impulse to remove the people of God to a place where they can live out their religious values away from an increasingly sinful, antagonistic and oppressive world”. These congregations sought “religious freedom” that was not liberal or pluralistic, rather they enforced a stricter conformity to religious doctrine. Furthermore, the “persecution” they fled was not oppressive or tyrannical, rather it was mostly government restrictions that the majority of people believed to be acceptable.

Croome (2017, pg. 10) believes that Christian moral conservatives' reactions to pluralism, modernity and democracy is rooted in a deep Judeo-Christian history of freedom from persecution. According to the Old Testament, the Jews fled persecution under the Egyptian Pharaoh to the freedom of Canaan. Early Christians believed that welcoming persecution from the pagan Romans was righteous and would bring them closer to God. However, archaeological evidence questions whether the Exodus and the enslavement of the Jews is historically accurate. In her work "The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom", New Testament historian Candida Moss has argued that Christian apologist Eusebius invented Christian persecution under the Romans in order to give Christians a sense of purpose and to assist their communities to be socially cohesive. She also notes that the same persecution narrative or sense of Christian martyrdom is serving the same purpose today but states that it is "poison[ing] the well of public discourse" (Moss, 2014, pg. 285).

7.4 The need for evidence-based policy

The consistent use of deception and the dissemination of false information by religious right groups in the same-sex marriage debate, highlight the need for valid, reliable and quality evidence to inform debate and policy. It is crucial that policy designers incorporate evidence, especially natural and social scientific knowledge. However, it is interesting to note that Laws and Hajer (2006, pg. 416) suggest that scientific knowledge has become "contested terrain" for policy practitioners. Fundamentally, policy designers must consider ways to moderate the assumption that knowledge can resist conflicting ideas and views surrounding policy issues. The authors illustrate five approaches to "moderate" this assumption. These include: scientists being involved in the policy design process; acknowledging that scientific knowledge can be contested; ensuring that knowledge is neutral in the policy design process. For example, policy designers must

understand the difference between academic research and policy-orientated research - as they answer different questions etc. They must also understand that analytical knowledge typical of scientific research and evidence may not adequately reflect the lived experiences of people and therefore may be insufficient in formulating effective public policy. Finally, they must consider that scientific knowledge does not provide the basis of all knowledge. For example AIDS activists contested public policy commitments and research within that policy domain (Laws & Hajer, 2006 pg. 416).

Dewey (1993) emphasises that policy decisions informed by scientific knowledge should be based on validity and not truth. In order to assess validity, scientific research must involve robust inquiry and allow scrutiny and analysis of its methodology and findings (Dewey, 1993). The relationship between science and public policy encapsulates the notion of “negotiated knowledge” as explicated by Haigh (2012, pg. 416). She argues that this sharing of ideas and knowledge between researchers and non-researchers is essential to the democratic process.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

8.1 Summary of findings

The research conducted for this thesis found that the Christian right successfully employed a range of attack strategies in order to delay and prevent same-sex marriage being implemented in Australia. It also found that the most influential groups of the Christian right included the Australian Christian Lobby, Marriage Alliance and the Australian Marriage Forum. The most commonly used tactic was framing the issue of same-sex marriage via emphasising the apparent detrimental impacts it would have on Australian society. These lobby groups argued that changing the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples would result in the weakening of freedom of speech and religion, and a loss of parental choice in determining whether their children would be taught “radical gender ideology” in schools. In addition, low-cost strategies were largely abandoned in favour of attack posturing. This was due to the fact that proponents had already gained high legitimacy among the public.

8.2 Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey and future research

At the time of writing, the Australian public is currently engaging in a voluntary postal survey on the issue of same-sex marriage. The survey asks eligible voters: “Should the law be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry?” The Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey was subject to legal challenges by proponents of same-sex marriage. The proponents questioned the authority of the Australian Bureau of Statistics to conduct the survey and whether the federal government was allowed to fund the cost of the survey from funds, which are only used for “urgent” and “unforeseen” circumstances. Both legal challenges failed and the High Court found that the survey was lawful. The survey is non-compulsory, non-binding on Parliament and is estimated to cost Australian taxpayers \$122

million. This extremely unusual process warrants a detailed analysis of the political influence of the Christian right within the Coalition, and the strategies they employed to achieve this policy outcome. Also, in the event of a majority Yes vote, a bill for same-sex marriage will eventually be introduced into the parliament. However, in order to pass, politicians from the Christian right will likely demand a compromise. This will be made more likely in the event that the No vote achieves a strong result. That compromise will most likely involve allowing religious service providers to deny married and marrying same-sex couples a service. This discrimination will be dignified by phrases such as “religious freedom” and “freedom of conscience”. However, it is simply affording people special privileges to discriminate against same-sex couples.

Same-sex marriage should be viewed through the paradigm of human and civil rights. Overall, policymakers in Australia should consider the mental health outcomes of sexual minorities when deliberating the implementation of same-sex marriage, and the social and legal benefits that come with it. The religious right’s strategies of agenda denial proved to be successful during the same-sex marriage debate of 2015-2016. The results of the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey being announced on 15 November 2017, will reveal whether they have succeeded in the same-sex marriage agenda conflict, once more.

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