

## ARGUING ABOUT FAMILIES – GAY, STRAIGHT OR NEITHER

By Robert N. Minor\*

A lot of very bad arguments take place using the word “family.” By that, I mean they are based in falsehoods about the history and psychology of families. They are steeped in very creative, and current-position-affirming mythology, and void of what we historians call data. And they are found in every sphere, from religion to politics to law.

In fact, “family” is less a clear, established concept in popular discussion and more a multi-valent symbol akin to the American flag, the National Anthem, and apple pie. You can’t be against it, whatever it is, without losing elections, friends, and media attention.

“Family” is emotionally charged, politically useful, and psychologically evocative. Since we have all experienced “families” of some sort (dysfunctional, abusive, addictive-centered, poor, privileged, indulgent, patriarchal, loving, nurturing and/or accepting), we are all scarred for better or worse by those experiences.

One cannot bring up the idea of family or the “marriage” that is supposed to go with it, without triggering the symbol’s emotional meanings.

Linguist George Lakoff argues that “family” is so basic a symbol that it is what he calls a frame through which we see our values, our country, our world, and ourselves.<sup>1</sup> Definitions of the family over which conservatives and liberals disagree appeal to radically different and deeply held frames called “family.”

And these frames trump everything else. In his most popular book, Lakoff summarizes research: “It is a general finding about frames that if a strongly held frame doesn’t fit the facts, the facts will be ignored and the frame will be kept.”<sup>2</sup>

### I. Marriage, the symbol

“Marriage,” as well, is a loaded word. Marriage is not just a legal and economic concept in our culture. If it were, legal “marriage” for LGBT<sup>3</sup> people would already be as successful politically as civil unions have been among the electorate.

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<sup>1</sup> GEORGE LAKOFF, DON’T THINK OF AN ELEPHANT! KNOW YOUR VALUES AND FRAME THE DEBATE: THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE FOR PROGRESSIVES 4-6 (Collete Leonard et al. eds., 2004).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 37. See also GEORGE LAKOFF, MORAL POLITICS: HOW LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES THINK (2nd ed. 2002); GEORGE LAKOFF, THE POLITICAL MIND: A COGNITIVE SCIENTIST’S GUIDE TO YOUR BRAIN AND ITS POLITICS (2008).

<sup>3</sup> LGBT will be my abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and other people who might be identified by some scholars as “queer,” that is, not self-identified as heterosexual and/or not straight.

“Marriage,” too, is a multi-valent symbol like motherhood, Santa Claus, and the flag. It not only symbolizes an ideal people go on about and LGBT people would like to get in on, but a guilt-inducing reality — guilt-inducing because it’s working very poorly for most people.

LGBT people hold a marriage ideal itself in their hopes. In terms of human rights, the argument is why don’t they have the right to every sick, failing institution straight people have.

But it’s the actual felt reality of marriage in the light of the ideal that culture tells us marriage symbolizes that keeps it an issue for those who would deny it to LGBT people.

Marriage for many symbolizes dashed hopes. Fifty percent of first-time marriages end, with that percentage increasing for second and third marriages.<sup>4</sup>

That doesn’t mean the other fifty percent are personally living in the bliss that we’ve all been told marriage is supposed to bring us.

We’re not just talking about people who stay together with abusive spouses because exiting is scary, or those who feel that they are stuck because they could never do any better. Living as if one has compromised one’s life, done the best they could, settled for inevitable disappointment, just agreed to make it through, and spent time justifying this status to oneself “till death do them part” is what marriage as a straight-defined relationship has become for many.

It wouldn’t have been so bad if “marriage,” the symbol, hadn’t promised so much more. It wouldn’t be so disappointing if it hadn’t been idealized and pushed by our social, economic, and religious institutions, and most media.

Its expectations are so high that when they almost inevitably don’t materialize, “marriage” becomes more a symbol highlighting the personal failings to meet the ideal for those who embrace it. Something about them – their character, their personality, their bad choices, their inadequacies – the symbol reminds them, is to blame for their disappointment. It’s not their problematic definition of the institution itself that is the problem.

The symbol is full of mythology represented in that ideal, commercially lucrative marriage ceremony<sup>5</sup> followed by a honeymoon that (if it’s your true love) lasts forever, the intertwining of the two in harmony, and the sex that will become increasingly fulfilling as they grow emotionally closer.

Marriage, the symbol, is supposed to involve happily-ever-after-ness, or, at least, personal fulfillment. It’s supposed to save us from our loneliness, emptiness and meaninglessness, prove that someone wants us, and provide a companion who always accepts us just the way we are, warts and all.

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<sup>4</sup> CTRS. FOR DISEASE CONTROL: NAT’L VITAL STATISTICS REPORTS, BIRTHS, MARRIAGES, DIVORCES, AND DEATHS: PROVISIONAL DATA FOR 2009 Table A (2010), available at [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr58/nvsr58\\_25.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr58/nvsr58_25.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Think of magazines such as *Brides*, *Modern Bride*, *Elegant Bride*, *Get Married*, or *Southern Weddings* in particular, but it’s found throughout almost all women’s magazines and in the obsessive glorification of celebrity weddings in entertainment magazines. According to a 2006 survey by the Conde Nast Bridal Group, seventy-two billion dollars per year are spent on weddings while over two million couples get married each year with the average wedding costing over \$27,000, up nearly 100% since 1990.

CONDE NAST BRIDAL GROUP, AMERICAN WEDDING STUDY 2006, available at [www.heraldtribune.com/assets/pdf/advtips/IO\\_BridalSalons.pdf](http://www.heraldtribune.com/assets/pdf/advtips/IO_BridalSalons.pdf). On the wedding-industrial complex, see CHRYS INGRAHAM, *WHITE WEDDINGS: ROMANCING HETEROSEXUALITY IN POPULAR CULTURE* (1999).

Why, then, jokes such as: scientists have found a food that stifles peoples' sex drives – wedding cake? Why, then, the wives who report being lonely in their marriages? Why the men who have become workaholics rather than finding their fulfillment at home? Why, then, the complaints that the romance is gone, “the honeymoon is over,” and the incessant justifications that all this is actually normal? Why, then, the feeling that this person one has married has not fulfilled the needs they were supposed to fill in marriage? Why does the grass start looking greener elsewhere even when one has committed to always keep it fertilized and mowed in the marriage one is inhabiting?

As long as the symbol claims to represent ideals that are probably unrealistic or seldom realizable, marriage is more likely to evoke (symbolize) one's personal failure to have attained these ideals. Its very claims will constantly remind us we, in contrast, have failed if we venture to consider it carefully.

There might be some who have the ideal. They're out there somewhere, but they're not us.

George Bernard Shaw described “marriage” famously back in 1908:

The actual result is that when two people are under the influence of the most violent, most insane, most delusive, and most transient of passions, they are required to swear that they will remain in that excited, abnormal, and exhausting condition continuously until death do them part. And though of course nobody expects them to do anything so impossible and so unwholesome, yet the law that regulates their relations, and the public opinion that regulates that law, is actually founded on the assumption that the marriage vow is not only feasible but beautiful and holy, and that if they are false to it, they deserve no sympathy and no relief.<sup>6</sup>

When asked, many married people are in denial. Honestly facing their marriage's disappointments, for those who have not divorced, would enforce the sense of their personal failure at it all.

So denial is rife. Evidence those who are totally surprised that there is anything wrong with their marriage when a spouse announces they're unhappy and wants a divorce.

It's not that all the fifty-percent that are still together are unhappy. But we can suspect that the principle that those who are the least secure are more likely to project their problems on others seems to be in play in the political discussion.

To the extent that marriage really symbolizes disappointment, failure, and insecurity, to that extent I must “protect” it all the more and project my emotional problems on others, like LGBT people. I overreact by denying it to others.

If marriage were actually successful now, LGBT people wouldn't be its scapegoats. But marriage is an institution dominated by straight, that is conditioned, roles that are not inherently heterosexual, roles of what a husband and wife, lovers, etc. should be.<sup>7</sup>

The future of marriage, as it looks now, is not bright in itself. Our broader culture would rather blame than take a deep look at what we are expecting from a very sick institution.

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<sup>6</sup> GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, *GETTING MARRIED* 20 (Players Press 1995) (1958).

<sup>7</sup> ROBERT N. MINOR, *SCARED STRAIGHT: WHY IT'S SO HARD TO ACCEPT GAY PEOPLE AND WHY IT'S SO HARD TO BE HUMAN* (2001).

It would be nice to believe sooner than later that LGBT people will be allowed to participate legally in this symbol.<sup>8</sup> Less likely is the fact that the institution will become a more successful one.

## II. “Marriage” and “family” – a reboot

Marriage needs to be redefined for it to be a fulfilling means of relating to another human being. But instead we blame its current problematic state, saying that it is a deterioration of something better, and claim that we need to go back to that more traditional ideal.

Historian Stephanie Coontz has taken on both “family” and “marriage” to explode the myths involved in our culture’s backward nostalgia. In *Marriage, A History: From Obedience to Intimacy, or How Love Conquered Marriage*, she reminds us that what we want to believe is a “traditional” definition of marriage is far from historically accurate or traditional.<sup>9</sup> In *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, she does the same for what is being called the “traditional family” by those who look backwards for an ideal.<sup>10</sup> In both works she shows how myths, not the realities, of “marriage” and “family” have affected not only public perceptions but public policy.

Too much emotional baggage is dependent upon marriage and the nuclear family -- more than any single relationship or institution can emotionally bear. Their creation as special and preeminent relationships outside of the rest of our relationships has distorted their place in our culture. Both marriage and family have taken the place of everything that a larger community had taken and apparently must retake.

“Family,” which is a symbol tied to marriage in our culture, suffers from the same misunderstandings as “marriage.” “Traditional family” is a meaningless symbol, filled with the desires those who use the term wish it would fulfill.

The idea of the nuclear family that gets pushed by almost all parties no matter what their sexual orientations is in no way and no where “traditional.” As Coontz shows, “the ‘traditional’ family of the 1950s was a qualitatively new phenomenon. At the end of the 1940s, all the trends characterizing the rest of the twentieth century suddenly reversed themselves.”<sup>11</sup>

“The values of the 1950s families also were new. The emphasis on producing a whole world of satisfaction, amusement, and inventiveness within the nuclear family had no precedents.”<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note that in the 1950s, what happened as the result of this change in the ideal of a family was a growing emphasis on this nuclear family as the center of it all, which meant less loyalty to society or a sense of responsibility for society as a whole. Concern for my family as opposed to all outside it was turned into such arguments that ones

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<sup>8</sup> See E.J. GRAFF, WHAT IS MARRIAGE FOR? (2004) (providing arguments for why the gay and lesbian community should fight for the right to marry, including the basic protection of financial assets and the accountability for resources brought to and earned in the relationship).

<sup>9</sup> STEPHANIE COONTZ, MARRIAGE, A HISTORY: FROM OBEDIENCE TO INTIMACY, OR HOW LOVE CONQUERED MARRIAGE 15-16 (2005).

<sup>10</sup> STEPHANIE COONTZ, THE WAY WE NEVER WERE: AMERICAN FAMILIES AND THE NOSTALGIA TRAP 8-9 (1992).

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 25.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* at 27.

own family will suffer if the government helps others. “The government is taking my money and using it to help others.”

Belief that my family would take care of all of my needs, meant that society was beginning to lose its purpose.

This new definition of family counters all historical evidence. Yet today’s ideal of the nuclear family whether its members are heterosexual or like those on the popular TV show, “Modern Family” promotes it anyway.

For those who want to believe this nuclear family is somehow biblical to buttress their arguments, historian Rosemary Radford Ruether, in *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family*, argues that this was never a biblical ideal either.<sup>13</sup> The New Testament “vision of the church as an alternative family was itself in profound tension with existing social constructions of the family in Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds” as it is in disagreement with the American 1950’s family of myth.<sup>14</sup>

By contemporary standards, the New Testament depicts an anti-“family” position. Jesus of the Gospels has little good to say about the family.

To replace a father and mother in this definition with two fathers or two mothers, then, will not make families better (or worse), no matter how it produces legal marriage equality. To question what it means when we use the words “father” and “mother” and how our gendered expectations limit these roles to males and females would be another place to begin in the healthy re-defining of “family” in order to eliminate the problems with what is now being called “traditional.”<sup>15</sup>

Sociologists Judith Stacey and Timothy Biblarz of the University of Southern California, spent five years reviewing 81 studies of one- and two-parent families, including gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples.<sup>16</sup> “At this point no research supports the widely held conviction that the gender of parents matters for child well-being,” they conclude.<sup>17</sup> “It’s more about the quality of the parenting than the gender of the parents,” says Stacey of New York University, co-author of the comprehensive review.<sup>18</sup>

In reality, Coontz shows in her research:

[D]espite all the difficulty of making generalizations about past families, the historical evidence does suggest that families have been most successful wherever they have built meaningful, solid networks and commitments *beyond* their own boundaries. We may discover that the best thing we will

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<sup>13</sup> ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER, *CHRISTIANITY AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERN FAMILY* 3 (2000).

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at 6.

<sup>15</sup> The terms “father” and “mother” need more careful consideration in the light of the work of sociological, comparative, and gender studies so they are not limited to outmoded gender expectations of who is nurturer, etc. See Julia C. Nentwich, *New Fathers and Mothers as Gender Troublemakers? Exploring Discursive Constructions of Heterosexual Parenthood and Their Subversive Potential*, 18 *FEMINISM & PSYCHOL.* 207, 207-30 (2008). In that sense marriage equality does threaten “traditional” marriage if marriage is defined as the mythological 1950s model with the limiting gender roles both women’s and men’s movements have been fighting since.

<sup>16</sup> Judith Stacey and Timothy Biblarz, *How Does the Gender of Parents Matter?*, 72 *J. MARRIAGE & FAM.* 3, 3-22 (2010).

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 17.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

ever do for our own families, however we define them, is to get involved in community or political action to help others.<sup>19</sup>

So accepted was this idea that families are an institution to promote good citizenship in society at large that for most of Western history, it was considered shameful to display too much exclusive attachment toward one's spouse. In 1774, for example, a popular British fashion magazine, *Lady's Magazine* lectured its readership that: "the intent of matrimony is not for man and his wife to be always taken up with each other, but jointly to discharge the duties of civil society, to govern their families with prudence, and educate their children with discretion."<sup>20</sup>

So, if the success of families in general is dependent upon their larger commitments to society, the families of LGBT people will be successful to the extent that they are free from the ideal that fails straight families. They are likely to be healthier if they do not huddle in their nuclear form, as a place to be sheltered from, rather than open to active involvement in, the community around them.

Yet the desire to think of family as a place to huddle together in safety from the world around it, rather than to be a base to work to make that world a real community is a key part of the straight (no matter what the gender of the members) family today. It is called the "traditional" family.

The hurt that LGBT people have experienced from the discrimination of the broader society, which includes denial of experiencing "family," easily makes this huddling seem even more desperately to be a safe harbor against the stormy "out there."

Historian Elaine Tyler May reminds us:

The legendary family of the 1950s...was not, as common wisdom tells us, the last gasp of 'traditional' family life with deep roots in the past. Rather, it was the first wholehearted effort to create a home that would fulfill virtually all its members' personal needs through an energized and expressive personal life.<sup>21</sup>

For the first time, in the 1950s, Coontz demonstrates, men and women were encouraged by the broader culture to root their identities and self-images in limited and limiting familial and parental roles.<sup>22</sup> "Public images of Hollywood stars were consciously reworked to show their commitment to marriage and stability."<sup>23</sup> Acceptance of the family as the locus of all meaning became a mark of one's attainment of middle-class status and its upward mobility.

But what is called "tradition" in itself has no historical value. It is a word used to create value for those in the present by choosing some elements of the past one wants to value and ignoring all the rest. "Traditional family values" are a group of concepts chosen from all those in history while ignoring many, or most, others.

There is probably nothing more common to families from the earliest times as cockroaches. They can be traced back to the dinosaurs. But no one I know of argues that

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<sup>19</sup> COONTZ, *supra* note 10, at 287-88.

<sup>20</sup> THE LADY'S MAG., 1774, available at <http://www.beaconbroadside.com/broadside/2012/02/10-surprising-facts-about-heterosexuality.html>.

<sup>21</sup> ELAINE TYLER MAY, *HOMEWARD BOUND: AMERICAN FAMILIES IN THE COLD WAR ERA* 11 (1988).

<sup>22</sup> COONTZ, *supra* note 10, at 27.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

these persistent, common to all families, creatures should be valued. We have chosen to give them a negative value and therefore they are not a part of “traditional families” and their “values.”

### III. Arguing for marriage and family

A key to the success of “family” is to question the idea that “traditional” families are those of the 1950s. It is the radical notion that we reject the family as the primary institution in culture and instead, see it as a grouping that remains open to communities, friends, and everything that use to be called the “village” that it takes to raise a child. The family will have to be a place that encourages its members to love beyond itself, a base for creating the change that promotes a broader humanity.

LGBT people should have the right to decide how they want to live in a dysfunctional or a more functional model of “family” and “marriage.” That seems like legal common sense to me.

Since “traditional marriage” and “traditional family” are actually new creations, an interesting argument to be made in the fight against state and federal marriage amendments arises. It has the potential to take back the debate because it’s about the Constitution and the First Amendment’s guarantee of religious freedom.

There’s no doubt that the need for marriage equality is first and foremost about the civil and legal benefits that currently come with government recognition and approval of two people’s legal commitment to each other. It might be that the ultimate solution to the issue is to recognize marriage as only a civil issue with its legal benefits for everyone. Couples could then add the blessings to their union of a religious institution of their choice if they desired.

Yet the history of marriage in US culture and consciousness is one enmeshed with religious images, sanctions, and overtones. What happens if we take those connections in American consciousness seriously.

There is an established legal history in this country that state governments license religious leaders. In fact, the major civil benefit of such government licensure is that ministers, rabbis, priests, and other state-approved leaders can then perform marriages for the government.

Most marriage ceremonies are performed in churches and by clergy, and many pro-marriage-equality clergy would love to be able to perform them for the many LGBT people who’d prefer to get married in a religious setting.

The language of marriage as “sacred” invokes religious images for many. Linguist George Lakoff recommends, in fact, that in the fight for marriage equality advocates use the idea of sanctity, even if it’s not religious.<sup>24</sup>

“Sanctity is a higher value than economic fairness,” he advises.<sup>25</sup> “Talking about benefits is beside the point when the sanctity of marriage is in dispute. Talk sanctity first.”<sup>26</sup>

The arguments behind the federal and state marriage amendments are essentially religious. Right-wing think-tanks play on what have been the dominant cultural religious sentiments, but they also know that they must act as if their crusade is not the imposition of

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<sup>24</sup> LAKOFF, *supra* note 1, at 46.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at 50.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

a sectarian religious understanding. So, they couch their arguments in terms of inaccurate history, poor science, rejected psychological theories, and statistics unsupported by the social sciences.

Based on anti-marriage equality understandings of the Bible, tradition, and God, amendment proponents argue that same-sex marriages don't suit a "traditional" model of one man and one woman. One need not look deeply into the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament to see that even among the Patriarchs, Ten Commandments-giver Moses, and hero-kings such as David and Solomon polygamy was common and traditional.

Even early members of the Church could be polygamists. Otherwise, why would the writer of the first letter to Timothy say that he should pick from the diverse membership, men for church leaders who were "the husband of [but] one wife?"<sup>27</sup>

These clear Biblical practices must be explained away by the proponents of a marriage amendment to make an argument that supports their sectarian understanding. Likewise, "traditional" has to be defined quite selectively to eliminate all the cases of polygamy in world history.

It surely is the height of irony that the Mormon Church has been a major funder of amendments claiming that traditional marriage has been between one man and only one woman. Even its second prophet and president, Brigham Young, married some 50 women.

But, it's time also to recognize that there are many religious people who believe that the Bible, tradition, and God actually require them to confirm same-sex commitments. Their religious beliefs about morality, love, commitment, and marriage demand that they recognize and celebrate loving commitment wherever it is found.

These mainstream religious people believe that government has no business telling God, the Church, and any two consenting adults whom they can and cannot love. Unitarian Universalists, the United Church of Christ, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis have spoken out of their faith to testify that affirming same-sex marriages is a response of true belief. It arises out of the very central tenets of their faith.

Amending the Constitution under the guise of a relatively new, now sectarian, definition of "marriage" and "family" to forbid these religions from performing same-sex marriages violates both clauses of the First Amendment of the Constitution's Bill of Rights. It's both the "establishment" by the government of one religious position as well as "prohibiting the free exercise" of the religion of others. It's religious discrimination at its core.

The Defense of Marriage Act, the proposed Federal Marriage Amendment, state marriage amendments must be put to rest permanently because they are anti-American. The Federal Marriage Amendment is not only anti-American because it would be the first amendment to write discrimination of a group of people into the Constitution.

The Defense of Marriage Act and state marriage amendments are also anti-American because they destroy religious freedom. They forbid the religious practice of clergy, denominations, and religious communities that believe they are divinely called to affirm the love of two adults who happen to be of the same gender. They amount to sectarian religious abuse of the Constitution by promoting one religious position over others.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> 1 *Timothy* 3:2.

<sup>28</sup> Robert N. Minor, *Marriage Amendments Assault Religious Freedom*, 13 *THE GAY & LESBIAN REV. WORLDWIDE*, 5, 5-6 (2006).

Even so, arguing for marriage and family equality as well as non-discrimination in the workplace, public accommodations, and the area of partner benefits, still comes out of what sounds like a self-hating position that enforces huddling.

Let me close by discussing this since it is central to much relevant discussion of LGBT people.

The position is expressed as an argument for equal rights: “I wouldn’t choose to be gay if I had a choice.” One can hear the sadness in this response when gay people say something like: “With all of the oppression, prejudice, hate, abuse, death, and self-doubt that comes upon gay people, why would I choose this life?”

Here is a clear example for social scientists of actual victimization installing the victim role in a group of people — I’d do anything to stop the pain, even be someone I am not, if I only could. No matter how true it apparently is that sexual orientation is not a choice, this reaction reflects the self-hate of a societal victim role installed through real past victimization.

The argument that LGBT people can’t help being LGBT may be based in the best scientific and experiential evidence available. The current consensus among researchers is that sexual orientation is not a choice, though to date there are no replicated scientific studies supporting any specific biological etiology for anyone’s sexual orientation.<sup>29</sup>

The argument might temporarily be useful as a political strategy. It has brought some straight allies into the fold. But in the long run it plays into the marginalization of LGBT people as less than “normal.” And it must be noted that the acceptance of the belief that “race” was immutable and not a choice did not end slavery and racism.

The argument’s larger problems are, first, it takes the “straight” role, not merely a heterosexual orientation, as the model for life. It is the straight role that is affirmed with all of its obvious systemic conditioning about manhood and womanhood. Heterosexual people who step out of the role are also treated the way non-heterosexual people are.

But whether it is the role or the orientation that one desires, saying “I would not choose, but can’t help it” does not begin with arguments that affirm the worth and value of non-heterosexual human beings or any people that step out of the “straight” role that is acted out against non-heterosexual people. It merely speaks as if LGBT people are powerless victims.

Second, this argument colludes with the false assumption that non-heterosexual is a deviation from a human norm. It is arguing that LGBT people should be forgiven, put up with, tolerated, and maybe even accepted, for this deviation, disability, or flaw because they could not help it.

It in no way changes or challenges the standard of judgment involved. LGBT people were born with this fault and, the poor things, can’t help it. They are flawed victims of life’s game of chance, “biological errors.”<sup>30</sup>

Third, it assumes that if there were an authentically free choice, people would choose the straight role or even heterosexuality. There is no evidence for this because there is nothing about our society that would enable a free choice of heterosexuality.

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<sup>29</sup> Similarly, no specific psychosocial or family dynamic cause for someone’s sexual orientation (heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, et. al.) has been identified, including histories of childhood sexual abuse. *See generally*, AM. PSYCHOL. ASS’N, SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND HOMOSEXUALITY (2008), *available at* <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx>.

<sup>30</sup> This is the designation used numerous times by conservative radio talk show host Dr. Laura Schlessinger. *See Words of Dr. Laura*, STOP DR LAURA: A COALITION AGAINST HATE (Dec. 8, 1998 et al.), <http://www.stopdrlaura.com/laura/>.

Heterosexuality and the straight role are enforced by fear and terror at every turn. Some writers have even called this “compulsory heterosexuality.”<sup>31</sup> As I argue in *Scared Straight*, the straight role is not a free human choice but a dysfunctional, fear-based survival mechanism imposed on all people regardless of sexual orientation.<sup>32</sup> And its goal is to maintain the system and its gender conditioning the way it is.

The idea that LGBT people should have equality in all issues because sexual orientation or gender identity are immutable conditions might be the best that can be done legally. But it is not a healthy argument. It promotes the value of a destructive straight role and idealizes the straight, dysfunctional version of institutions such as marriage and the family.

It does not begin with the non-victim stance that sexual orientation, including homosexual and bisexual orientations, are “gifts,” “natural,” meant to be, or God-given if that is the language one prefers. If we reject victim role thinking, the only reason to end gay oppression and heterosexism to promote equality is that love should be honored wherever it is found and however ineloquently it might be expressed in order to counter the fear-based nature of society and its conditioning. The real issue should be love, not fear.

That means clarity about “marriage” and “family” beyond what today we are all supposed to be convinced is “traditional.” It means re-evaluating the concepts in the light of the existence of a larger society and the fact that these limiting institutions cannot fulfill what humans need from their village. It means lifting a burden that marriage and family cannot bear on their own. And it means recognizing that these institutions will be successful to the extent that they are a part of the greater community that is large enough to have the array of resources human beings need for fulfillment.

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<sup>31</sup> See ADRIENNE RICH, COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY AND LESBIAN EXISTENCE ¶ 6 (1980) available at <http://www.terry.uga.edu/~dawn/dba/4500compulsoryhet.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> MINOR, *supra* note 7.