The Gay Agenda

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THE GAY AGENDA

Libby Adler*

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I. Introduction

This Article is designed to illuminate options that I believe have been difficult for advocates of gay rights to imagine due to an incessant culture war and the hard work of anti-gay forces that have kept pro-gay advocates under persistent fire. The culture war, this paper argues, while a fundraising boon and a media draw, compels a particular type of participation and a particular reform agenda, eclipsing reform possibilities that might be preferable in the long run.

From its side of the culture war, the anti-gay camp often speaks in the language of protecting traditional family values. This elicits at least two species of rejoinders from gay rights advocates.

* Professor of Law, Northeastern University School of Law. My thanks go to Anastasia Dubrovsky, Jeremy Fredericksen, Britney Lacey and Rose MacKenzie for their research assistance. Thanks also to many colleagues who provided useful feedback, including Stacey Dogan, Rashmi Dyal-Chand, Taylor Flynn, Janet Halley, Wendy Parmet, Dean Spade, fellow participants in the series of workshops entitled Up Against Family Law Exceptionalism, sponsored by the Program on Law and Social Thought at Harvard Law School, and participants in the Faculty Colloquium at Northeastern University School of Law.
First, gay rights advocates depict the gay family as morally indistinct from an idealized version of the heterosexual family, i.e., wholesome, monogamous, bourgeois and much more about love than sex. This is a drive toward a species of normalization. It is especially evident in the same-sex marriage campaign, but shows up on other frontiers, as well, and it has had under-recognized (though not entirely un-theorized) costs.

Second, gay rights advocates fight to impose on the battle their preferred frame of civil rights and equality. The history of civil rights and equality in the United States makes these terms powerful rhetorical tools, but their hazards—while subject to extensive academic discussion—too often seem to elude the architects of major reform movements.

This Article will recount the dangers of both normalization and rights discourses, but not without recognizing how powerful the pull toward them can be under conditions of a culture war. Still, my call will be to resist that pull. Fighting the oppressive forces of sexual moralism can be done in other—and very possibly more productive—ways that do not replicate the problems of normalization or rights discourse.

This Article will propose other ways, mindful of the insights of a handful of critical theoretic traditions, including American Legal Realism, Critical Legal Theory, and Queer Theory, which I believe have something real and valuable to offer the gay rights movement if what its participants want is to combat sexual moralism and to ameliorate the full range of hardships faced by persons associated with marginal gender or sexual identities or practices. Collectively, these traditions give us some tools for appreciating the drawbacks of the gay rights agenda as it is currently formulated, open a way of thinking about how legal and economic conditions—conditions that are potentially alterable through law reform—contribute to the formation of our gendered and sexual identities, add to our options for organizing our erotic and domestic lives, and could lead to a new way of conceiving a law reform agenda. The agenda imagined in this Article is less consumed with achieving formal equality between gay and straight people, and more interested in using law to create the best possible conditions under which a broad array of people can make choices.

Part II discusses what I deem to be the difficulties with the current gay rights model, and in particular the way in which the reform agenda has been overly determined by the culture war. Next, Part III begins the process of re-imagining a law reform agenda along new lines, proposing concrete examples of how the insights of the critical theoretic traditions might be put to reformist purposes. My hope is to avoid acquiescing to
the toxic demands of the culture war, to learn from these traditions, and
to make a turn to an articulate and useful blend of what they offer.

II. Fighting a Culture War

The rhetoric of the contemporary American culture war is
familiar—stale, really. It addresses issues ranging from gun control to
abortion, from sex education to physician assisted suicide, from prayer
in schools to stem cell research, spanning legal as well as popular venues.
This part will recall the terms of just one of the culture war’s several
frontiers: the battle over progress in the treatment of gay, lesbian, bisexual
and transgender (GLBT) people and the status of same-sex erotic
and domestic relations.

A. Anti-Gay Mainstays

In his State of the Union Address in 2005, President George W.
Bush said:

Our second great responsibility to our children and grandchil-
dren is to honor and to pass along the values that sustain a free
society. So many of my generation, after a long journey, have
come home to family and faith, and are determined to bring
up responsible, moral children. Government is not the source
of these values, but government should never undermine
them.

Because marriage is a sacred institution and the foundation of
society, it should not be re-defined by activist judges. For the

1. I am cognizant of the difficulties of the “GLBT” litany to describe a range of people
among whom there are numerous differences, for example, the danger that trans-
gender issues will be collapsed into or eclipsed by gay issues. Forgive my use of
“GLBT” here, and the even more obscuring term “gay,” to cover a diverse array of
people and concerns. My use of the term “gay” in particular refers more often to the
archetypal subject of gay rights litigation than to an actual kind of human being. In
fact, one purpose of the article will be to demonstrate how identity-based law reform
is restricted in its capacity to ameliorate many of the adverse legal conditions faced by
persons on the sexual and gender margins. I also make these vocabulary choices for
reasons of economy, particularly in the first half of the article. In the second half, in
which I make an effort to articulate a new approach to agenda setting, the differences
among and contingencies within these identities will be given more careful attention.
good of families, children, and society, I support a constitutional amendment to protect the institution of marriage.\(^2\)

Whether or not you listened to this address, it probably sounds familiar. The terms “values,” “moral,” “faith,” “sacred,” and “family” are mainstays of the anti-gay right.

Observe as well the customary condemnation of judicial activism. The Americans to whom the above-excerpted lines probably are meant to appeal do not seem prone to inquire why judges are ill-suited to addressing a “values” question such as how marriage ought to be defined. Any law school graduate ought to understand the logic, but it is not clear that the rest of the electorate would. My instinct is that few Americans, if asked, actually could explain the reasoning, but that the link has been rhetorically drummed into them.\(^3\)

1. Judicial Decisions Invoking Institutional Competence

Of course, in legal discourse, the whole idea of judicial competence and its limits is routine. I recount it nonetheless for a few reasons. First, I want to demonstrate some discursive continuity across the legal/popular divide while also highlighting a distinction between the commonly elaborated rationale for judicial deference and the poorly grasped rhetorical refrain. Second, while the rationale is in widespread use throughout constitutional law, it can be critiqued; I will provide a brief reminder of how that might go. Finally, a bit of anti-gay rights rhetoric contextualizes the pro-gay rejoinders that follow and it is the pro-gay arguments with which I am ultimately concerned.

A few key cases will suffice to recall the jurisprudential incarnation. In Lawrence v. Texas,\(^4\) the 2003 decision of the United States Supreme Court striking down a Texas sodomy prohibition under the due process clause, Justice Thomas (along with Chief Justice Rehnquist) joined in a lengthy dissent authored by the reliable culture warrior, Justice Scalia.\(^5\)

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3. I have not conducted a scientific study on this, but I have made a handful of informal inquiries among smart, educated non–lawyers (e.g., “what is judicial activism and why is it wrong?”) and my intuition has been almost uniformly vindicated—that is, most have no idea what theoretically ought to distinguish a proper judicial action from an improper one. Try it.


5. Lawrence, 539 U.S. at 586 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
Despite Justice Scalia’s customary incisiveness and thoroughness, however, Justice Thomas submitted an additional dissent—a mere two paragraphs—signed only by him. Justice Thomas reasoned:

I write separately to note that the law before the Court today “is . . . uncommonly silly.” If I were a member of the Texas Legislature, I would vote to repeal it. . . .

Notwithstanding this, I recognize that as a Member of this Court I am not empowered to help petitioners and others similarly situated. My duty, rather, is to “decide cases ‘agreeably to the Constitution and laws of the United States.’”

Presumably, Justice Thomas could not persuade Justice Scalia to incorporate this sentiment into his opinion or the case would include only a single dissent. His two paragraphs establish Justice Thomas as perhaps a bit less rabid than his conservative colleagues on the Lawrence Court and this might be what he hoped to convey. The same paragraphs, however, establish Justice Thomas as a culture warrior—not simply because he voted with the conservative wing of the Court on a divisive social issue, but because by articulating as he did the distinction between what he would do as a legislator and what he must do as a judge, he fortified the cable connecting the popular and legal discourses of the right in this substantive domain. In particular, this kinder, gentler culture warrior fused his vote for traditional, family-values style moralism to a conclusory pronouncement of the limit of judicial competence.

Justice Scalia, of course, performs this rhetorical task much more intently and elaborately, in his Lawrence dissent and also in his dissent

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6. Lawrence, 539 U.S. at 605 (Thomas, J., dissenting).
7. Lawrence, 539 U.S. at 605–06 (Thomas, J., dissenting) (citations omitted).
8. Lawrence, 539 U.S. at 602–05 (Scalia, J., dissenting). After charging the majority with taking sides in the culture war and observing with apparent empathy that for reasons of morality “[m]any Americans do not want persons who openly engage in homosexual conduct as partners in their business, as scoutmasters for their children, as teachers in their children’s schools, or as boarders in their home,” id. at 602–03, Justice Scalia assumes a more neutral posture.

Let me be clear that I have nothing against homosexuals, or any other group, promoting their agenda through normal democratic means. . . . But persuading one’s fellow citizens is one thing, and imposing one’s views in the absence of democratic majority will is something else. . . . What Texas has chosen to do is well within the range of traditional democratic action, and its hand should not be stayed through the invention of a brand–new “constitutional right” by a Court that is impatient with democratic change.

Id. at 603.
in *Romer v. Evans*, the decision striking down on equal protection grounds an anti-gay amendment to Colorado's constitution. Justice White and Chief Justice Burger, however, preceded Justice Scalia in their majority and concurring opinions (respectively) in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, upholsting a Georgia sodomy statute, shortly before Justice Scalia's elevation to the Supreme Court. Justice White, writing for the majority, was clear that the case "did not require a judgment on whether laws against sodomy . . . are wise or desirable." The issue presented," he famously explained, was "whether the Federal Constitution confers a fundamental right upon homosexuals to engage in sodomy," adding that the case did entail the need for him to exercise "some judgment about the limits of the Court's role in carrying out its constitutional mandate." Justice White proceeded to reject the finding made in the Court of Appeals that the Supreme "Court's prior cases have construed the Constitution to confer a right of privacy that extends to homosexual sodomy." In fact, Justice White admonished, nothing in the privacy line of cases "bears any resemblance to the claimed constitutional right" asserted by Hardwick. References to the *Lochner* Era and FDR's court-packing plan come a few pages later just to make sure that we got the point: this is not a matter for the Court.

Chief Justice Burger joined the main opinion, but wrote separately to form a kind of reverse parallel structure to the Scalia and Thomas pair
of dissents that followed by seventeen years. It took the Chief Justice three paragraphs to distinguish himself as a bit more hostile than his brethren in the majority, tapping Blackstone for the language of “the infamous crime against nature,” “an offense of ‘deeper malignity’ than rape,” and “a heinous act ‘the very mention of which is a disgrace to human nature.’” To find a fundamental right in such depravity would, Chief Justice Burger wrote, “cast aside millennia of moral teaching,” but he could not wrap up there. He needed one more paragraph, which strangely sounds almost as if he does not himself hold an opinion on the subject of sodomy: “This is essentially not a question of personal ‘preferences’ but rather of the legislative authority of the State. I find nothing in the Constitution depriving a State of the power to enact the statute challenged here.”

The joint that binds the moral condemnation—as bald as any legislative tirade—to the technocratic pronouncement regarding institutional competence—designed to sound a bit more neutral in tone—is, of course, a transparently ideological deposit into what are otherwise vacant gate-keeping concepts, such as whether a right is “implicit in the concept of ordered liberty” or “deeply rooted in this Nation’s history and tradition.” Moreover, the justices in Bowers were construing the right to privacy, which has been rather widely critiqued as a cloak for judicial political preference. These terms compose the discursive culture of substantive due process jurisprudence, and so should not be met here with shock. I exhibit them as a reminder of the rhetorical connection between anti-gay morality and institutional competence, as well as of the jurisprudential justification for their entwinement.

In Goodridge v. Department of Public Health, the Massachusetts case extending marriage rights to same-sex couples under the state

21. See, e.g., Robert H. Bork, Neutral Principles and Some First Amendment Problems, 47 Ind. L.J. 1, 9 (1971) (criticizing the right to privacy as found in Griswold v. Connecticut, 381 U.S. 479 (1965), and arguing that “[w]hen the Constitution has not spoken, the Court will be able to find no scale, other than its own value preferences, upon which to weigh” a minority’s freedom claim against the majority’s regulatory power); Frances E. Olsen, The Family and The Market: A Study of Ideology and Legal Reform, 96 Harv. L. Rev. 1497 (1983) (critiquing the public/private distinction).
constitution, the dissenting justices represented themselves as firmly disposed to the Thomas tonality. To those of us located in the Massachusetts legal culture, it would be difficult to imagine a contemporary justice of that court denigrating homosexual sex with Blackstonian epithet. Instead, the three dissenters (on a court of seven members), each of whom authored a dissent as well as signed the dissents of the others, stressed the institutional competence side of the discourse, even occasionally nodding to the possibility that the marriage statute might be worth legislative reconsideration.

Despite the absence of Scalia/Burger-style vitriol on the Massachusetts court, however, a close reading reveals the same rhetorical entwinement. Justice Spina, for example, began his dissent:

What is at stake in this case is not the unequal treatment of individuals or whether individual rights have been impermissibly burdened, but the power of the Legislature to effectuate social change without interference from the courts. . . . Today, the court has transformed its role as protector of individual rights into the role of creator of rights.

Why is this not a question of rights?, one might ask the justice. His answer is that the court, “using the rubric of due process . . . has redefined marriage.” The definition of marriage and the scope of its fundamental nature are to be drawn from the “nation’s history,” resulting in a similar analysis to the one that led the Bowers majority and Lawrence dissenters to determine that sodomy was not entitled to constitutional protection.

23. See, e.g., Goodridge, 798 N.E.2d at 983 (Cordy, J., dissenting).
24. Goodridge, 798 N.E.2d at 974 (Spina, J., dissenting).
25. Goodridge, 798 N.E.2d at 976 (Spina, J., dissenting).
26. Goodridge, 798 N.E.2d at 976 (Spina, J., dissenting). In the more recent decision by the Supreme Court of California requiring that state to grant marriage licenses to same-sex couples, In re Marriage Cases, 183 P.3d 384 (Cal. 2008), a dissenting justice made a similar cluster of arguments. Justice Baxter wrote “[i]n reaching this decision, I believe, the majority violates the separation of powers, and thereby commits a profound error,” id. at 456 (Baxter, J., concurring and dissenting), going on to charge that “a bare majority of this court, not satisfied with the pace of democratic change, now abruptly forestalls that process and substitutes, by judicial fiat, its own social policy views for those expressed by the People themselves. . . . [T]he majority creates a new constitutional right.” Id. at 457 (Baxter, J., concurring and dissenting). Justice Baxter makes explicit reference to a state constitutional “separation of powers clause,” id. at 458 (Baxter, J., concurring and dissenting), and to the conventional terms of fundamental rights analysis as “crucial restraints upon the overreaching exercise of judicial authority in violation of the separation of powers.” Id. at 459 (Baxter, J., concurring and dissenting). Consistent with this, Justice Baxter also urges that
Justice Sosman’s dissent shares Justice Spina’s solicitude for the legislature, but is focused on the uncertainty of science and the consequential proper outcome of the rational basis test.

Based on our own philosophy of child rearing, and on our observations of the children being raised by same-sex couples to whom we are personally close, we may be of the view that what matters to children is not the gender, or sexual orientation, or even the number of the adults who raise them, but rather whether those adults provide the children with a nurturing, stable, safe, consistent and supportive environment in which to mature. . . . It is therefore understandable that the court might view the traditional definition of marriage as an unnecessary anachronism, rooted in historical prejudices. . . .

It is not, however, our assessment that matters. Conspicuously absent from the court’s opinion today is any acknowledgement that the attempts at scientific study of the ramifications of raising children in same-sex couple households are themselves in their infancy and have so far produced inconclusive and conflicting results. 28

“plaintiffs seek, and the majority grants, a new right to same-sex marriage[.]” Id. at 462 (Baxter, J., concurring and dissenting). Note that this case was effectively overruled by “Proposition 8,” the voter referendum that amended the California constitution to limit marriage to the union of a man and a woman. See Dan Morain & Jessica Garrison, Backers Focused Prop. 8 Battle Beyond Marriage, L.A. TIMES, Nov. 6, 2008, http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-gaymarriage6-2008nov06,0,2331815.story.

About a week before the law in California was restored to its status quo ante, the Supreme Court of Connecticut awarded the same-sex marriage campaign a victory in that state. See Kerrigan v. Comm’r of Pub. Health, 957 A.2d 407 (Conn. 2008). Some familiar arguments show up in this case (e.g., if marriage is to be changed, “it is appropriate that it be done by the democratic process, rather than by judicial fiat,” id. at 504 (Borden, J., dissenting)). Much of the disagreement between the majority and dissent, however, focused on whether gays are properly understood as politically powerless enough to warrant treatment as a suspect class. See id. at 439, 487–88.

27. Goodridge, 798 N.E.2d at 979 (Sosman, J., dissenting).

28. Goodridge, 798 N.E.2d at 979 (Sosman, J., dissenting). A few pages later, Justice Sosman invites the reader to consider whether the court would find irrationality in a less emotional but analogous context:

[1] If the issue were government subsidies and tax benefits promoting use of an established technology for energy efficient heating, the court would find no equal protection or due process violation in the Legislature’s decision not to grant the same benefits to an inventor or manufacturer of some new, alternative technology who did not yet have sufficient data to prove that the new technology was just as good as the established technology.

Id. at 981 (Sosman, J., dissenting).
In the absence of scientific certainty, Justice Sosman reasoned, the legislature cannot be said to be irrational for waiting until the data are in. This dissent is at pains to avoid affront; one can almost feel Justice Sosman pleading with her gay friends to understand that she thinks they are fine parents—it is just that the studies are not in yet, so she cannot—despite her personal open-mindedness—find that the legislature has been irrational. Her decision is based strictly on institutional concerns.

Embedded in Justice Sosman’s reasoning is her apparent confidence that heterosexual marriage has been an irrefutable triumph. Indeed, she urges in her opening paragraph that “the Legislature need only have some rational basis for concluding that . . . alternate family structures have not yet been conclusively shown to be the equivalent of the marital family structure that has established itself as a successful one over a period of centuries.” None of the justices question this assumption, or even contemplate that the legislature’s requiring same-sex marriage to prove itself while not requiring heterosexual marriage to do the same might raise a constitutional issue. This, I believe, is the spot to dig if one seeks to unearth evidence of Justice Sosman’s acquiescence to the rhetorical entwinement of anti-gay morality and morally neutral assessments of judicial competence: heterosexual relationships benefit from the assumption of success while homosexual relationships begin as suspect.

Justice Cordy concluded the longest of the three dissents with equivalent courtesy. “While the courageous efforts of many have resulted in increased dignity, rights, and respect for gay and lesbian members of our community, the issue presented here is a profound one, deeply rooted in social policy, that must, for now, be the subject of legislative not judicial action.”

[There is much to be said for the argument that excluding gay and lesbian couples from the benefits of civil marriage is cruelly unfair and hopelessly outdated: the inability to marry has a profound impact on the personal lives of committed gay and lesbian couples (and their children) to whom we are personally close (our friends, neighbors, family members, classmates, and co–workers) . . . .

_id._ See also the separate dissenting opinion of California Justice Corrigan, who wrote, “In my view, Californians should allow our gay and lesbian neighbors to call their unions marriages. But I, and this court, must acknowledge that a majority of Californians hold a different view.” _In re Marriage Cases_, 183 P.3d at 468 (Corrigan, J., concurring and dissenting).

29. _Goodridge_, 798 N.E.2d at 981 (Sosman, J., dissenting).
30. _Goodridge_, 798 N.E.2d at 982 (Sosman, J., dissenting).
31. _Goodridge_, 798 N.E.2d at 979 (Sosman, J., dissenting).
32. _Goodridge_, 798 N.E.2d at 1004–05 (Cordy, J., dissenting).
on the point that until there is certainty that the same-sex-headed household is equal to the unquestionably successful heterosexual household, the court ought to defer to the legislature, but goes perhaps a bit further in suggesting that marriage is designed to organize the procreative capacity of heterosexual intercourse and so can be rationally confined to that context. His argument veers back and forth between the pragmatics of reproduction and the morality-laden language of history and tradition.

2. Popular Discourse of Institutional Competence

It is useful to bear in mind the jurisprudential justifications for judicial deference on gay issues when turning to popular discourse on the same topic. Take, for example, the lay advocates of amending the United States Constitution to preclude same-sex marriage, who speak in terms virtually identical to those of the conservative justices (if sometimes in a slightly more antagonistic tone). The national organization Focus on the Family, which has advocated a federal amendment, confronts on its website in “frequently asked questions” format, why homosexuals should not be entitled to the same treatment as heterosexuals. The answer reads in part:

Here’s what is intolerant. Same-sex “marriage” is being forced upon us by a small, but elite, group of individuals dressed in black robes—judges—who say that thousands of years of human history have simply been wrong. That is a very arrogant notion that will bring great harm to our culture.

Similar efforts have been made to amend the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights. A layperson’s guide produced by the Massachusetts Family Institute pointedly entitled Take Back Democracy, coaches would-be activists with the following talking points:

33. See Goodridge, 798 N.E.2d at 1003 (Cordy, J., dissenting).
34. See Goodridge, 798 N.E.2d at 995 (Cordy, J., dissenting).
35. See, e.g., Goodridge, 798 N.E.2d at 985–87 (Cordy, J., dissenting).
The SJC, in its narrow 4–3 ruling on homosexual marriage, upset the balance of powers between the three branches of government. The Court hijacked the power of the Legislature—and of the people—by declaring a “right” to homosexual marriage without legislative action or a vote of the people.

A single judge (appointed, not elected) radically changed the timeless definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman. This one judge robbed the power to legislate from 200 elected representatives and senators and ultimately from millions of registered Massachusetts voters.

With its Goodridge decision, the Court has now invented a “right” to homosexual marriage, claiming great numbers of children in homosexual homes who need protection [sic].

Notice that the national group uses quotation marks around the word “marriage,” while the state group saves the marks for the word “right.” I take the former to be more substantively anti-gay, going directly to the illegitimacy of same-sex relationships, while the latter aims at the structural dimension, suggesting that in the absence of a genuine right, the court has behaved inappropriately. Perhaps the choices were accidental. Either way, the two excerpts encompass both aspects of the discourse, just weighted a bit differently and offered without any evidence of thoughtfulness about the limits of judicial competence, but merely in the mode of an anti-gay-entwined-with-anti-judicial battle cry.

Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller has written a lengthy and detailed analysis of anti-same-sex marriage strategies, including the anti-judicial rhetoric, much of it in the context of Hawaii, which saw a promising same-sex marriage litigation undercut by a state constitutional amendment after an aggressive public campaign. According to Goldberg-Hiller, the anti-gay right deployed an elaborate, dual-stranded strategy

38. Id. at 5.
that has had an impact on Americans' understanding of civil rights more generally. First, he identifies

a reaction against the fast-growing visibility of gays and lesbians and the forms of knowledge and political presentation of the self under which the demand for civil rights has been made. This has created a responsive set of political strategies that use lesbian and gay identities and political claims as an “alter” against which majorities have realized their opposing interests.

But Goldberg-Hiller does not think this is the entire story. He discerns a second component:

The rhetorical tactics used to retain the privilege of marriage for nongays have combined formerly diverse, contradictory, and sometimes dormant American discourses into mutual coherence, amplifying their effects. This hybrid political language has sampled from liberal and nonliberal political ideologies, neoliberal economic notions, nationalist ideas of political space, religious morality, themes of civilization, and even—indeed, especially—from the discourse of civil rights. Cobbled together, these discourses aid the constitution of new identities capable of building majorities and driving them to the polls in opposition to courts and rights-based movements.

Goldberg-Hiller illustrates in vivid and sophisticated fashion how courts and law have become rhetorically entangled with gay identity and how together they have been posited as threats to a host of prized values such as family and order.

3. Critique of the Institutional Competence Arguments

These rhetorical ties between substance and institutional competence—while routinely deployed and virtually instinctive to persons with legal training and apparently unquestioned by laypersons who might not even understand the structural rationale undergirding their

41. Id. at 7–8.
own position—are nonetheless eminently vulnerable to critique. In abridged form, the critique might go something like this:

- All sides agree that it is the province of the court to interpret the constitutional text—in the case of Goodridge, for example, the equality and due process guarantees of the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights.

- Still, if one reads those provisions to mean that a gay person cannot be denied the right to enter into a marriage with his or her chosen mate just as a heterosexual person may, then one would also believe that the Massachusetts court acted within its proper institutional bounds, merely enforcing the constitutional terms.

- If, however, one reads the same provisions to mean that while no gay person can be denied the right to enter into a heterosexual union on the same terms as a heterosexual person, the provisions do not entail the additional right to choose the sex of one’s mate, then one would also believe

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42. Article I of the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights, as amended by the Equal Rights Amendment, provides as follows:

All people are born free and equal and have certain natural, essential and unalienable rights; among which may be reckoned the right of enjoying and defending their lives and liberties; that of acquiring, possessing and protecting property; in fine, that of seeking and obtaining their safety and happiness. Equality under the law shall not be denied or abridged because of sex, race, color, creed or national origin.

MASS. CONST. art. I, amended by MASS. CONST. art. CVI.

43. Article X provides in relevant part as follows: “Each individual of the society has a right to be protected by it in the enjoyment of his life, liberty and property, according to standing laws.” MASS. CONST. art. X. While the term “due process” does not appear in this Article (which otherwise closely tracks the language of the Fifth Amendment to the United States Constitution), the due process requirement has been implied. See Goodridge v. Dep’t of Pub. Health, 798 N.E.2d 941, 975 (Mass. 2003) (Spina, J., dissenting).

44. This is Justice Cordy’s view. “The classification is not drawn between men and women or between heterosexuals and homosexuals, any of whom can obtain a license to marry a member of the opposite sex; rather it is drawn between same-sex couples and opposite sex couples.” Goodridge, 798 N.E.2d at 994 (Cordy, J., dissenting). A dissenting justice in the California marriage case agreed. See In re Marriage Cases, 183 P.3d 384, 462–63 (Cal. 2008) (Baxter, J., concurring and dissenting) (arguing that a new right was being invented by the majority and that the case bore no relation to California’s state court case striking down an anti-miscegenation statute (citing Perez v. Sharp, 198 P.2d 17 (1948)))). The California majority, however, saw the choice of marital partner as encompassed in the right to marry. See Marriage Cases, 183 P.3d at 399. See also infra Part II for a discussion of analogy to federal miscegenation decision in Loving v. Virginia, 388 U.S. 1 (1967).
that the Massachusetts court exceeded its role of protecting constitutionally guaranteed rights and behaved in an “activist” manner.

- In order to arrive at a position on the institutional question, one must first—explicitly or not—consult one’s position on how to construe constitutional terms such as “equal” and make a substantive judgment about the merits of the plaintiffs’ claims. One’s view of the correct outcome comes before one’s view of the court’s competence.

The purpose of this kind of critique is to foreground the decision-maker’s political choice. When a judge disavows his or her institutional competence in the manner described above, or when a political actor such as President Bush charges a court with “judicial activism,” that judge or actor is making a claim about what the constitutional doctrine of separation of powers requires. The claim of judicial incompetence is ostensibly neutral rather than driven by policy or outcome preference. The utility of the critique is to expose the pretense of this neutrality. It flushes out the hidden politics and renders them visible and accessible for conscious consideration. It exposes the ultimate indistinctness of Justices Thomas and Scalia, or the well-mannered Massachusetts dissenting justices and the more vulgar anti-gay backers of the constitutional amendments.

One conceivable strategy for countering the rhetorical obfuscation promoted by the right would be to spread the critique with equal vigor in the hope of exposing the anti-gay sentiment that masquerades as politically disinterested concern for the constitutional structure. It might win over those who see themselves as the fair-minded middle. Pro-gay advocates, however, cannot often be heard levying this sort of critique. The next sub-part recounts what those advocates tend to offer instead.

**B. The Terms of Pro-Gay Advocacy**

1. Normalization, Especially the Sex-Family Distinction

In April, 2005, a little boy in kindergarten in Lexington, Massachusetts brought home from school a “diversity book bag.” In it was a children’s book entitled *Who’s in a Family?* that depicts a variety of

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families, including a single-parent family, a bi-racial family, a family with divorced parents and a family with same-sex parents. When the boy’s father, David Parker, learned that same-sex parenting was being presented to his son as a legitimate familial arrangement, he set off for the elementary school and refused to leave school grounds until administrators agreed to excuse his son from any further instruction on that point. Instead of conceding to Parker, the principal called the police and Parker was arrested for trespassing. He refused bail and so spent the night in jail, consequently becoming a cause célèbre for the anti-gay right. Fred Phelps’s organization, the Westboro Baptist Church (an independent church, the slogan of which is “God hates fags”), came to Lexington to demonstrate; then-Governor Mitt Romney made a public statement in support of parental rights; and MassResistance, the Commonwealth’s premier anti-gay marriage organization, came to Parker’s aid and supported the unsuccessful federal lawsuit he and his wife filed against the town of Lexington.

Parker raised constitutional claims, including claims arising under the substantive due process right to parent and the free exercise clause,

47. See Vaznis & Jan, supra note 45.
48. See id.
50. Cf: Vaznis & Jan, supra note 45 (reporting that out-of-state groups came to Lexington to demonstrate).
52. See Sacchetti, supra note 49. See also Parker v. Hurley, 474 F. Supp. 2d 261 (D. Mass. 2007), affd, 514 F.3d 87 (1st Cir. 2008). The Parkers were joined in their lawsuit by another family that was disgruntled with the Lexington school district’s provision of positive gay imagery; the Wirthlins’ second-grader listened to a reading of a fairy-tale entitled King & King about two princes who fall in love. Parker, 474 F. Supp. 2d at 266. See also LINDA DE HAAN & STERN NIJLAND, KING & KING (2002).
53. Parker, 474 F. Supp. 2d at 263. The federal district court dismissed the constitutional claims based largely on a First Circuit case, which “held that the constitutional right of parents to raise their children does not include the right to restrict what a public school may teach their children and that teachings which contradict a parent’s religious beliefs do not violate their First Amendment right to exercise their religion.” Id. (quoting Brown v. Hot, Sexy, and Safer Prods., 68 F.3d 525, 534, 539 (1st Cir. 1995)). The court of appeals affirmed the dismissal, relying on slightly different reasoning:

The heart of the plaintiffs’ free exercise claim is a claim of “indoctrination”: that the state has put pressure on their children to endorse an affirmative view of gay marriage and has thus undercut the parents’ efforts to inculcate their children with their own opposing religious views. . . . Plaintiffs’ pleadings do not establish a viable case of indoctrination.
and also alleged that the school district violated a state statute, which provides (in relevant part) as follows:

Every city, town, regional school district or vocational school district implementing or maintaining curriculum which primarily involves human sexual education or human sexuality issues shall adopt a policy ensuring parental/guardian notification. Such policy shall afford parents or guardians the flexibility to exempt their children from any portion of said curriculum through written notification to the school principal. No child so exempted shall be penalized by reason of such exemption.55

Parker’s argument was that the statute entitled him to notice in advance of the lesson to his son’s kindergarten class as well as to the right to have his son excused from the class.56 The school district’s position, joined by the American Civil Liberties Union, a couple of gay rights organizations and others,57 was that the statute did not apply.58 As the amicus memorandum in support of the school district’s motion to dismiss argued,

None of the books objected to by the plaintiffs here are part of a curriculum “primarily[”] about “sexual education” or “human sexuality issues” for purposes of the statute, and thus fall outside of its scope. The books about which the plaintiffs complain are simply stories that contain gay characters—a far cry from the type of content implicated by the statute. The argument that depictions of gay characters constitute sex education or “sexual” content would mean that depictions of families with a husband and wife as parents are also about sexuality education, a plainly absurd notion. The promotion of tolerance, acknowledgement of diversity, and discussion of

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55. See Parker, 474 F. Supp. 2d at 263. State claims were dismissed without prejudice to allow the plaintiffs to bring them in state court. See id. at 278. I found nothing to indicate that the plaintiffs have done so.
57. Parker, 474 F. Supp. 2d at 267.
58. See Parker, 474 F. Supp. 2d at 262 (listing amici).
equal treatment and rights of gay people in society is not "sex
education."

As the Boston Globe reported, school officials stated "that the material
was about families, not sexuality."60

This argument holds a certain understandable appeal. One can
draw a relatively coherent line between the children's books at issue and,
for example, a lesson about how to use a condom. It is a line that the
Massachusetts Department of Education arguably drew in its regulation
interpreting the statute, and one can understand why the school dis-
trict and its allies would articulate the division in this case. The pro-gay
side is trying to de-stigmatize same-sex relationships and make them
seem not importantly different from heterosexual relationships—not
more sexual or threatening than the traditional mother/father/child
formation and therefore not warranting the excess of deference to paren-
tal preferences that is required under the state's sex education law.

Still, the argument, with its insistence on a sharp dichotomy be-
tween “families with . . . parents” and “human sexuality” ought to come
under some critical scrutiny in my view. The argument suggests and
promotes a sex-family distinction, so that a book can manage to teach
about how some kids have two mothers or two fathers, but still not be

59. Memorandum Amicus Curiae from the ACLU of Massachusetts, Lexington
C.A.R.E.S., Lexington Teachers Association, Massachusetts Teachers Association,
Respecting Differences, Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders, Human Rights
Campaign, and the Human Rights Campaign Foundation in Support of Defendants’
Motion to Dismiss, at 19 (2006) (on file with author).

The defendants' own memorandum made the same point:
The defendants deny that the books . . . involve “human sexual education”
or “human sexuality issues.” . . . King and King . . . no more “primarily in-
volves human sexual education or human sexual activity” than Snow White
and the Seven Dwarfs, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Beauty and the Beast, or
The Princess and the Pea, all of which similarly involve romance. Simply
because the characters who live happily ever after at the close of the story
happen to be members of the same gender does not mean the book [pri-
marily] involves sex.

Memorandum of Law in Support of Defendants’ Motion to Dismiss Plaintiffs’

60. Vaznis & Jan, supra note 45.

61. In title 603, section 5.02 of the Code of Massachusetts Regulations, the Department
interprets the statutory terms to refer to “courses (typically, sex education or discrete
units of a health education or biology course), school assemblies or other instruc-
tional activities and programs for which the instruction and materials focus
principally on human sexual education, the biological processes of human reproduc-
tion and sexual development, or human sexuality issues.” 603 Mass. Code Regs.
5.02 (1987).
about sexuality. The gays who have children, it starts to seem, are somehow not quite the same gays as those who have sexuality. The split recalls the virgin-whore dichotomy to which feminists have so long objected. The gays in the children's books are virgins, not whores, or alternatively, good gays, not bad gays.

But what is most noticeable to me about this formulation, this downplaying of the "sex" in sexual orientation while working overtime to depict the gay family as a legitimate and morally upstanding fragment in the multicultural mosaic, is its endemism to the culture war. The sex-family dichotomy was not forged in Lexington; it is a trope, and the trope can be heard coming from culture warriors of all stripes.

Most obviously, the right wing has promoted the division to advance its anti-gay agenda. The very fact that the plaintiffs portray the children's books in question as regarding sexuality, while presumably not understanding *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* (which you will recall involves a mama, a papa, and a baby bear) as regarding sexuality to the same extent, says plenty. Apparently, heterosexual sex within the confines of marriage is hardly sex at all. (Those bears were married, right?) The very rhetoric of "family values," as invoked against an array of matters concerning sex, including but not limited to homosexuality, promotes the dichotomization.

But the trope is not the sole province of the anti-gay camp. Pro-gay advocates promote the same distinction, and when they do, they are already playing on the field of sexual moralism—exactly where the right-wing wants them.


63. Another articulation comes from Michael Warner, who wrote that "the image of the Good Gay is never invoked without its shadow in mind—the Bad Queer, the kind who has sex, who talks about it, and who builds with other queers a way of life that ordinary folk do not understand or control." Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal* 114 (1999).

64. Opposition to pornography, for example, is sometimes cited as a "family value." See, e.g., Timothy Egan, *Technology Sent Wall Street into Market for Pornography*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 23, 2000, at A1 (discussing the prosecution of a porn dealer in Utah, including both his large consumer base and the public support for his prosecution given the "family values" orientation of that state).
The gay marriage campaign is the clearest—albeit not the only—
example. The public relations strategy of the campaign is fairly evident. 
While the Goodridge case was pending in Massachusetts, Newsweek ran a 
sympathetic, 3300-word article entitled The War Over Gay Marriage, 
opening and closing with domestic scenes that featured the named 
plaintiff couple.65 “It was a homey scene,”66 the article began. “Standing 
in their warm kitchen on a winter’s day in 2001, Julie and Hillary 
Goodridge, a couple for 16 years, played the old Beatles song ‘All You 
Need Is Love’ for their young daughter, Annie.”67 Lest you suspect that 
the opening conceit represents solely the intentions of the columnists, 
the article reported on the explicit PR strategy of one of the nation’s 
leading gay rights organizations:

Lambda is trying to soften up public opinion with town-hall 
meetings designed to show that gay families are good for the 
community. “The town halls we’re doing tell people, ‘Hey, 
we’re just like anyone else—a middle-class, hometown subur-
ban couple that’s been called boring,’” says Cindy Meneghin, 
45, who with her partner, Maureen Kilian, also 45, and their 
two children, Joshua, 10, and Sarah, 8, are suing to be recog-
nized as a legal family in New Jersey. “You can’t look at our 
beautiful, charming kids and not notice that we’re a family, 
and the myths start tumbling down. What we’ve found is that 
persons get to know us as people with families and kids, that I 
coach soccer and take pictures, and Maureen is the best dessert 
maker in town, and, oh yes, Maureen and Cindy are a gay 
couple.”68

Let me be clear that I have no problem with suburban parenting, soccer, 
or dessert, but something more is going on here. In their eagerness to be 
seen as “boring,” their pointing to children as evidence that their relation-
ship is legitimate, their hope to contravene myths, and “oh yes, 
[they] are a gay couple,” lies something more insidious. My reading of 
the subtext of this paragraph is as follows:

_pay no attention to our lesbian sex. Our sex is a small matter 
compared with the ways in which we are an ordinary, bourgeois_

65. Evan Thomas, The War Over Gay Marriage, Newsweek, July 7, 2003, at 38, avail-
able at http://www.newsweek.com/id/57774.
66. Id.
67. Id.
68. Id.
family. We’re nothing like what you imagine (i.e., practitioners of anonymous sex in public restrooms). Because sex is only a minor matter and normal family life is the big picture, we should not be marginalized.

If my reading is a plausible one, then the problem that follows is that Lambda’s spokeswomen are conceding that their sex is a negative, something that must be downplayed in order to bolster their credibility as a family and make the case for fair legal treatment. Moreover, their plea contains the implicit concession that those who are leading other lifestyles are morally inferior and less deserving of such fairness.

Lambda’s strategy is a species of normalization. As Janet Halley explains:

Normalisation [in the Foucauldian sense] is not the generation and imposition of some consolidated idea of good behavior or good values, the coercive herding of more and more people into normalcy defined by that behavior or those values; it is the ever-shifting, provisional ordering of a social, conceptual, and ethical field around a distinction—say, married/unmarried; or a range of distinctions—say, wife/mistress/girlfriend; or a standard—say “room temperature” or “illness” or “reasonableness.” . . . [E]thical value may or may not emerge as an effect of the ordering of the field. 69

The Lambda PR strategy is normalizing in precisely this sense. It conceptually organizes the social world around the sex-family distinction. Moreover, in this case, it seems to me that a predominant ethical valuation does emerge—family is ethically privileged over sex—although one could take the same basic discursive structure in the obverse and wind up with the contrary ethical conclusion. Examples can occasionally be heard coming from pro-sex radicals such as Pat Califia, who—in an essay about the inadequacy of extending constitutional protection to sodomy while failing to protect gender deviance and more outlying sexual practices such as S/M—contemptuously spits out the label “lesbian

soccer moms”70 or addresses with unconcealed hostility “you, bubba, with your domestic partner and Jack Russell terrier.”71 My critique is not meant to render righteous anything belligerent to mainstream values. Denigrating family with the suggestion that it is anti-sex fortifies the dichotomy no less than downplaying sex with the implication that it is adverse to family. One can reinforce the basic dichotomy regardless of which side one privileges.

The Lambda normalization strategy might be effective in winning over some people who can find empathy only for those who represent themselves as modest and unthreatening participants in run-of-the-mill family forms, but the cost is vilification of homosexual sex (or the valorization of sex among pro-sex radicals, but then family starts to look bad). While the strategy might very well lead to some formal legal victories, it leaves entirely intact the sexual moralism of the anti-gay right.

Courts that have awarded gay rights advocates with litigation victories sometimes fortify their opinions using the same strategy. In Goodridge, the main opinion by Chief Justice Marshall, while (in my view) admirable for its sober focus on marriage as an administrative and distributive tool,72 includes a gratuitous list of occupations among the plaintiffs (“business executives, lawyers, an investment banker, educators, therapists, and a computer engineer”), noting also that “[m]any are active in church, community, and school groups.”73 I suppose this could be read merely as a general introduction to the parties, but one has to surmise that go-go dancers and Streisand impersonators were not considered as potential plaintiffs—and that if they had been, this paragraph would have an entirely different feel. The paragraph as written advances

71. Id. at 67. This did not offend me personally, as I have a Labrador retriever.
72. Save for a lapse here and there about “connection that express[es] our common humanity,” Goodridge v. Dep’t of Pub. Health, N.E.2d 941, 955 (Mass. 2003), the Chief Justice does not let discourses of love or sanctity cloud her judgment, e.g., “[i]n short, for all the joy and solemnity that normally attend to marriage, G.L. c. 207, governing entrance to marriage, is a licensing law.” Id. at 952. The California Court was a bit less sober, extolling “the opportunity to publicly and officially express one’s love for and long-term commitment to another person [which] also is an important element of self-expression that can give special meaning to one’s life.” In re Marriage Cases, 183 P.3d 384, 425 (Cal. 2008).
73. Goodridge, 798 N.E.2d at 949. See also the concluding paragraph of Justice Greaney’s concurrence, which again lists the plaintiffs’ occupations and mentions their participation in religious and other “ordinary daily” parts of life. Id. at 973 (Greaney, J., concurring). The California case includes a similar paragraph. See Marriage Cases, 183 P.3d at 403.
a sense of normalcy in the bourgeois sense. Admittedly, it might be beneficial for the compassion-challenged to be reminded that they have something in common with people whose rights they might otherwise feel comfortable abrogating, but it is worth asking what less desirable images these images of bourgeois normalcy are meant to counteract. If the answer is homosexual sex—and I think it is74—then the normalizing imagery comes at a cost.75

Even in Lawrence, the normalizing imagery shows up to mute the sex and bolster the pro-gay reasoning. Justice Kennedy reproached the Bowers Court for its articulation of the question presented76 when he urged that such a framing “demeaned” Michael Hardwick’s claim, “just as it would demean a married couple were it to be said that marriage is simply about the right to have sexual intercourse,”77 and went on to make clear that Lawrence, a case about sodomy, was not only, or maybe even mainly, about sodomy: “[w]hen sexuality finds overt expression in intimate conduct with another person, the conduct can be but one element in a personal bond that is more enduring.”78 The men prosecuted for sodomy in Lawrence did not claim to be forming such a personal bond, but that they could have dilutes the distaste some readers might experience for what they were really doing.79 There is just no denying that this case is about criminalized sex acts, but the Court nonetheless relies on a variation on the trope: here, gay sex is tolerable because it can be part of a legitimate relationship—the kind that heads a family.

Whether the anti-gay right is sensationalizing gay sexuality in order to delegitimize gay family life, pro-gay advocates or gay-sympathetic

74. Gender deviance might also be among the “myths” that the normalizing imagery is meant to counteract. Moreover, the imagery might easily leave one with a monolithic impression as to class.

75. A few people in a workshop setting reacted to this argument by reminding me that it is helpful for litigators working for social change to humanize their clients and portray them in a manner that enables judges, who might come from more privileged groups, to identify with them. I do not dispute this. Normalization is not, in my view, the same thing as humanization or depicting clients sympathetically. The problem with equating normalization and humanization is that it comes at the expense of dehumanizing those who may be deprivileged by the norm that is being (re)produced by the strategy. It might take a bit more thought, but it does not seem to me impossible to depict one’s clients as human—real people who need, desire and suffer—without at the same time implicitly and judgmentally prescribing what they should need, desire or suffer from in order to be worthy of decent legal treatment.

76. See infra Part II.A.


78. Lawrence, 539 U.S. at 567.

79. I have complained about this before and in greater detail. See Libby Adler, The Dignity of Sex, 17 UCLA WOMEN’S L.J. 1, 18–19 (2008); Libby Adler, The Future of Sodomy, 32 FORDHAM URB. L.J. 197, 215–18 (2005).
multiculturalists are normalizing (read: de-sexing) homosexuality in order to legitimize gay family life, or sex radicals are exhibiting disdain for gay domesticity in order to valorize transgressive sex, the suggestion is that family and sex are somehow antithetical enterprises. Of course they are not. If some people experience them that way, however, it might be because that is the reality that the trope is producing.\(^8^0\)

Normalization rhetoric, therefore, and specifically the sex-family distinction, is political, but not in the sense that it belongs solely to one side of the culture war. On the contrary, the power of the sex-family trope lies precisely in its not being the sole property of any one political camp, but rather in its being a creature of the war itself, so common and shared as to be difficult to see. This frontier of the culture war is looking more and more as if it were premised on family’s segregation from its dark sexual side.

It is hard to resist normalizing rhetoric under conditions of a culture war, with the anti-gay right’s compassionless denigration of same-sex intimacies and gay parenthood, but the hazards of fighting in these terms have gone under-recognized. It is not clear to me whether the culture war is winnable, but if it is, and further cementing of the sex-family distinction is required to do it, the victory will be Pyrrhic. A victory on those terms cannot possibly be a genuine victory over the oppressive forces of sexual moralism. At best, it can result in the acquisition of a few formal rights while reproducing the general framework that maligns sex and justifies the oppression of persons identified with marginal sexual practices.

Moreover, the cost of an impossibly entrenched, virtually invisible dichotomy between family (or parenting) and sex could be staggering. This is not because people would in the ultimate sense have to choose between one and the other so that no one could ever have both children and sex, but because of the possibilities for shame and projection when people cannot quite manage all of their desires and self-states, and the political consequences that can flow from that failure.

When looking to the right, pro-gay advocates have no trouble seeing this danger. Reaction to the bathroom escapade of Senator Larry

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80. We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it “excludes”, it “represses”, it “censors”, it “abstracts”, it “masks”, it “conceals”. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.

Craig (R-Idaho) (to choose from a mountain of available examples) is a case in point. A columnist for the *San Francisco Bay Times*, a newspaper aimed at gay readers, wrote, “Larry Craig is a confused and closeted gay man unable to connect the dots between his sexuality and his belief in marriage and family.”

Setting aside for the moment the pile of assumptions built into this sentence (e.g., the assumption that Craig is gay, as opposed to bisexual or just a guy who enjoys anonymous bathroom sex and rarely encounters women in public men’s rooms), observe the author’s awareness that one’s political beliefs can be driven unconsciously by what one fears or loathes in oneself.

While perhaps a bit vulgar and overly certain, the columnist’s statement more or less amounts to the basic psychoanalytic insight that what one cannot consciously manage about one’s own desires will find its way into some neurosis that might easily be acted out to the detriment of others. When we contemplate the tragic falls of right-wing, excessively judgmental figures such as Craig, it is easy to imagine that those who wield the weapon of sexual moralism most menacingly are ill at ease with their own proclivities. This is not to suggest that every homophobe is a closeted homosexual, but that behind sexual moralism is a generalized hatred of that painfully vulnerable human experience of desire. Gay rights proponents know this very well.

What seems harder to remember is that gay-identified people are perfectly capable of the same unconscious fear and self-loathing, and that this can take a political toll no less damaging than the one imposed by Craig. There is no doubt, for example, that normalization strategies such as the one deployed by the Lambda spokeswomen undermine queer alliances. The entire volume from which Califia’s essay is drawn

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82. See, e.g., SIGMUND FREUD, CIVILIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS 64 (James Strachey trans., 1961) (1930) (“Psycho-Analytic work has shown us that it is precisely these frustrations of sexual life which people known as neurotics cannot tolerate. The neurotic creates substitutive satisfactions for himself in his symptoms, and these either cause him suffering in themselves or become sources of suffering for him by raising difficulties in his relations . . .”); MARTHA C. NUSBAUM, HIDING FROM HUMANITY: DISGUST, SHAME, AND THE LAW 219 (2004) (arguing that branding a group as sexually deviant is a way of casting out one’s sexual shame).

83. See infra note 84 and accompanying text. This is not the only source out there that is critical or resentful of gay mainstreaming. See, e.g., WARNER, supra note 63, at 97 (characterizing the arguments of a pro–same-sex marriage advocate as “[w]hoever gets state support first wins. You are free to pursue ‘other avenues,’ but, of course, don’t blame us if you find yourself stigmatized, abjected, or criminalized.”); id. at 111 (responding to a same-sex marriage proponent that “[w]hen leading gay legal theorists dismiss gay sexuality as mere liberty, uncivilized and uncommitted, it is no
is a protest by sundry sexual outsiders (e.g., transgender persons, sex workers, vocal practitioners of S/M) against the mainstreaming impulse of the gay rights movement and an expression of resentment at being left out in the cold, as well as a call for a queer politics that is not so devoted to the dream of social acceptance. In the introduction, the editor (whose attack is a bit more focused on consumerism in the gay rights movement, but who assails gay assimilation in all its aspects) is clear about the book’s unifying theme:

assimilation robs queer identity of anything meaningful, relevant, or challenging—and calls this progress. . . . The gay mainstream presents a sanitized, straight-friendly version of gay identity, which makes it safe for David Geffen, Rosie O’Donnell, or Richard Chamberlain to come out and still rake in the bucks. By the twisted priorities of this gay mainstream, it’s okay to oppose a queer youth shelter because it might interfere with “community” property values, or to enact neighborhood “beautification” programs that require the wholesale arrest of homeless people, transgendered people, sex workers, youth, people of color. . . . As an assimilationist gay mainstream wields increasing power, the focus of gay struggle has become limited to the holy trinity of marriage, military service, and adoption. 84

Just as the Senator Craigs of the world have fomented homophobia by their self-abnegation and strident “pro-family” moralism, so the gay rights movement attains its own normalcy by apologizing for its sex at the cost of drawing a line between good gays and bad, virgins and whores. As a result, the whores suffer—just ask them. Tune in a bit more deeply, though, and see that the “boring” gays lose, too, if one believes (as I do) that there is a subtle and longer term loss to be discerned in discursive complicity with the denigration of homosexual sex.

2. Rights, Especially Equality

In answer to the dissenters’ charge of judicial overstepping, Chief Justice Marshall wrote in Goodridge:

84. Mattilda, aka Matt Bernstein Sycamore, Breaking Glass: An Introduction, in That’s REVOLTING!, supra note 70, at 1, 3.
The Massachusetts Constitution requires that legislation meet certain criteria and not extend beyond certain limits. It is the function of the courts to determine whether these criteria are met and whether these limits are exceeded. To label the court's role as usurping that of the Legislature is to misunderstand the nature and purpose of judicial review. We owe great deference to the Legislature to decide social and policy issues, but it is the traditional and settled role of courts to decide constitutional issues.\(^85\)

Of course, the Chief Justice begs the question no less than her detractors. To determine whether a substantive issue is a constitutional one and therefore a properly judicial one, a person must first form an opinion on the substantive issue itself. Someone who does not view the denial of marriage licenses to the plaintiffs as rising to the level of an equality or due process concern will not, as a consequence, consider the issue a judicial one, and vice versa. Chief Justice Marshall is no dope, and it is difficult to imagine that this epistemological difficulty eludes her. If that intuition is correct, then my complaint is about her bad faith rather than her sophistication.

But my complaint is also about the position in which the gay rights advocates have put her, where acquiescing to the same kind of obfuscation promoted by the anti-gay right regarding the limits of judicial competence seems like the best that she can do. In both legal and PR venues, gay rights advocates—perhaps especially advocates of same-sex marriage—routinely levy arguments that collaborate in the reproduction of the framework that the anti-gay right is promoting when it condemns "judicial activism." Even if the pro-gay cause is the nobler one, the assertion that the constitutional terms render same-sex marriage a properly

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85. Goodridge v. Dep't of Pub. Health, 798 N.E.2d 941, 966 (Mass. 2003). Similarly, the California majority opinion states:

\[\text{[W]e disagree with the Attorney General and the Governor to the extent that they suggest that the traditional or longstanding nature of the current statutory definition of marriage exempts the statutory provisions embodying that definition from the constraints imposed by the California Constitution, or that the separation-of-powers doctrine precludes a court from determining that constitutional question. On the contrary, under "the constitutional theory of checks and balances" that the separation of powers doctrine is intended to serve" a court has an obligation to enforce the limitations that the California Constitution imposes upon legislative measures, and a court would shirk the responsibility it owes to each member of the public were it to consider such statutory provisions to be insulated from judicial review.}\]

\text{In re Marriage Cases, 183 P.3d 384, 448 (Cal. 2008) (citations omitted).}
judicial question of rights, as opposed to a legislative question of values, is just as lacking in foundation as the contrary claim. The critique set forth in Part II.A supra is equally applicable, and I suppose too dangerous to deploy against anti-gay advocates for precisely that reason. 86

It might be that it is simply very, very hard not to speak in terms of rights when talking about as emotional an issue as same-sex marriage under conditions of a culture war. When an issue appears to be a basic and obvious question of fairness, when one has felt personally demeaned by the treatment one has received under the law, as well as by the public’s conversation about the life one leads, including the intimacies that one feels gives her or his life meaning, the turn to rights is intuitive, nearly impossible to forgo. I have experienced this and have complete empathy for that pull.

Moreover, there is the hard, cold fact of the constitutional regime. 87 To prevail on a constitutional claim one obviously is bound to deal in rights and justify counter-majoritarian action. My argument in this section is not that gay rights advocates should make suicidal attempts to bring constitutional claims without reference to rights or the reach of judicial power. Instead, I am laying ground for a pitch (that will come in the next part) to do something else—that is, to re-conceptualize the law reform agenda to de-privilege questions of rights.

In addition to the collaborative elision of the epistemological problem, constructing an agenda around rights has disadvantages that have gone under-recognized just as normalization does. Left-wing, critically-minded legal thinkers have been trying to illuminate those disadvantages for years, 88 but somehow they seem easily forgotten in the context of

86. Cf. Suzanne B. Goldberg, Constitutional Tipping Points: Civil Rights, Social Change, and Fact-Based Adjudication, 106 COLUM. L. REV. 1955, 2008–14 (2006). In a section entitled “The Costs and Benefits of Candor,” Goldberg perceives a tension judges face between preserving institutional legitimacy and being explicit about their choices among competing norms when they are being asked to advance a social progress agenda: “To the extent courts are concerned with legitimacy and capacity constraints, a regime requiring discussion of norm choices might also lead to a decrease in decisions embracing societal change.” Id. at 2012. “Simply put, norm declaration closes doors more definitively than norm avoidance.” Id. at 2013.

87. The Massachusetts tripartite system functions much like the federal system, in that the judges are appointed and have (not life tenure but) tenure until the age of seventy. MASS. CONST. pt. 2, ch. II, § 1, art. IX and pt. 2, ch. III, art. I. One would expect in this system, at least as much and probably more so than in a state in which judges are elected, a good deal of attention paid to the balance between the judicial and other branches of government in which the existence of rights justifies the exertions of the counter-majoritarian branch.

identity-based legal reform. This section recalls some of the difficulties as they manifest themselves in the relevant context.

a. Rights Claims Can Conflict and Even Invite Competing Rights Claims

Romer v. Evans concerned the constitutionality (under the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution) of an amendment, passed by statewide referendum, to the constitution of Colorado that would have invalidated state and local laws providing anti-discrimination protection to gay people. One of Colorado's arguments in defense of the impugned “Amendment 2” was “respect for other citizens’ freedom of association, and in particular the liberties of landlords or employers who have personal or religious objections to homosexuality.” Colorado's brief urged that the amendment enhances individual freedom by eliminating governmental interference in the choices people make in religious, familial, personal, and associational matters. . . . Under the ordinances preempted by Amendment 2, individual landlords or employers who have sincere and profound religious objections to homosexuality would nonetheless be compelled to compromise those convictions . . . .

Justice Kennedy and the rest of the six-member majority did not buy it, but three dissenting justices (who expressed empathy for those who wish to exclude gay people from teaching positions, tenancies, etc.) and plenty of Coloradans (who voted in the referendum to adopt the amendment) did. Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller describes this as “permitting dominant majority political interests to be viewed through a minoritarian lens,” meaning, as I read him, that the gay people subject to discrimination were the true minority while the anti-gay, religious landlords were properly understood as belonging to a majority. It is not clear, however, how one arrives at this certainty without first consulting one's political preference. Religious landlords might constitute a small minority of people, their religious and associational rights are at least arguably implicated, so in what sense is this—in Goldberg-Hiller's

90. Romer, 517 U.S. at 635.
92. See supra note 9.
93. See Goldberg-Hiller, supra note 39, at 50.
94. Id. at 63.
terms—a “reversal”? This designation implies a kind of certainty that
might be warranted by the particular dictates of one’s conscience, but is
by no means rationally necessary. It contains a foundationless assump-
tion about who can occupy the position of victim and who cannot, but
surely if a religious landlord’s prerogatives are intruded upon by anti-
discrimination measures, that landlord will feel victimized, just as a gay
tenant would under the contrary legal conditions.

Two rights or clusters of rights, such as the religious and associ-atonal rights of landlords and the equality rights of tenants, can conflict.
It might be that one right trounces the other under existing common
law, but it might be that both assertions are viable. When that happens,
it is either analytically unsound or in bad faith to dismiss one side’s
rights as a distortion. Instead, one must confront the difficulty that it
might be bare political preference that makes the call, that one’s judg-
ment might not be based on pure constitutional principle—in fact, the
same person might weigh the same two competing rights differently on
a different day. For example, imagine a religious man who is taken to a
public hospital emergency room and does not want to be touched by a
female doctor. A person who favored the equality right in the landlord-
tenant context might favor the religious and associational right in the
medical context. It does not seem to me “hypocritical” for a person to
reach opposite conclusions in those two cases. Instead, it is merely evi-
dence of what critical legal thinkers have been pointing out for years,
that is, that contextual factors and the weight one attributes to them due
to one’s policy preferences matter in reaching legal conclusions.

The first problem with rights argumentation, then, is that contrary
outcomes often can be rendered correct within the logic of the dis-
course. What determines one’s position on the just outcome as between

95. Id. at 65.
96. See Libby Adler, Civil Unions and Civic Wars, 11 Gay & Lesbian Q. 627 (2005)
(reviewing Goldberg-Hiller, supra note 39). To be clear, I do not foreclose the
possibility that one of the two competing rights will have a stronger pedigree under
our legal system, so that more case law can be marshaled behind it and it can ult-
imately seem weightier. Sometimes that will be the case, but that still leaves times
when two highly valued rights conflict and their relative weight is not logically de-
terminable.
97. The Legal Realists are the critical progenitors on this point, having authored such
sentences as, “General propositions do not decide concrete cases. The decision will
de pend on a judgment or intuition more subtle than any articulate major premise.”
Lochner v. New York, 198 U.S. 45, 76 (1905) (Holmes, J., dissenting). Writers asso-
ciated with Critical Legal Studies picked up the idea and, using the methodology of
internal critique, made multiple distinct efforts to expose the political preferences un-
derlying ostensibly rationally determinate legal conclusions. See, e.g., Kennedy supra
note 88, at 82–92.
two conflicting rights might not be analytic correctness, but political preference. Rights, therefore, should be understood as unreliable. They are not fundamental first principles that, properly considered, constrain decision-makers to arrive at predictable and logically determined decisions in every case. Decision-makers with different politics can (at least sometimes) do different things with them. Some decision-makers might do things that pro-gay advocates detest, but that cannot—rationally speaking—be shown to be wrong.

Justice Scalia shows further the malleability of the discourse of majorities and minorities in his *Romer* dissent, not precisely on the point of rights, but still in the general domain of attributing power and victim-status. He describes Amendment 2, adopted by statewide referendum, as an effort “to preserve traditional sexual mores against the efforts of a politically powerful minority to revise those mores through use of the laws.” He cites expert opinion to the effect that “those who engage in homosexual conduct tend to reside in disproportionate numbers in certain communities . . . [and] have high disposable income . . . .” He chastises the majority for characterizing homosexuals as “politically unpopular” (and therefore in need of counter-majoritarian protection) by observing that the “group enjoys enormous influence in American media and politics, and which . . . though composing no more than 4% of the population had the support of 46% of voters on Amendment 2.”

Justice Scalia describes the statewide referendum as “this most democratic of procedures” used in this case “to counter both the geographic concentration and the disproportionate political power of homosexuals.”

Leaving aside for the moment the specious factual assertions about gay demographics, observe how the alleged minority achieves through geographic concentration and wealth a position that removes it from the counter-majoritarian purview. It turns out that power and powerlessness can be shifted around a bit more than the formulation:

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98. See *Kennedy*, *supra* note 88, at 316–17.
100. *Romer*, 517 U.S. at 645 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
103. *Romer*, 517 U.S. at 647 (Scalia, J., dissenting). This comes up in the California marriage case, as well. One of the dissents disputes the finding of a suspect class and the application of strict scrutiny in part because “the gay and lesbian community does not lack political power.” *In re Marriage Cases*, 183 P.3d 384, 466 (Cal. 2008) (Baxter, J., concurring and dissenting). The majority does not appear to disagree about the group’s political power, but was satisfied that the class “exhibit[s] a certain characteristic [that] historically has been subjected to invidious and prejudicial treatment.” *Id.* at 443. See also *Kerrigan v. Comm’r of Pub. Health*, 957 A.2d 407, 487–88 (Conn. 2008) (Borden, J. dissenting) (on political powerless).
gay = victim of majoritarian discrimination, anti-gay = majoritarian would allow.

If these were the only hazards in rights discourse, one might conclude that the best plan is to proceed with the gay rights agenda and hope for decision-makers who share pro-gay politics. Sometimes this works—as it did in Romer. Sometimes it does not, as in Hurley v. Irish-American Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Group of Boston and Boy Scouts of America v. Dale—both cases in which a statutorily granted right against discrimination had to give way to an expressive or associational right under the First Amendment. This, however, is not the full extent of the danger.

It might actually be the case that a discourse of gay rights invites conflicting rights claims. In Massachusetts, for example, after the Goodridge decision, advocates of a state constitutional amendment that would ban same-sex marriage were thwarted by a legislature that repeatedly tabled their proposed amendment, eventually voting it down, so that it never made it to the ballot for a statewide referendum. They and then-Governor Mitt Romney urged that “the people” had a “right to vote” on the amendment. Aghast at the flipping of the rights rhetoric, pro-gay advocates protested that it was basic American civics that “rights” arguments were the province of the minority seeking equality.


That the anti-gay activists could turn their cause into one of rights seemed, for a moment, stunning.

In hindsight, however, perhaps it should not have been. Pro-same-sex marriage advocates began a rights-based campaign, prompting opponents to dismiss the existence of the right. Once the right was vindicated by the state’s highest court, however, this could no longer serve the anti-same-sex marriage cause effectively; the ship had sailed: same-sex marriage was a right in Massachusetts. To ratchet up the anti-same-sex marriage campaign and meet the next procedural challenge (i.e., the amendment process), anti-same-sex marriage activists had to identify a victimizing deprivation like the one suffered by Colorado’s religious landlords. A competing right had to be generated. Voting must have seemed like a pretty good one.  

If this is a fair rendition, then rights claims can provoke rights claims, stoking the culture war rather than bringing it to a right-determined conclusion. The culture war’s supple discourse around themes of victimization and majoritarianism/counter-majoritarianism make this possible, perhaps inevitable.

b. Rights Imply Rights-Bearers

In an equal protection case or a claim that involves the rights of some group, the judgment is only one of perhaps many consequences. As a separate matter, the very assertion of the group’s existence, and the terms used to define or depict that group, can have potent effects. Litigators “represent” their clients in more than just the usual sense of the lawyerly duty to zealously advocate on their behalf. So, for example, when a gay rights litigator “represents” gays and lesbians in some civil rights action, the claim implies a more or less coherent and identifiable group on whose behalf the claim is made. It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that the litigator simply observes that pre-existing group, can discern its rough boundaries and can ascertain its interests. Instead, this subsection argues, the litigator—consciously or not—is participating in the ongoing production of that group.

This does not make everything that the litigator does on behalf of the group inherently wrong, but it does suggest that the litigator ought

109. See also the California marriage case, in which the dissent refers to “the People’s general right, directly or through their chosen legislators, to decide fundamental issues of public policy for themselves.” In re Marriage Cases, 183 P.3d 384, 459 (Cal. 2008) (Baxter, J., concurring and dissenting).

110. See, e.g., Iglesias supra note 62 (discussing racial and gendered representations in law, especially rape law); see also Model Rules of Prof’l Conduct R. 1.3 cmt. (2007).
to feel obligated to deliberate on the consequences of that facet of representation. "[R]epresentation is very different from reflection: 'It implies the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping: not merely the transmitting of already-existing meaning, but the more active labour of making things mean.' So, when a lawyer articulates a client-constituency and asserts claims on its behalf, that articulation is not merely a passive description of the group as it is found in the natural world; instead the lawyer is an active participant in making that constituency real and giving it meaning and therefore should, in my view, take responsibility for that act.

At least two relevant potential consequences to gay rights litigation should be considered. First, as one of the more oft-cited thinkers in this area, political scientist Wendy Brown, has cogently argued, it is worth contemplating whether legal “protection” for a certain injury-forming identity discursively entrenches the injury-identity connection it denounces. Might such protection codify within the law the very powerlessness it aims to redress? Might it discursively collude with the conversion of attribute into identity, of a historical effect of power into a presumed cause of victimization?

In other words, when a lawyer brings the unfairly treated class of gays and lesbians to court to seek redress, or petitions a legislative body to enact protective legislation, it is not merely the acquisition of a judgment or piece of legislation to which the lawyer ought to attend. A judgment or law that seems favorable might have the long term cost of re-inscribing injury on the class. There is a cost-benefit analysis to be performed between the value of the judicial relief or protective legislation sought and the protraction of the group’s subordinate status as a political reality. It is as an injured subordinate that one approaches the law seeking protection or vindication. Where Brown mentions turning a “historical effect of power into a presumed cause of victimization,” I take her to mean that an identity group associated with injury and subordination such as gays and lesbians is not a natural grouping that would exist under any historical conditions. Various forces converged to produce an identity group around a particular (if variable) set of

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113. *Id.*
behaviors, traits, or tendencies. It is worth considering whether a better strategy in the long term, if what one wants is to ameliorate the injury, is to highlight the historical contingency of the grouping, to call into question the coherence of the grouping or the moral relevance of the traits said to render the group coherent, rather than to re-enforce the apparent naturalness of the group by bringing it before the law for remedies, which seems like a good recipe for prolonging the existence of the injured class. This may be an under-recognized cost associated with rights argumentation: when the advocate articulates the claimant group and the injury it suffers as a class, the advocate simultaneously discursively reproduces the group as a subordinate.

The second consideration has less to do with injury but nonetheless regards the production of identity and the establishment of governing norms. In a Foreword to the Supreme Court Review of the Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology published the year after Lawrence, Bernard Harcourt wrote surprisingly that it is “far too simplistic today to think about a decision such as Lawrence in dichotomous terms—as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ for ‘homosexuals.’” The sentence is surprising because it takes a consciously critical effort to imagine that there might be constituencies, vaguely pro-homosexual if we divide the world in two, for whom that case might be a defeat. Taking as his starting point Justice Scalia’s dissent which asserts that the Lawrence majority sided with homosexuals, Harcourt sets out to undermine this dichotomous view of the culture war, in which there is a pro-gay side and an anti-gay side.

Harcourt depicts instead a disorderly array of small groups with wildly divergent sexual projects (e.g., “promiscuity, monogamy, child custody, sadomasochism, commitment, ‘fisting,’ public sex, female-to-male sex change operations (and male-to-female), ‘barebacking’ and ‘bug chasing,’ importuning, ‘role-playing,’ ‘piercing’ and ‘cutting,’ ‘packing,’ ‘fancying,’ marrying, childbearing, adopting, pornography, and sexual assault—to name just a few”) and identities (e.g., heterosexual,

114. See JOHN D’EMILIO, Capitalism and Gay Identity, in Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University 3 (1992) (on the progress of American capitalism from the colonial period through industrialization and how that progression contributed to the emergence of gay identity).
118. Id. at 507.
homosexual, bi-, trans-, poly-, metro-, pomo-sexual, lesbian, queer—again, to name just a few”). He urges that before we can know “[w]ho wins and who loses,” as a result of a case such as Lawrence, we would have to engage in “a much closer parsing of sexual projects” than Justice Scalia’s dichotomous portrayal of the culture war permits. Harcourt’s key examples of those who might experience Lawrence as a defeat are constituencies who thrive on transgression, for whom constitutional protection for their sex acts might be anathema.

One could take the position that these variables and (in many cases) outlying constituencies do not much matter. This should be recognized as a political choice, though, for which a person designing a law reform agenda ought to take responsibility. Mere assertion of the “pro-gay position” or of the interests of the gay community, without the “parsing” that Harcourt calls for, steamrolls over the concerns of real people. Moreover, the practice of asserting the singular pro-gay position is a powerful discursive act. That is, the articulation of the group and its interests is group-making, not merely group-describing. Of course, one must speak, describe, and make—the argument is not that one can avoid that, but is (in part) a defense of explicit deliberation. To consciously deliberate on the varied projects, identities and interests, and to state forthrightly what factors are deemed most weighty and which must give way to them, even if in the end the judgment call is to seek constitutional protection for sodomy (which I favor), is a more honest act than to articulate competing interests out of view.

Rights imply a rights-bearing constituency with an identity bounded by traits and/or norms. Production of this constituency by

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119. Id. at 507.
120. Id. at 511. I also have portrayed the culture war as dichotomous in this Article, but I hope it will not be read in quite the same way. Part of my argument is that many costs and benefits have been excluded from strategic calculation precisely because of the discourse of the culture war, one facet of which is its polarity. Like Harcourt, I am advocating a deliberate step outside of that discourse in order to see what the discourse obscures.
121. Id. at 525–37.
122. This takes us back to the discussion in Part II.B.1 supra regarding normalization—in particular, the idea that the sex–family distinction is a trans–political trope that produces the experience of sex and family as incompatible. See supra note 80 and accompanying text (citing Foucault for the concept of production). Here, the idea is that the legal representation of the rights–seeking gay constituency, let’s say as a constituency for whom access to marriage amounts to fair legal treatment, could produce that constituency in multiple ways. For example, it could organize the constituency around a good gay/bad gay polarity and entrench the perception gay identity is naturally occurring rather than historically contingent, which, as other writers have argued, see, e.g., D’Emilio, supra note 114, is both historically flawed and associated with certain perils.
making rights claims comes with costs. In the case of “entrench[ing] the injury-identity connection,” it might sometimes be worth the cost to seek judicial or legislative redress. I do not foreclose that possibility. Moreover, the discursive production of a particular rights-bearing constituency that elides people who get in the way might be mitigated against through conscious consideration of a broad range of projects, identities and interests. Still, I hope it will become clear in Part III that there are other kinds of law reform besides rights claims that are less likely to subject individuals to these hazards.

c. Discourse Can Produce Desire and Curb Imagination

Finally, and most importantly, it is worth considering whether some of the specific desires embodied in the gay rights agenda, however passionately and authently held, are a product of the equality discourse in which gay-identified people are caught. Same-sex marriage, for example, does not have to be a reformist priority, and has not always been one. In recent years, however, it has come to feel like the brass ring. This might be because the discourse of equality produces it as such.

Marriage is the right that the anti-gay camp seems most to want to hoard, the mark of heterosexual distinction and superiority, which seems only to heighten the gay need for it. This is not to deny that there are important legal benefits that accompany marriage, but we are past the point at which gay rights advocates would be satisfied with even a federally recognized version of civil unions identical to marriage in all respects except name. This became abundantly evident when, in August 2007, several of the Democratic candidates for President appeared in an unprecedented televised forum focused solely on gay issues. The three

123. Brown, supra note 112.
124. See Warner, supra note 63, at 84, 87 (regarding the shift in law reform and activist priorities to marriage); id. at 109 (noting that “the desire to marry is an aspect of the normativity of marriage”).
125. See Marc Spindelman, Homosexuality’s Horizon, 54 Emory L.J. 1361 (2005) (beginning: “For some time, the right to marry has defined homosexuality’s horizon. Once, very recently, a political and legal impossibility, officially a reductio ad absurdum, marriage has become the lesbian and gay communities’ main programmatic obsession.”).
126. Cf. Goldberg-Hiller, supra note 39, at 7 (“[T]he growing tolerance for diverse living arrangements makes the public rejection of same-sex marriage seem all the more a significant limit in need of explanation and comprehension.”)
frontrunners, Senator Barack Obama (D-IL), Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY), and former Senator John Edwards (D-NC), in seriatim, indicated their support for identical legal benefits for same-sex couples, even at the federal level, but under the separate name “civil union” rather than “marriage.” The panelists, including the president of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) (the leading gay rights lobbying organization that convened the forum), expressed dissatisfaction with the position of each. The issue of same-sex marriage exceeds its dimension of concrete legal benefits. Gay rights advocates will not feel satisfied that they have been victorious until all discernable signs of formal inequality are expunged. Once the war is on, one must win it.

This might be a good reason not to wage war, but if not, there are others. First, the war continues to require the commitment of tremendous resources that might have gone elsewhere (the next part will offer alternative sites). Second, the need for equality at the level of symbolism, not merely at the level of concrete benefits, accords more power to the state to provide one’s sense of self-worth than perhaps is healthy. Finally—my main point here—it would be good to have the mental room to deliberate on whether this is the best place to devote so much law reform effort, but psychological room to critically evaluate law reform priorities is pretty difficult to come by when marriage is so tied up in the discourse of equality. Operating within the discourse, one almost cannot help but to ask: Am I truly being treated as equal if my intimate partnership is managed under the separate legal category of “civil union”? It is much harder to generate such questions as: Is the denial of access to marriage the cause of so much suffering in the domain of sexuality compared with other causes that it should ascend to the top of the reform agenda? Is some of the suffering that it does cause a result of my having yielded to the state too much power to bestow legitimacy and value on my life, so that I could mitigate against that suffering by thinking in a new way? What other possibilities for change fall outside of my line of vision while I chase this prize? And finally, Might the battle for marriage rights for same-sex couples impose any costs on GLBT or other marginalized people?

In the forum on gay issues for Democratic presidential candidates, lesbian pop musician Melissa Etheridge (inexplicably one of the panelists) began the questioning of John Edwards. After observing that both she and Edwards’s wife had suffered from cancer, Etheridge recalled the high cost of her treatment and inquired, “[D]o you understand the special needs of people in gay and lesbian couples who cannot depend on

128. See id.
129. See id.
130. See id.
their partner’s insurance for protection because they are not a legal spouse or have to pay extra on the benefit? What would you do about this?" Edwards used the opportunity to tout his health care plan, then, in an apparent non sequitur, said:

And I might add just a few weeks ago I was the [sic] LA Gay and Lesbian Center, which is an extraordinary place, which I’m sure some people here are familiar with here in the Los Angeles community, where they are doing amazing, amazing work.

But there’s a message from my visit there that I think is really important for America to hear, which is I met a whole group of young people who were there because they were homeless, and they were homeless because they came out of the closet and told their parents the truth, and their parents kicked them out of the home.

And there they were—the only place—they were living on the street, had nowhere to go. Thank God for the LA Gay and Lesbian Center being there for them, and an extraordinary woman who runs the center. But without that place, where would these young people go?

And it just can’t be that in America people think that’s OK. They can’t believe that’s OK. And they need to hear and see exactly what I saw when I was there, because it was moving. It was touching, and I actually believe that that kind of experience would have a huge impact on the American people if they could just see.

The panelists were not so moved. Etheridge responded by asking Edwards whether he was “uncomfortable around gay people” and eventually the panelist from HRC brought the brief discussion back to Edwards’s inadequate position on marriage. Apparently, it did not occur to any of them to ask some sort of follow-up question, such as, What would you do as president to help those kids that you met at the LA

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131. See id.
132. Id.
133. Id.
134. Id.
Gay and Lesbian Center? Would the panelists contend that access to marriage was a more pressing injustice or are they just unable to see anything outside of marriage’s glare? 

Same-sex marriage seems to have captured the imagination of numerous people concerned with sexuality. In addition to this popular display by HRC’s panel, the canon of books and articles is virtually endless; a number of well-known scholars have written extensively on the topic. It is not merely volume, however, that conveys the point about dominating the imagination. If one were to compare readings advocating same-sex marriage to, say, readings advocating that gay people be permitted to adopt children, the arguments convey a different feeling.

135. Perhaps a pop star cannot be expected to follow-up appropriately, but the other two panelists were a journalist and the chief of a major gay rights organization. Also, it is worth noting that neither did it seem to occur to Etheridge that even people who are not in same-sex relationships sometimes face difficulty paying for expensive medical treatments. Same-sex marriage would hardly fix the problem of access to affordable medical care. I am not the first person to observe this, see, e.g., Beyondmarriage.org, http://www.beyondmarriage.org/full_statement.html, the web page for a group of left, GLBT and queer activists, academics, artists and others who convened initially in 2006 to think about change “beyond” same-sex marriage, but I mention it nonetheless because it bolsters the point about the power of the equality discourse to curb imagination.

136. This glare seems to blind marriage proponents to other pressing issues as well as to the downsides of marriage itself. For example, one often sees the well-known advantages of marriage in the immigration context cited in support of the need for equal access for same-sex couples. See, e.g., Evan Wolfson, Why We Should Fight for the Freedom to Marry, in Same-Sex Marriage: Pro and Con 128, 129 (Andrew Sullivan ed., 1997). Somehow, though, those proponents have not noticed that reformers in the domain of domestic violence have had to struggle with the bind in which the marital immigration advantage leaves battered women immigrants who face a disincentive to leave their citizen husbands. See generally Janet Calvo, A Decade of Spouse-Based Immigration Laws: Coverture’s Diminishment, But Not Its Demise, 24 N. Ill. U. L. Rev. 153 (2004). Shouldn’t the pros and cons of marriage in the immigration context at least be fully evaluated before putting gay immigrant victims of domestic violence in this same position?


about their purpose. Readings in the former, unlike the latter, often contain an implicit—sometimes explicit—suggestion that to prevail on same-sex marriage is to prevail finally.

Take, for example, the work of leading academic proponent of same-sex marriage, William Eskridge. Eskridge has argued that “legal recognition of same-sex unions—or, ultimately, marriages—comes through a step-by-step process. Such a process is *sequential* and *incremental*: it proceeds by little steps that are taken in a particular order.”

According to Eskridge, the countries that have partner recognition laws that come close to marriage first decriminalized consensual sodomy and equalized the age of consent for homosexual and heterosexual intercourse, then . . . adopted laws prohibiting employment and other kinds of discrimination against gay people, and finally . . . provided other kinds of more limited state recognition for same-sex relationships, such as the giving of legal benefits to or the enforcing of legal obligations on cohabiting same-sex couples.

Eskridge borrows at least some of his observations from Kees Waaldijk of the University of Leiden, a Dutch legal scholar and same-sex marriage proponent, internationally known in the debate. In *Small Change: How the Road to Same-Sex Marriage Got Paved in the Netherlands*, Waaldijk lays out the three phases (cited by Eskridge) based on his observations of the legal treatment of homosexuality and the steps antecedent to formal partner recognition in Europe, then proceeds to

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140. One could charge Eskridge with being a bit sloppy here, nearly equating same-sex marriage with other forms of partner recognition, but elsewhere in the article Eskridge is attentive to the distinctions among partnership recognition laws, noting some variations and referring to the range as a “menu.” *See id.* at 661–62. In the epilogue of their 2006 book evaluating the Scandinavian reforms, Eskridge and Spedale set forth a typology of partnership recognition laws in ascending order of the “unitive commitment expected or entailed in the partners’ relationship.” *Eskridge & Spedale*, supra note 137, at 252, and regard the menu of options involving varying levels of commitment and concomitant legal benefits as a list of *competitors* that might weaken the appeal of marriage, *id.* at 256. They make the interesting observation that the options on the menu may emerge as political compromises, partially accommodating pro and anti-gay rights forces struggling over whether same-sex couples will be admitted into the institution. *Id.*


142. *See id.* at 648 n.32 (citing Waaldijk, *infra*, but before publication of the paper).
describe in detail the history that concluded in the legalization of same-sex marriage in the Netherlands, which was the first jurisdiction in the world to take the leap. His claims are not modest:

If you look at the legislative history of the recognition of homosexuality in European countries, it seems that this process is governed by certain trends, that can tentatively be formulated as if they were “laws of nature”. At the very least, there is a clear pattern of steady progress according to standard sequences.

Waaldijk goes on to specify sub-steps—the components of each of the three major phases—and to deem the overall process demonstrative of his “law of small change,” a theory which appears to have won over Eskridge.

It may be that Waaldijk and Eskridge have the history right, and one might even give Waaldijk the benefit of the doubt in his assertion that the history amounts to something of a pattern—that is, it might be true that same-sex marriage is so shocking, as compared with, say, decriminalizing sodomy, that it can come into being only after the general population of a society is gradually introduced to pro-gay law reforms and a certain sense of fairness toward gay people is cultivated. Taking the teleological approach, however, obscures law reform possibilities deemed non-essential in the march toward the telos—for example, finding ways to house kids who have been kicked out of the house by their parents after expressing something about their emerging identities or desires.

Eskridge urges repeatedly in his work that same-sex marriage is demanded by the principle of formal equality, even charging that “neither progressives nor conservatives [opposed to same-sex marriage] have yet produced a convincing response to my argument that the principle of formal equality requires the state to recognize same-sex unions on the

144. Id. at 439.
145. Id. at 440.
146. See Eskridge, Comparative Law, supra note 137, at 647–48.
same terms as which it recognizes different-sex unions." It seems to me that there is a basic epistemological difficulty that more or less equally plagues pro- and anti-same-sex marriage arguments (i.e., only political preference tells one whether formal equality requires the law to do more than permit all persons of any sex or sexual orientation to enter into a heterosexual marriage). I will explain how his challenge can be met here, then proceed to what I see as the real issue.

In his 1996 book, Eskridge devotes a chapter to arguing that prohibitions against same-sex marriage should be found unconstitutional based on Loving v. Virginia, the case in which the United States Supreme Court struck down a state law prohibiting interracial marriage. As Eskridge explains, the usual argument against extending Loving to strike down prohibitions against same-sex marriage is that in Loving, the statutory classification was race, and the ideology animating the statute (Chief Justice Warren found) was white supremacy, effectively creating a “caste system” that disadvantaged non-white people. In the case of same-sex marriage, however, the statutory classification is sex, while the ideology is heterosexism (rather than sexism) and the disadvantaged class is homosexuals (rather than women). The argument against the applicability of Loving is based on this discontinuity between the classification and its animating ideology and resulting hierarchy. Eskridge sets out to undermine that distinction in two alternative ways.

First, he cites Sylvia Law and Andrew Koppelman for the argument that heterosexism is, at its core, a manifestation of sexism and that women, confined historically to a disadvantageous marital role, are in fact a disadvantaged class as a result of the heterosexual-only definition of marriage. There is, therefore, greater continuity than appears at first blush and the Loving analogy holds.

But then Eskridge laments that this argument has something of a “transvestite quality,” “dress[ing] a gay rights issue up in gender rights garb,” and moves on to his second version of the Loving analogy in which sexual orientation is the classification, an argument he views as

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148. See Eskridge, Comparative Law, supra note 137, at 641–42.
149. See supra Part II.A.
151. Eskridge, Case for Same-Sex Marriage, supra note 137, at 153–82.
152. Id. at 165.
153. Id.
154. Id. at 165–67.
156. Eskridge, Case for Same-Sex Marriage, supra note 137, at 171.
“more direct.”157 In the second argument, Eskridge taps *Washington v. Davis*158 and *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*159 for the idea that a facially neutral statute’s heavily “lopsided effect[s]” are constitutionally relevant, and that this is particularly pertinent in the same-sex marriage context where the prohibition “is animated in large part by the state’s insistence on compulsory heterosexuality.”160 This argument justifies his using sexual orientation as the classification, despite a marriage statute’s typical facial neutrality as to that category. Then, if we are all in agreement that heterosexism is behind the law and homosexuals are the disadvantaged class, we have continuity and (assuming we apply a heightened form of scrutiny, an argument he also makes but which I will not recount here161) the *Loving* analogy holds.162

One has to admire Eskridge’s nimbleness with the categories of sex and sexual orientation, sexism and heterosexism, women and homosexuals. The complex and highly debatable connections among those categories give him a lot with which to work. He is less nimble with the components of *Loving*, however, and this is why his formal equality arguments are not as determinate as he thinks. Chief Justice Warren made choices regarding classification, ideology, and disadvantaged group that Eskridge did not appear to notice were choices.

The State defended itself in *Loving* by denying any racial hierarchy in the impugned statute,163 and in fact an earlier Supreme Court accepted that reasoning in *Pace v. Alabama*,164 as Eskridge notes.165 The State was forthright about its eugenic ideology,166 but did not go so far as to admit to an ideology of white supremacy. Of course, Chief Justice Warren was having none of it. In the Chief Justice’s view, the eugenic purpose of the statute “boiled down to ‘White supremacy,’”167 just as in the Law/Koppelman view, heterosexism “boils down to” sexism. The former might seem obvious, but it was not obvious to the *Pace* Court,

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157. Id. at 172.
161. Id. at 176–81.
162. Id. at 181.
165. *ESKRIDGE, CASE FOR SAME-SEX MARRIAGE*, supra note 137, at 156.
166. *Loving*, 388 U.S. at 8.
167. *ESKRIDGE, CASE FOR SAME-SEX MARRIAGE*, supra note 137, at 160. *See also Loving*, 388 U.S. at 7, 11.
which made a different political choice. Likewise, not everyone adheres to the Law/Koppelman view.\textsuperscript{168}

Eskridge may be correct to read Chief Justice Warren’s opinion as finding a “caste system” in which non-white people were the disadvantaged class, but if this reading is correct the finding was not necessary. Mildred and Richard Loving were equally subject to penalty under the Virginia law,\textsuperscript{166} so it was not just black people who suffered. As Eskridge acknowledges, another articulation of the disadvantaged group might have been “people who fall in love with a person of another race.”\textsuperscript{170} We could call these people something—let’s say “different-race-o-sexuals”—but we don’t. We refrain from labeling them as such, even though we might observe in the world around us that some people have a fairly consistent tendency toward cross-racial desire, perhaps as consistent as the correlation between same-sex desire and gay identity. Again, there are unseen decisions being made. Had Chief Justice Warren, relying on \textit{Yick Wo} (\textit{Washington v. Davis} had not yet been decided), found that a group called “different-race-o-sexuals” was unfairly disadvantaged by the statute, and that they constituted a real group, perhaps immutably so, for equal protection purposes, then the argument usually offered against the \textit{Loving} analogy would collapse, saving Eskridge nearly thirty pages.

\textit{Loving} hinged on a judicial willingness to move analytically from a race-based classification to a particular ideology and a racial hierarchy. Chief Justice Warren made good choices in \textit{Loving}, but that does not mean that they were required as a matter of formal logic. When we go to the grocery store and see apples in one bin and oranges in another, we do not suspect the grocer of having an apple-supremacist ideology, yet white supremacy seems like a pretty reasonable suspicion when we read Virginia’s statute. Formal logic does not tell us the difference; experience does.\textsuperscript{171}

This is the answer to Eskridge’s challenge. Same-sex marriage is not logically required by the principle of formal equality any more than \textit{Loving} was. To get to his decision in \textit{Loving}, Chief Justice Warren made the political choice to reject the distinction between a eugenic ideology and white supremacy and to see the creation of a racial hierarchy rather


\textsuperscript{169} \textit{Loving}, 338 U.S. at 3.

\textsuperscript{170} ESKRIDGE, CASE FOR SAME-SEX MARRIAGE, supra note 137, at 166.

\textsuperscript{171} See Oliver Wendell Holmes, \textit{Early Forms of Liability}, in \textit{THE COMMON LAW} 1, 1 (1881), reprinted in \textit{AMERICAN LEGAL REALISM} 9, 9 (William W. Fisher III et al. eds., 1993) (“The life of the law has not been logic: it has been experience.”).
than harm to a discrete class of people who exhibit cross-racial desire. To get to same-sex marriage using a constitutional equality provision, one must make similar choices, but one could refuse. One could begin with sex as the classification, but then find that heterosexism does not “boil down to” sexism, or, alternatively, one could begin with sexual orientation as the classification, then find that heterosexism is at base sexism but that women are not disadvantaged. Of course, one also could find as Eskridge wishes; it’s just that one need not.

My larger argument, however, is that Eskridge’s framing of the challenge is problematic. Formal equality has its merits, but it is not incontrovertible that formal equality is the highest value that law reformers could be pursuing at all times. For one thing, the very term formal equality exists in opposition to substantive equality,\textsuperscript{172} and—as any student of affirmative action or workplace accommodations for working mothers will attest—the goals can conflict. A formal equality agenda can eclipse or even undermine other potentially worthy goals. For example, the achievement of formal equality has been held responsible by some for obscuring subtle forms of racism that would be better addressed using a more remedial approach, or that fly beneath the radar of anti-discrimination discourse thereby debilitating anti-racist political action.\textsuperscript{173} In the case of workplace accommodations for working mothers, feminists with divergent interests (i.e., those mothers seeking accommodation for their family lives\textsuperscript{174} and those non-mothers who could find themselves either discriminated against because they are seen as potential mothers or bearing the brunt of the work from which the accommodated mothers obtained relief\textsuperscript{175}) have found that they do not


\textsuperscript{174} See, e.g., Joan Williams, Our Economy of Mothers and Others: Women and Economics Revisited, 5 J. Gender Race & Just. 411, 422–27 (2002) (urging workplace restructuring to accommodate women’s work patterns).

\textsuperscript{175} See, e.g., Mary Anne Case, Commentary, How High the Apple Pie? A Few Troubling Questions About Where, Why, and How the Burden of Care for Children Should Be Shifted, 76 Chi.-Kent L. Rev. 1753, 1758–59 (2001) (“I fear the practical effect of localizing benefits for children and their parents at the level of the employer may be to effect something like a taking, not so much from the employer, as principally from one group of female employees (childless women who will remain childless), for the benefit predominantly of another group of male employees (those with wives and children). The former are in a lose/lose scenario, the latter can win big, while childless
form a singular constituency for whom formal or substantive equality is a clear and uncontroversial goal.

In the case of gay people, the benefits of formal equality stand counterpoised to the costs associated with the pursuit of formal equality. While the attainment of formal equality has undeniable fairness appeal, the pursuit takes place in the context of a culture war which is waged in normalization and rights discourses, some costs of which are described in this part.

Eskridge anticipates one difficulty with the culture war in his discussion of fundamentalist religion. He acknowledges that

the trajectory of religious enthusiasm. . . . might be influenced by gay people’s efforts to secure equal rights. As gay rights and openly gay people have become part of the public culture, fundamentalist religions in the United States have not only been energized in their efforts to confront that development, but have reordered their religious beliefs to make homophobia doctrinally central. Thus, it is quite possible that recognition of same-sex marriages in one or a few jurisdictions could massively reenergize religious fundamentalism and trigger a national or transnational backlash against gay rights.\textsuperscript{171}

Eskridge understands that advocacy of same-sex marriage is an engagement in the culture war and that this is an invitation to opponents to fight back and sometimes win. He underestimates the costs of engagement, however, because he is fixated only on the telos of marriage/formal equality: you win some, you lose some. The argument here, however, is that the costs are being inflicted now, in the pursuit. Sex is being segregated from family, vulnerable people are being left behind and alienated, alliances are being undermined, and the imagination necessary to fully develop law reform possibilities unrelated to the march toward marriage/formal equality is being curbed.\textsuperscript{177}

The same-sex marriage campaign is the easiest target for this critique. Marriage, however, is not the only item on the gay law reform

\textsuperscript{176.} Eskridge, \textit{Comparative Law}, supra note 137, at 657.
\textsuperscript{177.} See \textit{WARNER}, supra note 63, at 84 (“Since the 1993 March on Washington, marriage has come to dominate the political imagination of the national gay movement in the United States.”).
agenda the desire for which might be the product of a discourse that is difficult to see and the pursuit of which might in turn reproduce the discursive conditions that curb imagination. A former student in my course on Sexuality, Gender and the Law raised the possibility that the debate over adding sexual orientation as a category of offense to hate crime statutes contributes to anti-gay violence. Real causation would be tough to demonstrate as an empirical matter and he made no pretense of doing so; instead, he argued that as the debate about hate crimes wears on, pro- and anti-gay advocates participate in a discourse that not only entrenches an injured gay identity, but inflicts and re-inflicts the question of homosexuality's moral worth. His point was not that hate crime protection was itself harmful, but that there are unnoticed costs being inflicted along the way to that law reform goal.

I add to his argument only the possibility that a confluence of interrelated discourses of equality, injury and minority status produce the gay desire for that specific law reform. This is not to deny the travesty of anti-gay violence for both bodies and minds, but rather to call into question how one comes to desire the particular solution of hate crimes legislation. All of the legitimate and worthy minorities seem to be covered by hate crimes legislation; to be recognized as a worthy minority, it therefore seems to follow, one must have it. Possibilities for addressing the problem of physical safety besides a public law prohibition that targets animosity toward gay identity might occur to reformers under different discursive conditions, but right now such possibilities are difficult to imagine. Imagining them requires a deliberate effort to step outside of the culture war discourses of equality and minority status.

In another example, pro-gay lobbyists have been urging Congress for years to pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). ENDA would provide anti-discrimination coverage in the employment context much like Title VII does for other groups. Early versions of the bill protected against discrimination on the basis of sexual orienta-

178. The former student is Carl Roller, Northeastern University School of Law, class of 2005.
179. See, e.g., 18 U.S.C. § 245(b)(2) (2006) (regarding violence motivated by animus based on race, color, religion, or national origin). This is not to assume that hate crime laws, once enacted, work out well for the intended beneficiaries. See generally Lisa A. Crooms, "Everywhere There's a War": A Racial Realist's Reconsideration of Hate Crime Statutes, 1 GEO. J. GENDER & L. 41 (1999) (arguing that hate crime laws as applied, construed, upheld, and struck down, can entrench the problems of racial subordination that they are ostensibly aimed to combat).
180. See infra Part III.B. (regarding NYC zoning law).
tion, but did not address gender identity. As the voices of trans people became louder and trans activists logged in some significant victories at every (local, state, and federal) level (despite some defeats under Title VII), there were calls to add anti-discrimination coverage based on gender identity to the bill. In October, 2007, Representative Barney Frank (D-MA) issued a missive, urging that after years of fighting for the passage of ENDA he thought he could get the votes in the House if gender identity coverage were excluded from the bill. He must have been stunned by the resistance he encountered. Over three hundred GLBT organizations came together to form an ad hoc coalition called “UnitedENDA” to push for the more inclusive version. Members’ inboxes swelled with emails from the UnitedENDA organizations urging constituents to contact members of Congress and insist that transgender people not be left out.

In calling for a consensus to drop the gender identity protections, Frank had urged patience for the gradualism of law reform. Patience for gradualism is not an inherently terrible idea, but in this case scaling back the bill was the wrong move, and the organizations were right to oppose it—even at the risk of seeing ENDA fail—because of the toll it

185. See, e.g., Ulane v. E. Airlines, Inc., 742 F. 2d 1081, 1086–87 (7th Cir. 1984), cert. denied, 471 U.S. 1017 (1985) (holding that discrimination on the basis of being transsexual is not actionable under Title VII).
189. Id. This announcement was issued as an email as well as a posting on GLAD’s website.
190. See Statement of Barney Frank on ENDA, supra note 187 (“If we were to push for a vote now, knowing that the transgender provision would be defeated by a majority, we would be making it harder ultimately to win that support.”)
seemed likely to take in divisiveness had they agreed to split the “GLB” from the “T.”

Stepping back a few feet from that question, however, observe how the fight for ENDA, and over who will be covered by its provisions, is about where to draw the line between legitimate, worthy minorities and the acceptably marginalized. It is mired in a discourse about equality and neglects its own role in producing norms (e.g., legitimate and illegitimate minority) and identities (e.g., persons in the injured identity categories that would be entitled to remedies under the legislation). The bill’s passage and contents hinge on just how far out Congressional Democrats are willing to seem in the midst of a culture war in which their Republican challengers could hold validation of homosexuality and/or transsexuality against them at the next election cycle. As a result, it is tough to see how such problems could be avoided. Under these conditions, it is worth considering whether pushing for ENDA is the right move at all. This is not to say that employment discrimination is just fine; rather it is a call to redirect law reformist attention toward an assessment of whether statutory protection against it is of such extraordinary value as to make the effort to get ENDA passed worth whatever it costs in divisiveness, normalization, and so on.

I am not sure what the right answer is, but I think that the question deserves consideration and that the calculus should be fully informed as to both costs and benefits. The premise that discrimination is bad does not inexorably lead to the conclusion that trying to get ENDA passed is good. There ought to be an intervening cost/benefit analysis, but it is hard to squeeze anything in between premise and conclusion under culture war conditions. Equality discourse seems to demand its formally correct outcome not only in the marriage domain, but in anti-discrimination law, as well. Standing inside equality discourse, it is difficult to see much else. Before making the judgment call, however, it would be good if law reformers could step outside and try.

Before moving to the next part, I want to reiterate that pro-gay reliance on the discursive strategies critiqued above is not random. The strategies are, in my view, virtually impelled by a culture war in which sexual moralists criminalize and mock same-sex intimacies,

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191. In spite of the outcry, the bill passed the House sans gender identity protections. The Employment Non–Discrimination Act of 2007, H.R. 3685, 110th Cong. (2007) (as passed). As of this writing, it has yet to come up for a vote in the Senate.

192. See, e.g., supra note 36 and accompanying text (illustrating Focus on the Family’s use of quotation marks around the word marriage).
lessly assail gay parents\textsuperscript{195} who cannot fathom their characterization as presumptively substandard when they devote such fierce love and labor to their children, propose that it is legitimate to deny qualified and dedicated people access to their chosen vocations or avocations (e.g., teacher or scoutmaster) because of their desires or identities,\textsuperscript{194} and so on. My fondest hope is that this Article will not be read to demonstrate lack of appreciation or compassion for the hardships of derision, discrimination, or inhumanity.

The problem on which I am attempting to shed light is what happens when the culture war drives the agenda. The culture war provokes pro-gay discourses of normalization and equal rights; those discourses all but require prioritization of particular law reform efforts—eclipsing others—and such efforts, while they have resulted in some extraordinary successes, also have some serious pitfalls that have been accorded too little attention.\textsuperscript{195} There are other things we could do.

III. Re-Imagining a Law Reform Agenda

A. Prime Example: Homeless Adolescents

To begin with, we could accept John Edwards's invitation to consider the circumstances of the young people he met at the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center. Homelessness is a huge problem among GLBT youth,\textsuperscript{196} and while some organizations have taken up their cause,\textsuperscript{197} the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{195} In case it is not clear, I want to stress that this is a paper about law reform. The GLBT organizations engage in all sorts of other activities (organizing, education, social services referral and delivery, etc.), and this paper is not intended as a comment on any of those. It is strictly an analysis of what appears to be the architecture of the GLBT law reform agenda, particularly its rights orientation and the discourse of normalization that supports it.
  \item \textsuperscript{197} See Ray, supra note 196, at 91–152 (documenting the efforts of GLBT youth homeless shelters, especially the Ruth Ellis Center in Detroit, Green Chimneys: Triangle Tribe in New York City, Ozone House in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Urban Peak in Denver, and Waltham House in Boston).
\end{itemize}
laws that condition their lives have not drawn nearly the attention that the marriage laws have. I investigated these conditions once before in an effort to understand at least some of the sex work undertaken by minors, and GLBT minors in particular.\(^{198}\)

The lives of these young people begin under a legal regime that grants tremendous deference to their parents to raise and control them in accord with parental values, including values that might be ungenerous toward homosexuality or gender deviance.\(^{199}\) This deferential posture has constitutional roots\(^{200}\) but makes its real effects felt in child welfare practice, where no consensus exists as to whether seeking treatment intended to discourage a child’s homosexuality or transsexuality constitutes abuse,\(^{201}\) and where neither homophobic nor transphobic attitudes typically serve as a \textit{per se} bar to adults wishing to become foster or adoptive parents.\(^{202}\) Perhaps as a result, a disproportionate number of runaway adolescents identify as GLBT.\(^{203}\)

\(^{198}\) See Libby Adler, \textit{An Essay on the Production of Youth Prostitution}, 55 ME. L. REV. 191, 201–04 (2003). I say "some" because I learned that while some kids appear to sell sex to survive, some do so despite the fact that they are not in material need, apparently to buy luxury items or for pleasure or adventure. \textit{Id.} at 204–06. Much of the discussion in this section of the legal conditions faced by homeless youth is based on the more elaborate analysis provided in that article.


\(^{202}\) \textit{See, e.g.}, 110 MASS. CODE REGS. 1.09(1) (2005) (prohibiting the denial of an application for reasons of the applicant’s religion). Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is also prohibited, but when the general anti–discrimination policy is read next to the eligibility criteria to become a foster or adoptive parent, \textit{see} 110 MASS. CODE REGS. 7.104(c) (2005) ("the ability . . . to respect the integrity of a child’s racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious background," but not the ability to respect the child’s gender identity or sexual orientation), the regulations do not appear to preclude homophobic—and certainly not transphobic—persons from becoming foster or adoptive parents.

\(^{203}\) \textit{See} RAY, supra note 196, at 1 ("Our analysis of the available research suggests that between 20 percent and 40 percent of all homeless youth identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT). Given that between 3 percent and 5 percent of the U.S. population identifies as lesbian, gay or bisexual, it is clear that LGBT youth experience homelessness at a disproportionate rate.").
Once they run away (a status offense punishable in the juvenile justice system204), their options for survival are few. Youth shelters that receive federal funds must report the whereabouts of runaways to their custodians within seventy-two hours.205 Sleeping in parks is illegal in most places,206 and renting an apartment will not be an easy task. First, there is a limitation on a minor’s capacity to contract (called the power of disaffirmance), which vests minors with the unilateral right to void contracts without cause; this presumably will reduce the number of landlords willing to offer them a lease.207 Second, how will a minor pay rent? The hours that people under the age of sixteen are permitted to work are limited by federal and state law,208 as are other aspects of youth employment,209 and minors cannot serve as payees for their own child support.210

Undoubtedly, the GLBT organizations are aware of the barriers to youth self-support and of the apparent consequence that many of these youth turn to sex work and other criminal enterprises,211 but the major gay law reform efforts do not appear to be designed in contemplation of any of these background legal conditions.212 My principal contention is that this can be explained by the fact that these legal issues (as opposed to, for example, issues of discrimination) do not sound in the culture war, making it difficult both for the movement lawyers to notice them

205. See 45 C.F.R. § 1351.18(e) (2007).
206. See, e.g., 350 Mass Code Regs. 2.01(2)(b) (2001) (“No person is allowed on [Metropolitan District Commission] Reservations except during the hours from dawn to dusk unless specified otherwise at the site, or by permit.”).
209. See id.
210. See 45 C.F.R. § 302.38 (specifying to whom child support payments shall be made).
211. See, e.g., Ray, supra note 196, at 52.
212. See id. at 154–60. This section of Ray’s report makes a number of useful policy recommendations, a couple of which scratch the surface of the kind of legal thinking that this Article advocates, such as changing the law to “[p]ermit minor youth, especially unaccompanied minors, to receive primary and specialty health care services without the consent of a parent or guardian.” Id. at 154.
and for the major organizations to speak to their constituencies about them and raise money.

In 2007, a fundraising appeal from MassEquality, a pro-same-sex marriage organization in Massachusetts that worked to defeat the anti-same-sex marriage constitutional amendment, arrived in my mailbox. On the exterior of the nine-by-twelve envelope was a photograph of a vulnerable-looking, wide-eyed boy, maybe six years old, watching television. The text read:

Imagine it's 2008.

A small boy in Massachusetts turns on the TV—and tunes into a $15 million campaign to single out his family and take away his parents' equal rights.

He sees a message that says:

You do not have a real family. Real families have a mother and a father. You're an experiment. Your life will be unhappy. Your family isn't normal, and that's why we have the right to judge it.

Those are actual, focus-group tested arguments our opponents are using right now.

The attack is coming. And only one thing can stop it . . .

The ellipsis, of course, beckons the reader to open the envelope and submit to the ask. Note the familiar rhetoric of equality and normalcy. This appeal practically wrote itself.

Now try to imagine drafting the appeal to raise funds for reforming the Department of Health and Human Services regulation against minors serving as payees for their own child support, or for addressing common law limits on a minor's capacity to contract. It would be a lot harder to draft that appeal, because the drafter could not simply rely on the recipients' involuntary assumption of their culture war positions. Maybe a more general account of GLBT youth homelessness would do some of the work, but even that probably would not benefit from the level of reactivity provoked by the MassEquality appeal.

No doubt each of the above-described doctrines and rules governing minors came into being for a reason, and I do not write to advocate the total eradication of any one in particular, but there are half a dozen legal conditions that might at least serve as starting points for a law reform initiative that could benefit GLBT kids. I suppose using the law to
provide more options for youth survival would do little to advance Eskridge’s march toward formal equality, but it might be a step forward in establishing decent conditions for young people to develop their sexual habits and identities.

Of course, even if I am correct that strategies of normalization and rights do little to help homeless GLBT adolescents, could it be that some adolescents remain safely in their homes due in part to the success that such strategies have had in breeding tolerance in their parents? It is certainly possible that this is the case. My contention is not that these strategies bring no benefit whatsoever. That benefit, however, must be weighed against the costs.  The goal of Part II.B infra is to foreground those costs, which have gone under-recognized, so that law reformers have as much as possible in their calculus when they make strategy decisions.

213. I would add to what is written in Part II.B supra with regard to normalization, that the strategy does not necessarily provide even those kids who are safe at home with safety at no cost. Rather, the safety of some of those kids could quietly be coming at the cost of conforming (consciously or not) to the norm. That might be just fine with someone like Eskridge, whose book title, *The Case for Same-Sex Marriage: From Sexual Liberty to Civilized Commitment*, supra note 136, makes plain his idea of how gay people ought to behave. If the title is not sufficient, the text inside will be:

> It should not have required the AIDS epidemic to alert us to the problems of sexual promiscuity and to the advantages of committed relationships. . . . To the extent that males in our culture have been more sexually venturesome (more in need of civilizing), same-sex marriage could be a particularly useful commitment device for gay and bisexual men.

*Id.* at 9. It is hard to read this as anything other than sexual moralism and, particularly by his use of the term “civilizing,” a deep wish for acceptance into an established norm. It should not be overlooked that it is a political choice whether to ally oneself with the center or the margins. One who chooses the former is likely to be comfortable with the costs of normalization, but one whose political identification is with the marginalized is more likely to be concerned about the costs of the norm. Recall, though, that even a person whose identification is with the center, such as Lambda’s “boring” spokeswomen, may be paying a subtle, long-term cost in the form of the denigration of their sex. See supra Part II.B.1.

Imagine if the gay law reform organizations dedicated as much
brainpower, time, and money to finding ways to feed and house these
kids as they do to same-sex marriage. Imagine more generally if the gay
agenda were constructed in resistance to the culture war rather than in
reaction to it. Imagine if instead of reflexively chasing symbolic equality,
the organizations refocused their attention on the low-profile legal con-
ditions against which people live and evolve into their gendered and
sexual selves. Imagine if instead of sating their own and the anti-gay
right’s appetite for titanic clashes over equality, normalcy, morality, and
legitimacy, they engaged the legal system’s obscurer doctrines and rules
and spoke about them clearly to their supporters, baffling the anti-gay
right in its crusade for symbolic supremacy. As the next sub-part at-
ttempts to demonstrate using additional examples, American Legal
Realism, Critical Legal Theory, and Queer Theory can help figure out
how to make this move.

B. Other (Appropriated) Examples Collected and Thematized

To the chagrin of some (at least me), there is an absence of genuine
understanding between lawyers (presumably mostly legal academics)
interested in theory and lawyers (academics as well as practitioners) on
the front lines of pro-gay law reform. My intent here—and the Article is
a failure if it does not do this—is to offer legal thinkers who participate
in the ongoing construction of the gay agenda some concrete ideas for
taking what I see as potentially useful theoretic interventions and put-
ting them to work. The theory utilized here is “critical” and involves
“critique.” I am aware of the bad rap that critique has outside of its
small circle of devotees in law, but I beg for some patience. The bad rap,
as I understand it, stems from the impression that critique offers noth-
ing positive, is nihilist, and performs the easy task of explaining why
everything that practitioners and judges do is wrong without offering
anything reconstructive to do instead. That is not quite right.

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215. I do not mean to imply that the anti–gay right is too dim–witted to notice a shift in
tack, and would not think to steer course to undermine progress. Still, it cannot hurt
to stay a few steps ahead, and moreover, to drain the fuel that comes from feeling
oneself in an historic battle to preserve so-called “family values.”

216. See Kennedy, supra note 88, at 359–63.
Critical Legal Theory surely does resist reconstruction in the sense that, when it is done well, it does not reconstruct a totalizing theory, but that is not the same as neglecting to construct a law reform agenda. In other words, you will not herein find a proposal that law reform should be founded on the principles of individualism or communitarianism. You will not find a proposal that correct legal conclusions will be arrived at if a particular balancing test is employed, or that certain outcomes are demanded by a principle such as formal equality. You will not find an assertion of the proper weight of moral concerns in constitutional litigation, or any certainty in advance about how much courts should deliberate on what constitutes “the good life.” I do not have an idea for how Hercules would approach legal problems. Those reconstructions are abstract and—contrary perhaps to its reputation—Critical Legal Theory at its best is concrete.

What I am interested in here are tangible law reform ideas, ideas such as intervening in the circumstances of homeless GLBT adolescents by attending to the constellation of low-profile laws that constrain how they support themselves and where they sleep. The legal conditions discussed in that example are best understood as “background conditions,” in the sense illuminated by the American Legal Realists. The highest profile matters in gay law reform tend to emphasize equality, antidiscrimination, and substantive due process. These are the matters that typically make it into State of the Union addresses, front page news articles, and state and federal supreme court decisions. They are the terms in which pro-gay legal advocates wage the culture war. The legal issues that more immediately affect homeless GLBT adolescents, however, are not primarily constitutional concerns (the due process right to parent notwithstanding), but lower-profile rules, often of a private law or administrative nature, that frame the very poor set of choices these kids face for self-support and housing. The Realists can teach us to shift our focus away from the explicit law of “gay equality” and toward less obviously pertinent rules such as the extent of minors’ capacity to contract. This kind of legal analysis was developed in the context of labor law, where the Realists saw that property and other private law doctrine, “including such basic rules as that corporations can ‘own’ factories, that no

217. Careful genealogy of the different methodologies has been done by others. See generally id.; JANET HALLEY, SPLIT DECISIONS: HOW AND WHY TO TAKE A BREAK FROM FEMINISM (2006). Here, I intend the term Critical Legal Theory to embrace not only the school of thought known as Critical Legal Studies, but also its antecedent American Legal Realism, and the importation of some aspects of Queer Theory.
218. See KENNEDY, supra note 88, at 359–63.
one ‘owns’ the ocean, that you have no legal obligation to help a starving stranger, that workers can sell their labor and must refrain from taking its product home,” structured the employer-employee bargaining relationship even while not speaking directly to it. Moreover, the law of property “influence[d] the possibility and desirability of abandoning employment altogether,” for example, by making it illegal to eat whatever food one happens upon if one does not own it and cannot pay for it. Law operating in the background, therefore, established the realistic range of options available to parties to an employment relationship and thus concretely influenced their material reality far more than, say, abstract assurances of their right to bargain autonomously ever could. At first glance, contract doctrine might not appear to have anything to do with the legal lay of the land for GLBT people, but upon closer inspection, it might open up some avenues for change that do not directly engage the big culture war issues. For my purposes here, that is the Realist contribution.

The contribution drawn from Queer Theory regards the capacity of law to produce the identity of its subjects, as discussed supra (on the identity-producing capacity of rights argumentation). “[J]uridical systems of power produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent.” As law regulates or even protects a class, it also takes part in the formation of the group’s identity.

This subpart provides a handful of additional examples drawn from the recent work of several feminist, pro-gay, pro-sex and/or pro-trans thinkers. These thinkers all have different reformist goals, but they share a critical watchfulness that guards against the pitfalls of equal rights argumentation discussed in Part II, and they have the potential to shine new light on problems (some of which are old and tiresome) and steer reformist thinking away from discursive dead-ends. The thinkers in this subpart seem aware of law’s productive capacities and offer law reform ideas designed to intervene in the difficulties faced by their constituencies while resisting the tendency to entrench them in culture war, gender war, or other identities that might actually limit the potential for improving their circumstances in the long run. The examples that follow

220. DUNCAN KENNEDY, The Stakes of Law, or Hale and Foucault, in SEXY DRESSING ETC. 83, 86 (1993).
221. Id. at 87.
223. See supra Part II.B.2.b (discussing the views of Wendy Brown, Bernard Harcourt, Michel Foucault, and Leo Bersani).
are intended as models for how to step outside of the mental confinement of the culture war and other worn-out polarities and generate new possibilities, to wrench our eyes from equal rights and redirect attention to those rules and doctrines that constitute the background legal conditions of daily life, affecting such crucial matters as employment opportunity and physical safety.225

To begin with, Katharine Silbaugh, a leading voice in the long-running feminist discussion of work-family balance, wrote an article in which she took up the possibility that some of the costs associated with the excess burden of domestic labor on women might be alterable through greater attention to space.226 Historically, the problem of work-family balance has been seen to demand changes in employment or family law that would correct for sex-based inequalities (e.g., workplace accommodations for working mothers or adjustments to rules governing property distribution, alimony, and child support upon divorce, respectively).227 The usual reform proposals bring up wearisome conundrums such as meeting the needs of “most” women (who are caretakers) versus creating remedies for women that produce them as caretakers.228 Taking sides about whether such proposals will do more to remedy or entrench problems of sex-based inequality is like taking sides between reason and passion—it will always leave you partly wrong. Could there be another way of approaching the work-family balance problem? We do not want to be paralyzed into inaction by old dilemmas, but neither should we pretend not to see them.

Silbaugh has taken what could turn out to be an early step down a new analytical path. She draws attention to areas of law that have not traditionally been mentioned in connection with the work-family balance problem, such as single-use zoning, pointing out effects on work-home commutes and errand-running:

225. This is to be distinguished from proposing a move toward “socio-economic rights,” which, in my view, would be likely to replicate the problems associated with more traditional rights, such as conflicting rights, the production of rights-bearers, and so on.
228. See, e.g., Mary Becker, Caring for Children and Caretakers, 76 Chi.-Kent L. Rev. 1495, 1528–29, 1535–36 (2001) (noting that most women are mothers, and responding to Katherine M. Franke, Theorizing Yes: An Essay on Feminism, Law, and Desire, 101 Colum. L. Rev. 181, 183 (2001) (arguing that some feminist law reform efforts designed to advance the interests of women as caretakers “collapse women’s identity into motherhood’’)).
Some travel researchers have argued that women are more likely to choose workplaces closer to home in order to manage dual responsibilities. If this is so, we have workforce participation patterns determined in a gendered fashion according to attributes of land use patterns. The landscape separating work from home places constraints on employment decisions of workers who take greater responsibility for family work. This constraint on job mobility should be expected to negatively influence women’s wage equality. When a worker makes a residential decision for her family based on the location of her employer, or an employment decision based on family, a greater portion of family stability is tied to stability in a single job. This should give an employer a bargaining advantage once employment has begun, because her exit options are impaired . . . . [I]f an entire area is more densely developed [than single-use zoning generally permits], it is possible that a larger array of employment options would be available . . . . This improves a worker’s exit strategy, which in turn improves her bargaining position with her current employer.229

The article is filled with such insights, steering clear of old-school calls for anti-discrimination measures or a shift toward or away from legal accommodations in work or family domains. Instead, Silbaugh examines the nitty-gritty of zoning, housing design,230 the home mortgage deduction,231 and utility subsidies,232 and considers their possible impact on work-family balance.

This approach has the potential to make reformist headway while avoiding some of the wheel-spinning of the conventional positions staked out in this longstanding debate. Silbaugh’s is a Legal Realist argument in its attention to the conditions against which people choose a job and decide what pay, hours, and so on to accept. It is also at least consistent with (though perhaps not deliberately informed by) some of the insights gained from thinkers cited in Part II.B.2 on the difficulties of rights argumentation—thinkers who are associated with Critical Legal Theory (e.g., Kennedy) or Queer Theory (e.g., Bersani and Foucault)—in that she made a shift outside of old discursive confines and is thinking in ways other than how best to serve her constituency up for a group-based remedy. Silbaugh’s article has the capacity to be a

229. Silbaugh, supra note 226, at 1826.
230. Id. at 1829–35.
231. Id. at 1844–46.
232. Id. at 1847–48.
breakout moment—a strong heave that finally pushes the tires out of
the muddy trench. It can start a fresh conversation, with different terms
and new potential for change.

Moving back to the gay agenda, recall the discussions in Part II
regarding the shortcomings of normalization and rights discourses.
Recall the identity-entrenching, norm-producing, culture war-stoking
hazards associated with the Lexington school case and the same-sex
marriage campaign, or with hate crimes legislation or ENDA. Are
there any other ways to address the status of same-sex eroticism (of
greater or lesser domestication) or to confront the problems of physical
safety and employment for GLBT people? Are there approaches that
do not replicate the hazards of normalization/equal rights/identity-
based/anti-discrimination discourse?

As it turns out, zoning may be a fertile area of law for combating
anti-gay and anti-sex politics, as well. The administration of Mayor
Rudy Giuliani used zoning rules as a major tool in an anti-sex initiative
that affected GLBT constituencies, adult businesses, and sex workers in
New York City. In 1995, following a Giuliani administration study
asserting “secondary impacts” (i.e., diminishing property values and in-
creased crime) associated with the city’s sex-oriented businesses, the
City Council amended the city’s zoning law to, among other things, re-
strict the number, size, and placement of sexually-oriented businesses,
keeping such businesses away from houses of worship, schools, and
daycares, and also preventing such businesses from clustering.

As Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue,

The law aims to restrict any counterpublic sexual culture by
regulating its economic conditions; its effects will reach far be-
yond the adult businesses it explicitly controls. The gay bars
on Christopher Street draw customers from people who come
there because of its sex trade. The street is cruisier because of

233. See Lauren Berlant & Michael Warner, Sex in Public, 24 CRITICAL INQUIRY, 547,
551–52 (1998); Jennifer Cook, Shaken from Her Pedestal: A Decade of New York
City’s Sex Industry Under Siege, 9 N.Y. CITY L. REV. 121, 121–23, 130–39 (2005);
Eva Pendleton & Jane Goldschmidt, Sex Panic!—Make the Connections, HARV. GAY
234. N.Y. City Dep’t of City Planning, Publications: Adult Entertainment Study,
describing the Department of City Planning’s 1994 Adult Entertainment Study).
235. See N.Y. City Zoning Resolution Amend. N 950384 ZRY (Oct. 25, 1995), cited in
also generally Stringfellow’s of N.Y., 91 N.Y.2d at 390–94 (providing the historical
background of the amendments and explaining their provisions in a decision upholding
them against a constitutional challenge).
the sex shops. The boutiques that sell freedom rings and “Don’t Panic” T-shirts do more business for the same reasons. Not all of the thousands who migrate or make pilgrimages to Christopher Street use the porn shops, but all benefit from the fact that some do. . . . The street becomes queer. It develops a dense, publicly accessible sexual culture. It therefore becomes a base for nonporn businesses, like the Oscar Wilde Bookshop. And it becomes a political base from which to pressure politicians with a gay voting bloc.236

Moreover, the legally forced geographic dispersion of sex businesses could put persons identified as sexual minorities at greater risk of violence as they search for businesses and each other in less concentrated areas.237 Also, to the extent that the zoning laws actually cause the dissolution of existing businesses, many people will lose their jobs, perhaps including a disproportionate number of GLBT persons who staff the bars, t-shirt shops, and book stores.238

Some of the mainstream gay rights organizations did tune into the significance of the Giuliani crackdown.239 In fact, new alliances among GLBT populations, porn buyers and sellers, and sex workers arose in response, coalescing around shared interests (rather than shared identity) in what became a long-running political struggle in that city.240 The struggle did nothing to divide good gays from bad, but in fact spanned across the interests of such archetypes. Nor was it an anti-discrimination campaign—formal equality would be difficult even to map on this issue. Some of the legal action did occur under a rights banner (i.e., free expression),241 but engagement with this local zoning law nonetheless had it all: sex (gay and not) and the cultivation and protection of sexual culture, political community, physical safety, and business and employment. This is not formal equality; it is where the rubber hits the road, where bodies gather for intimacy, community, politics, safety, and work. This can be done.

A critical approach has begun to take hold in the legal analysis of sex work, as well. This issue, not unlike the issue of work-family balance, has long endured the grind of irresolvable conundrums that divide reform-minded thinkers. For example, while some people have the idea

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237. See id. at 551, n.9.
238. See Pendleton & Goldschmidt, supra note 233, at 30.
239. See Berlant & Warner, supra note 233, at 551.
240. See Pendleton & Goldschmidt, supra note 233.
that sex work can be a legitimately chosen profession,\textsuperscript{242} at least one subset of feminists view sex work as a manifestation of women’s structural subordination to men and believe it is impossible for a woman to choose that line of work in a genuinely autonomous sense.\textsuperscript{243} In a way, both positions are oriented toward rights and equality: the former involves the idea that women should not be denied (either legally or by virtue of the condescension of the structuralist position) the right to autonomous choice, while the latter involves the idea that women’s structural inequality undermines the authenticity of their autonomy. Both offer compelling arguments in support of their positions, but suffer from a lack of being able to know for sure.

Feminists and others concerned with the issue could carry on this debate indefinitely, and sometimes it feels as if they have. Many of the programmatic approaches that emerge from the debate in those terms have been ideologically driven. Some feminists have called for “partial decriminalization”—that is, “decriminaliz[ing] the activities of sex workers” while leaving the acts of johns and third parties criminal.\textsuperscript{244} This program reflects the view that commercial sex is bad and should be outlawed, but that the sex worker is properly regarded as a victim rather than a culprit. Others have called for “complete decriminalization”—that is, “the repeal of any special criminal legislation dealing with sex work”—or “legalization,” which “involves decriminalization coupled with” any of a variety of regulatory schemes, such as “labor law, employment law, zoning of sex businesses, compulsory medical check-ups, licensing of sex workers, etc.”\textsuperscript{245} While decriminalization proposals might sometimes represent a pragmatic concession to the inevitability of commercial sex, many proponents of decriminalization hold the perspective that the work is legitimate and chosen.\textsuperscript{246}


\textsuperscript{244} Halley et al., \textit{supra} note 214, at 338–39.

\textsuperscript{245} Id. at 339. \textsuperscript{246} See also Law, \textit{supra} note 243, at 552–72 (discussing numerous regulatory regimes).

\textsuperscript{246} See Halley et al., \textit{supra} note 214, at 347 (Chantal Thomas, subpt. author) (explaining two feminist perspectives on prostitution and trafficking as “‘structuralist’ or radical
Feminist advocates of these two types seem to “imagine their favored criminal law reform to operate simply by actually eliminating precisely and only the conduct it outlaws” without contemplating how the different components of the formal legal regime might, combined with varying levels of enforcement, constitute the bargaining conditions among the relevant parties and affect the kinds of choices sex workers and others make. This tunnel vision might easily be the result of the discourse in which many advocates are engaged, in which the autonomy or victimhood of the sex worker, and the resulting legitimacy or not of the work, is the overriding point.

Is there a reformist approach to sex work that avoids the tedium of the dispute over autonomy? Can we generate any new law reform proposals or think about this issue in any other way?

Eliyanna Kaiser, Executive Editor of $pread Magazine (a magazine about the sex industry that appears to be aimed primarily at a sex-worker readership), speaking on a panel at Harvard Law School, pointed to the concrete significance of some specific legal conditions, such as whether the volume of condoms on one’s person at the time of arrest is admissible as evidence of criminal conduct; if so, we might expect sex workers not to carry a volume sufficient to protect themselves and their customers on a given night. If the home of the john is the venue least subject to police intrusion and enforcement, then sex workers might be more vulnerable to violent johns than they would be given a broader choice of locales with low arrest risk. (This could also drive up the price of sex in a car.) If the exchange of sex for money is legal, but the act of soliciting is not (as in Canada), then street sex workers will be forced to make snap decisions about whether to get into a car with a john, lacking the time to linger in the car window and assess the safety of the situation, again, leaving them more vulnerable than necessary. In Sweden, sex work has been decriminalized, but the john’s act of pur-

247. Id. at 340 (offering hard-nosed ideas, guided by insights drawn from American Legal Realism, for shifting the analysis of various feminist legal concerns, including sex work, toward consequentialism and cost–benefit analysis).
249. Id.
chasing sex is criminal. Kaiser claims that the results have been declining prices and a shrinking client population, with many of the remaining johns being the most anti-social and dangerous.

Sex work is not just a women's issue but a GLBT issue as well in that the GLBT population, including its youth, is over-represented in the industry. The pertinence of some legal and economic conditions might vary by sub-population. For example, the availability and cost of hormones or sex reassignment surgeries would form a background condition for at least some transgender sex workers whose choices might be partially determined by powerfully felt needs for medical treatments for which they lack insurance coverage. Access to decent and affordable child care, on the other hand, would probably be a more prominent concern for mothers in the trade who might leave their children sleeping

252. Id. See also Halley et al., supra note 214, at 396 (Hila Shamir, subpt. author) (discussing the Swedish model citing Lag om fòbud mot köp av sexualla [Svensk författningsamling [SFS] 1999:408] (Swed.), revoked and replaced in 2005 by Brotsbalken [BrB] [Criminal Code] 6:11 (Swed.).

253. See also Halley et al., supra note 214, at 396 (Hila Shamir, subpt. author) (observing that while structuralist feminists view the Swedish legal reform as a triumph, critics argue that sex work merely “went deeper underground” which resulted in “worse working conditions, lower pay, greater dependence on pimps, and higher health risks to sex workers”); Law, supra note 243, at 568–69 (“[P]rostitute activists argue [that laws punishing customers will cause m]en who are married, with respectable careers and a reputation to protect,” to avoid the risk of exposure, while “men who are criminally inclined . . . will not be discouraged.”). Kaiser also reports the fascinating consequence in Sweden of women posing as sex workers in order to rob johns, who cannot report the robberies without risking arrest for having attempted to purchase sex. Kaiser, supra note 248.

254. This is not to deny that sex work and its regulation have significant implications for women. Mary Joe Frug’s argument that anti-prostitution rules have productive effects on women by “formally preserving the distinction between legal and illegal sexual activity,” effectively presenting women with a choice between the role of wife/mother and that of whore, suggests that the regulation of sex work has significance for women generally, not merely for those who practice the trade. See Mary Joe Frug, A Postmodern Feminist Legal Manifesto, in Postmodern Legal Feminism 125, 134 (1992).


256. See Estes & Weiner, supra note 255, at 61 (explaining that access to such treatments has been an important area of law reform by the major GLBT law reform organizations). See, e.g., GLAD: Our Work: Cases: In re Rhiannon O’Donnabhain, http://www.glad.org/work/cases/in-re-rhiannon-odonnabhain/ (last visited Mar. 16, 2009) (describing GLAD’s work in an ongoing dispute in U.S. Tax Court over whether sex reassignment surgery is a deductible medical expense).
at home at night with the idea that the neighbor has one ear out for them, but who feel less comfortable leaving them alone during the day-time. Other conditions, such as the nature and extent of police enforcement and/or abuse, would be of universal concern, even if the conditions themselves differ by sub-population, venue (e.g., escort services vs. street prostitution), neighborhood, and so on.

In any case, the conditions on the ground are likely to be factors in each person’s decision about whether to engage in sex work, as well as what kind or how much to engage in, how much risk to take in pursuit of a trick, whether to serve as police informants, and so on. If one’s concern is with the safety and well-being of sex workers, these sorts of concrete legal conditions might be good places to intervene. Abstract and irresolvable debates about autonomy seem less promising. We could insist on ideological victory (“I chose this work!” “No, you didn’t!”), or hold our breath for the arrival of true equality between men and women, gays and straights, or trans and non-trans people to see who was right, but if we tune our legal minds to a different channel, we might actually be able to change some legal conditions that have concrete effects on real people’s lives.

In the transgender domain, reformers have succeeded in getting some state and local anti-discrimination laws enacted and have had mixed results in obtaining anti-discrimination coverage by other means. Some of these efforts surely have raised the profile of the issue and emboldened and organized the constituency. On the other hand, they come with the same hazards discussed above (identity production/entrenchment, provocation of competing rights, obscuring of law reform possibilities other than formal equality, etc.).

257. Sylvia Law reports that in France, a feminist legislator named Marthe Richard was a moving force behind legislation that closed the brothels in that country, but that after the legislation took effect and the apparent consequences were increased “venereal diseases, public solicitation, . . . police corruption . . . [and sex workers’ dependency] upon pimps,” she then attempted to reverse her previous reform. Law, supra note 243, at 555–56. Based on this telling, Marthe Richard is my feminist heroine, because she bravely permitted the consequences of the initial reform to dislodge her from a position rooted in ideology.

258. See supra Part II.B.2 (discussing ENDA).

259. An example of a competing right that might be provoked by pro–trans rights argumentation is the right of women not to encounter biological males in a public women’s restroom. Cf. Goines v. W. Group, 635 N.W.2d 717, 721, 726 (2001) (dismissing discrimination claim made by a transgender-employee plaintiff). In Goines, the defendant-employer understood the complaints of the other women employees against their transgender co-worker for using the women’s restroom to be “a hostile work environment concern.” Id. at 721.
Widespread public recognition of gender identity concerns and of transgender people is comparatively recent, so some reformers might be inclined to follow the anti-discrimination, equal rights, normalization reform model upon which pro-gay law reformers have most often relied. There are, however, other options.

Some thinkers in this area have been keenly attentive to the power of all sorts of low-profile bureaucratic rules to produce gender while regulating daily life at the micro level. Dean Spade, for example, has written an elaborate analysis of conflicting standards for establishing one’s changed sex for purposes of state motor vehicle departments, the Social Security Administration, and state vital statistics bureaus, or for purposes of placement in prisons, homeless shelters, group homes for foster children, or other typically sex-segregated settings. As Spade explains,

[T]he terms and categories used in the classification of data gathered by the state do not merely collect information about pre-existing types of things, but rather shape the world into those categories, often to the point where those categories are taken for granted by most people and appear ahistorical and apolitical.

Taken for granted though they may be, the criteria for placement in the categories are wildly inconsistent. Spade demonstrates a clash among formal and discretionary bureaucratic definitions of male and female for all sorts of purposes. To qualify as a sex other than the one originally assigned at birth, the Social Security Administration, for example, requires medical documentation of sex reassignment surgery, while state motor vehicle departments may maintain any of a range of requirements, from sex reassignment surgery to a physician’s letter regarding the person’s predominant gender identity, to a court order based on what could easily be ad hoc judicial criteria for sex assignment, to a case-by-case


\[262.\] Spade, supra note 261, at 745.

\[263.\] Id. at 762.

\[264.\] Id. at 771–72.
determination relying on a department employee’s “common sense” view.\textsuperscript{265} Likewise, policy-makers and front-line personnel at sex-segregated facilities can make any of a wide range of decisions that determine who gains access to, for example, a particular shelter, dorm or bathroom.\textsuperscript{266} Such placement obviously could have an impact on a person’s physical safety (i.e., if one is perceived to be in the wrong place).\textsuperscript{267}

Moreover, conflicting determinations of a person’s sex can cause additional trouble in this era of the War on Terror, as a result of such practices as “batch checking” in which “different data-gathering agencies compare records to find individuals with non-matching information” in an effort to uncover falsely obtained documents.\textsuperscript{268} If the identifying information held on a single individual by multiple agencies does not line up, it can result in suspension of a driver’s license or notification of the problem to a person’s employer.\textsuperscript{269}

Spade calls in his article for a large-scale reduction in the use of gender as an identifying term, and asks readers not to take for granted that every bureaucratic entity is entitled to maintain gender-related information.\textsuperscript{270} This may or may not be the right solution to the problems he raises. To my mind, the great value of Spade’s analysis is that it draws attention away from the simple call for anti-discrimination coverage and toward lower profile rules that can have an imminent impact on a person’s safety, employment, licensure, or access to facilities or services. Moreover, rather than neglecting to notice the ways in which laws—even good laws—produce identity, Spade zeroes in precisely on the law’s identity-productive capacities. I doubt that Spade or anyone else can come up with a way to avoid the legal production of identity altogether, but it is still worthwhile, again for purposes of a fully informed strategic calculus, to evaluate what is being produced by the law’s categories and how that affects real life.\textsuperscript{271} Law reformers in this area can choose to run

\textsuperscript{265} Id. at 772.
\textsuperscript{266} Id. at 775–77.
\textsuperscript{267} Id. at 753.
\textsuperscript{268} Id. at 799–801.
\textsuperscript{269} Id.
\textsuperscript{270} Id. at 803, 819–20.
\textsuperscript{271} A group of activists, academics, and others came together in 2006 to issue a statement entitled “Beyond Same-Sex Marriage” that advocates a reworking of the distribution mechanisms for such benefits as health coverage in a way that would deprivilege the marital couple. See BEYOND SAME-SEX MARRIAGE: A NEW STRATEGIC VISION FOR ALL OUR FAMILIES AND RELATIONSHIPS (2006), http://www.beyondmarriage.org/BeyondMarriage.pdf. They point to polyamorous relationships, friends or siblings living together, adults living with and caring for elderly parents, and other arrangements, and urge the allocation of benefits in ways that would not disadvantage
headlong down the path of normalization and rights, or they can try instead to engage the low-profile rules that are quietly producing gender identity and distributing jobs, safety, and services.

The law reform approaches described above do not share a focal equality objective. Read one after another, their goals might seem a bit dispersed, but that is exactly the point. What they share is attentiveness to legal conditions happening at the ground level rather than at the height of constitutional vindication. Their aims are varied but concrete, in the details of daily life.

None is intended (by me) as a specific law reform proposal. Rather, I collect, summarize, and thematize them to demonstrate that there are alternatives to the dominant gay rights agenda and that to critique that agenda and highlight its costs does not leave reformers with nothing to do. Full throttle engagement in the monumental confrontation between moralism and rights might be the most visible option, but it is not the only option. Strategic thinking should involve thorough evaluation of many viable possibilities. This section is meant to bring a handful of those possibilities into view and to promote a critical approach to agenda-setting.

IV. Conclusion

Rights such as equality are limited in their capacity to advance the full range of interests of multiple sexual and gender constituencies and every representation of these constituencies hazards exclusion and harm. This is not to say that conventional equality-seeking strategies have no benefits or should never be used. Rather, the point has been to confront their costs and to demonstrate that, despite how things may seem under people in these groupings. Id. The statement does not oppose same-sex marriage, but rather urges that same-sex marriage not serve as the “only strategy” for increasing recognition of family forms and redistributing benefits. Id. While I sympathize with the overarching goal of getting “beyond same-sex marriage” and the good will of this group toward people living in all sorts of ways and needing access to societal benefits, the statement comes off as naïve, particularly in its concluding call for a “future where all people will be truly free.” Id. The drafters seem to imagine that there is some way in which the government could recognize everything as legitimate, and not be guilty of any norm-setting. I would urge thinkers inclined to an ideal of getting the government out of our lives or, conversely, having the government legitimize every conceivable formation, to recalibrate their analysis to the very specific effects of each law or doctrine and its norm-setting and distributive capacities. Instead of hoping that a strong push in one direction or the other will remedy a mass of inequalities all at once, assess each detail for its costs and benefits and make difficult judgment calls, sometimes between costs for one constituency one cares about and benefits to another.
culture war conditions, they are not the only options for constructing a law reform agenda. The approaches presented as examples in this paper are not silver bullets and may well carry costs of their own, but I hope they will contribute something useful to a process of re-imagining the possibilities for reform.