Casey Carnnia

Professor Kastens

English 112

20 January 2014

Marriage, the official act of forming a family, is a civil right for homo and heterosexual couples alike

Same-sex marriage is a controversial subject. Religious dogmas, the tendency to follow social norms, phobias born out of ignorance, and general difficulty for heterosexual majority to imagine a homosexual life are but a few of the pitfalls that cause confusion when thinking about this subject. We aim to propose a teleological argument that puts homosexual marriage on equal footing with traditional marriage between a man and a woman. Once we arrive at this state of equality between the two ideas, it is easy to join Congressman John Lewis[[1]](#footnote-1) in declaring that segregation of same-sex couples is discriminatory and thus not permissible in our post-civil-rights era.

Even though wanting to belong to a group that provides mutual benefits is a natural tendency for humankind, the social animal, all cultures have reserved a specific distinction for marriage. The widest definition of marriage is an officially recognized union that forms a family. This obligates us to define family. Let us examine the definition of family by looking at its form and its function.

The popular image of a father, mother and children as a family is recognizable across the world. Even the U.S. Census Bureau makes a distinction between a family and a household. This classic definition based on the work of anthropologist like George P. Murdock from first half of the nineteenth century is not the conclusive definition of family form today[[2]](#footnote-2). Sales teams, military units, religious congregations, athletic clubs as well as other groups that want to exhibit a collective commitment towards a singular goal refer to themselves as a family. This observation affords us a wider perspective on family’s form.

In expanding the definition of family’s form, we have not strayed too far from the median. The unit consisting of: Mom, dad and kids, though easy for us to conjure, is not a universal composition of family. Multigenerational families are still more prevalent across the world, though declining in numbers. The nuclear family is still a new concept and may turn out to be a fad; a phase born out of economical necessities of our urban lives. This is to say that the composition of family members has never been set in stone. Thus, we can declare that family defined by function is a superset to family defined by form.

Global variety in definition of family is not limited to form, but it also includes function. Some families, expanded and intrusive, dictate the future of their children through arranged marriages. Some are so paternally dominated that see no reason for the wife to continue living after the husband dies; Known as Sati or widow burning. In contrast, the fundamentalist function of family, which focuses on procreation, is too limiting. Modern family, free from dogmas, has a more inclusive form and a more pragmatic function. A function based on cohabitation and mutual benefit; a diversification that minimizes uncertainties of life in a dynamic society.

Consequently, such an inclusive definition of family’s form allows us smooth transition when studying a family’s function. We are free to speculate ideals of support, cooperation, mentoring, and parenting as the bases or telos of forming a family. The realization that the ability to perform a sexual act that produces an offspring is not a mandatory condition for forming a family is very liberating. We are safe to assume that if the traditional childless marriages were valid so is the proposition of a union that lacks that functionality, namely a same-sex one[[3]](#footnote-3).

The assertion that procreation is not an integral part of forming a family is an easy concept to accept. Adult members of human species are capable of providing for and parenting children that are not of their own blood relation. Foster parents, single parents, and adopted parents are prevalent examples of this concept in our society.

So far, we have initially pointed out that expanding the form of family and making it more inclusive is possible without harming the institution. Subsequently, we demonstrated that the function of family is also elastic and allows refining. Now we need to consider the officially recognized aspect of forming a family, namely marriage.

Looking at this vista of human activity, we cannot help but to notice the lofty presence of longevity. It seems that the concept of family, inclusive of children or not, automatically demands an idealistic hope of permanence. It is reasonable to want the union to last into the latter parts of our lives, when we are feral and venerable. Such a contract that, at the very least, is entered into with the hope of perpetuity is an important one. Members of a community moved to form such a union rightfully seek to proclaim it in public and rely on the community’s official recognition to add gravity to their solemn decision. The added complexities of our American way of life: dominance of contract law, vibrant court system, complicated tax rules, edge cases regarding medical procedures, and sovereignty of states and patchwork of legal systems that it generates only amplify the necessity of official recognition of such unions.

The combination of individuals that form a family is not a sum that represents the individual parts. Insisting that a family have a certain makeup does not insure the success of the union. Bright, accomplished children from single parent homes, productive families that took in their nieces or nephews, and effective foster parents are all around us. I am reminded of the story of *Ann of Green Gables*, a bright orphan raised in a farming family that consisted of an old woman and her old brother.

History has also proved that a family does not have to be strictly homogeneous. We have long learned to trust the viability of families formed by people of different color or creed. Though not long ago the traditionalist would have dismissed such arrangements as unviable, our own president Obama is the product of such a family.

In dissecting a modern family and evaluating its parts one fells quite safe to take a position that assumes viability of a family based on the moral, educational, financial, emotional and ethical qualities of its members. In contrast, the position that values a family’s resemblance of traditional makeup can be tenuous at best. A natural evolution of our society as a whole dictates that we are free to form a tight bond with whomever we see fit to be our family. This person could be from a different social class, a different religion, a different color, a different country, or the same sex.

The modern family, at its best, is a deliberate union that answers fundamental needs of sexual satisfaction and emotional belonging as well as abstract ideas of cooperation and future building. It then graduates to consider the feasibility of having children. Perhaps, that the golden ideal of forming a family is to make a commitment to a person that has similar enough aim for the future allowing the pair to support each other as they labor toward that goal.

Naturally, a period of independence after leaving the protection of our parents’ home is there but conceivably more young people postpone marriage to allow time to find such a valuable partner. This is perfectly in line with our evolutionary growth. This natural behavior, among members of our society, points to the fact that forming a family depends on far more then mating compatibilities. The freedom to look for a life partner without the burden of having to compromise on one’s sexual orientation­­­ is invaluable.

Based on the premise that marriage is an officially recognized union and having established that parenting children is not exclusive by blood line, we have been able to demonstrate that neither form nor functions of family are harmed by inclusion of same-sex couples. We have changed the ultimate aim of marriage to be a construct for cooperation rather than one for reproduction. This logic allows us to declare marriage as a civil right rather than a privilege bestrode on a procreating subset of the community.

Works Cited

# Lewis, John. “Rep. John Lewis is a Southerner for the Freedom to Marry.” Online video clip. *YouTube*. FreedomToMarry, 23 Feb. 2014. Web. 10 Apr. 2014.

Holland, Aubry. “The Modern Family Unit: Toward a More Inclusive Vision of the Family in Immigration Law” *California Law Review*. 96 (2008): 1051-52. Web. 1 Apr. 2014.

Graff, Gilda. “The Name of the Game is Shame: the Effects of Slavery and Its

Aftermath” *Journal of Psychohistory,* 39(2).(2011)133-144.Web.19 Jan. 2013.

Tischler, Henry L. *Introduction to Sociology.* 9th ed. Belmount: Wadsworth pub company, 2007. Print.

1. Lewis, John. “Rep. John Lewis is a Southerner for the Freedom to Marry.” Online video clip. YouTube. FreedomToMarry, 23 Feb. 2014. Web. 10 Apr. 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tischler, Henry L. Introduction to Sociology. 9th ed. Belmount: Wadsworth Pub Company, 2007. Print. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Holland, Aubry. “The Modern Family Unit: Toward a More Inclusive Vision of the Family in Immigration Law” California Law Review. 96 (2008): 1051-52. Web. 1 Apr. 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)