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Beyond Marriage? Yes, Way Beyond

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A group of liberal intellectuals and activists has released a statement calling for the nation to transcend contentious debates over same-sex marriage and sexuality by, in effect, abolishing marriage as a social norm and institution.

For some time now, many of us have been arguing that the debate over same-sex marriage is really a debate over the survival of marriage in the culture. This [new statement](#), published as an advertisement in *The New York Times* and garnering considerable media attention, proves the point.

On the one hand, this debate reveals a split in the ranks of homosexual activists. Some see the legalization of same-sex marriage as a way to advance the normalization of homosexuality in the culture. Other gay activists see the focus on marriage (even on pairing and monogamy) as a sell-out to heterosexual norms.

Now, the [Beyond Marriage](#) group turns this second position into a manifesto. In their words:

Marriage is not the only worthy form of family or relationship, and it should not be legally and economically privileged above all others. While we honor those for whom marriage is the most meaningful personal – for some, also a deeply spiritual – choice, we believe that many other kinds of kinship relationship, households, and families must also be accorded recognition.

How far “beyond marriage” do they want the society to go? The group calls for “legal recognition for a wide range of relationships, households and families – regardless of kinship or conjugal status,” “separation of church and state in all matters, including regulation and recognition of relationships, households and families,” and, most tellingly, “freedom from state regulation of our sexual lives and gender choices, identities and expression.”

In a list of specific arrangements that illustrate what the group intends to normalize, they list “queer couples who decide to jointly create and raise a child with another queer person or couple, in two households.” When this group says “beyond marriage” they mean it. Those proposals take us about as far “beyond marriage” as we can go — eliminating virtually nothing as a possibility. Consider this statement:

So many of us long for communities in which there is systemic affirmation, valuing, and nurturing of difference, and in which conformity to a narrow and restricting vision is never demanded as the price of admission to caring civil society. Our vision is the creation of communities in which we are encouraged to explore the widest range of non-exploitive, non-abusive possibilities in love, gender, desire and sex – and in the creation of new forms of constructed families without fear that this searching will potentially forfeit for us our right to be honored and valued within our communities and in the wider world. Many of us, too, across all identities, yearn for an end to repressive attempts to control our personal lives. For LGBT and queer communities, this longing has special significance.

The [published signatories](#) to the statement include Mimi Abrovovitz, John D’Emilio, Martin Duberman, Barbara Ehrenreich, Marvin Ellison, Judith Plaskow, Blanche Wiesen Cook, Cornel West, and a host of others.

Writing in *The Weekly Standard*, Ryan T. Anderson understands where this inevitably leads:

The stated goal of these prominent gay activists is no longer merely the freedom to live as they want. Rather, it is to

force you, your family, and the state to recognize and respect their myriad choices. The result of meeting these demands will be a culture, a legal system, and a government that considers a monogamous, exclusive, permanent sexual relationship of child-bearing and child-rearing nothing more than one among many lifestyle choices. The claim that marriage is normative for the flourishing of spouses, children, and society—not to mention any attempt to enshrine in law this unique human good—would be considered bigotry. In other words, marriage as a social institution would be destroyed.

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