



# **Beyond (Straight and Gay) Marriage: Valuing All Families under the Law (Queer Ideas)**

*Nancy D. Polikoff, Michael Bronski*

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The debate over marriage equality for same-sex couples rages across the country. *Beyond (Straight and Gay) Marriage* boldly moves the discussion forward by focusing on the larger, more fundamental issue of marriage and the law. The root problem, asserts law professor and LGBT rights activist Nancy Polikoff, is that marriage is a bright dividing line between those relationships that legally matter and those that don't. A woman married to a man for nine months is entitled to Social Security survivor's benefits when he dies; a woman living for nineteen years with a man or woman to whom she is not married receives nothing.

Polikoff reframes the debate by arguing that all family relationships and households need the economic stability and emotional peace of mind that now extend only to married couples. Unmarried couples of any sexual orientation, single-parent households, extended family units, and myriad other familial configurations need recognition and protection to meet the concerns they all share: building and sustaining economic and emotional interdependence, and nurturing the next generation.

Couples should have the choice to marry based on the spiritual, cultural, or religious meaning of marriage in their lives, asserts Polikoff. While marriage equality for same-sex couples is a civil rights victory, she contends that no one should have to marry in order to reap specific and unique legal results.

A persuasive argument that married couples should not receive special rights denied to other families, Polikoff shows how the law can value all families, and why it must.

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