Lawrence and Same-Sex Marriage Bans: On Constitutional Interpretation and Sophistical Rhetoric

Mark Strasser

Follow this and additional works at: https://brooklynworks.brooklaw.edu/blr

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://brooklynworks.brooklaw.edu/blr/vol69/iss3/12

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals at BrooklynWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Brooklyn Law Review by an authorized editor of BrooklynWorks.
Lawrence and Same-Sex Marriage Bans

ON CONSTITUTIONAL INTERPRETATION AND SOPHISTICAL RHETORIC

Mark Strasser

I. INTRODUCTION

In Lawrence v. Texas, the United States Supreme Court struck down Texas's sodomy law. The majority carefully made clear that it was not deciding whether the right to marry a same-sex partner was constitutionally protected, but instead was focusing on the criminal aspects of the prohibition at issue. Justice Scalia implied in dissent that the Court had abandoned principled constitutional interpretation and might well eventually recognize the right of same-sex couples to marry. While the Court is unlikely to recognize such a right in the near future, the right of same-sex couples to marry follows from the right-to-marry jurisprudence existing prior to Lawrence. Lawrence is important not because it recognized a right to same-sex marriage but because it overruled a decision that had falsely been thought to bar the right to marry a same-sex partner. This Article examines Lawrence in light of McLaughlin v. Florida, Loving v. Virginia, and the right-to-

© 2004 Mark Strasser. All Rights Reserved.

1 Trustees Professor of Law, Capital University Law School, Columbus, Ohio.

1 539 U.S. 558, 123 S. Ct. 2472 (2003) [hereinafter Lawrence].


4 388 U.S. 1 (1967).
marry jurisprudence more generally, concluding that Lawrence makes even clearer that the Constitution protects same-sex marriage, even if the current Court is unlikely to recognize that.

Part II of this Article examines Lawrence, contrasting it with Bowers v. Hardwick and discussing what Lawrence says and does not say about the right to marry a same-sex partner. This part ultimately concludes that although Lawrence undermines the argument against gay marriage, it does not expressly recognize that right. Part III examines the jurisprudence existing prior to Lawrence. It discusses the equal protection and due process issues implicated by same-sex marriage bans, suggesting that such prohibitions should be struck down on both due process and equal protection grounds. Part IV explains why Lawrence might be thought to involve "marriage," notwithstanding the explicit refusal of the Lawrence majority to address that issue. The Article concludes by suggesting that although same-sex marriage bans violate both equal protection and due process guarantees, it is at best unclear whether this Court will recognize what the Constitution requires in this regard or whether, instead, that recognition will not take place until sometime in the perhaps distant future.

II. LAWRENCE V. TEXAS

In Lawrence v. Texas, the plaintiffs challenged a statute that criminalized intimate, same-sex conduct as a violation of both the equal protection and due process guarantees of the Fourteenth Amendment, and the Court struck it down as a violation of the latter. The decision is likely to be viewed as a watershed in the movement to secure equal rights for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) community, although commentators will long disagree about what the decision means and why it is important.

5 478 U.S. 186 (1986).
7 123 S. Ct. at 2475.
8 Id. at 2476.
9 See id. at 2476, 2484.
10 Compare Richard G. Wilkins, The Constitutionality of Legal Preferences for Heterosexual Marriage, 16 REGENT U. L. REV. 121, 122 (2003) (asserting that Lawrence has little if any impact with respect to whether same-sex marriage is constitutionally protected), with The Supreme Court, 2002 Term: Leading Cases: I. Constitutional Law,
A. Lawrence as Response to Bowers v. Hardwick

One way to understand Lawrence v. Texas is as a substantive and symbolic response to Bowers v. Hardwick. Lawrence removes some of the underpinnings provided by Bowers upon which discrimination against the LGBT community has been rationalized. At the same time, it recognizes the dignity of same-sex relationships and offers hope that the LGBT community will someday enjoy the same rights that others in the United States enjoy.

At issue in Lawrence was Tex. Penal Code Ann. § 21.06(a), which prohibited sexual relations between members of the same sex involving contact between the genitals of one person and the mouth or anus of another, or the penetration of the genitals or the anus of another person with an object. The state did not criminalize the same activities if performed by members of different sexes.

While the Court ultimately struck down the statute as a violation of Fourteenth Amendment due process guarantees, the Court seemed to take the equal protection challenge seriously as well, describing that argument as "tenable."

However, the Court believed it very important to address Bowers directly, since "[i]ts continuance as precedent demeans the lives of homosexual persons."

The dispute in Bowers concerned a Georgia statute that prohibited sexual acts "involving the sex organs of one person and the mouth or anus of another." The statute did not distinguish based on either the sexes of the parties involved or their marital status. Indeed, initially, a married couple as well

---

2. Intimate Personal Relationships, 117 HARV. L. REV. 297, 298 (2003) (asserting that after Lawrence, same-sex marriage bans will only be upheld if narrowly tailored to promote compelling state interests).

12 See Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2476.
13 See id. at 2485 (O'Connor, J., concurring).
14 See id. at 2476, 2484.
15 Id. at 2482.
16 Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2482.
17 Id.
18 See Bowers, 478 U.S. at 188 n.1.
19 See id. at 200 (Blackmun, J., dissenting) ("The sex or status of the persons who engage in the act is irrelevant as a matter of state law.").
as Hardwick challenged the statute, although the couple was dismissed for lack of standing.\(^{21}\)

Hardwick challenged the statute as a violation of the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.\(^{22}\) The Bowers Court understood that an existing line of cases protected the right of privacy and, further, that some of the right of privacy cases recognized rights that "have little or no textual support in the constitutional language."\(^{24}\) The Court claimed, however, that it could "identify the nature of the rights qualifying for heightened judicial protection,"\(^{25}\) namely, those "liberties that are 'implicit in the concept of ordered liberty,' such that 'neither liberty nor justice would exist if [they] were sacrificed,'"\(^{26}\) or "those liberties that are 'deeply rooted in this Nation's history and tradition.'"\(^{27}\) The Court concluded that because "neither of these formulations would extend a fundamental right to homosexuals to engage in acts of consensual sodomy,"\(^{28}\) the right to privacy did not include the right to engage in same-sex relations.

Yet the Court failed to point out that those rights already recognized as falling within the right to privacy also would not have met the test articulated by the Court. For example, the statute at issue in Griswold v. Connecticut,\(^ {29}\) which prohibited using "any drug, medicinal article or instrument for the purpose of preventing contraception,"\(^ {30}\) had been on the books for over eighty years;\(^ {31}\) thus the right to use contraception could not plausibly have been described as either implicit in the concept of ordered liberty or deeply rooted in this nation's history and tradition. The statute prohibiting abortion at issue in Roe v. Wade\(^ {32}\) typified statutes that had

---

\(^{20}\) See id. at 188 n.2.

\(^{21}\) See id.

\(^{22}\) Id. at 189.

\(^{23}\) Bowers, 478 U.S. at 190.

\(^{24}\) Id. at 191.

\(^{25}\) Id.

\(^{26}\) Id. at 191-92 (citing Palko v. Connecticut, 302 U.S. 319, 325, 326 (1937)).

\(^{27}\) Id. at 192 (citing Moore v. City of East Cleveland, 431 U.S. 494, 503 (1977)).

\(^{28}\) Id.

\(^{29}\) 381 U.S. 479 (1965).

\(^{30}\) See id. at 480.

\(^{31}\) See Poe v. Ullman, 367 U.S. 497, 501 (1961) ("The Connecticut law prohibiting the use of contraceptives has been on the State's books since 1879.").

\(^{32}\) 410 U.S. 113 (1973).
been on the books for a century; thus the right to abort could hardly be thought deeply rooted in the nation's history and tradition. The point here is not to suggest that Griswold and Roe were wrongly decided but merely to suggest that the Court offered the wrong test in Bowers for determining whether something falls within the constitutional right to privacy.

The Bowers Court at least implicitly offered another test for determining whether a particular liberty falls within the right to privacy, construing the protected zone as involving family-related decisions and then suggesting that "[n]o connection between family, marriage, or procreation on the one hand and homosexual activity on the other has been demonstrated." The Lawrence Court accepted that family-related decisions are within that protected zone, reaffirming that "our laws and tradition afford constitutional protection to personal decisions relating to marriage, procreation, contraception, family relationships, child rearing, and education." However, the Lawrence Court differed from the Bowers Court in recognizing that same-sex couples can and do have relationships worthy of protection. Indeed, the Lawrence Court criticized the Bowers Court by noting that the latter had mischaracterized the relevant issue: "To say that the issue in Bowers was simply the right to engage in certain sexual conduct demeans the claim the individual put forward, just as it would demean a married couple were it to be said marriage is simply about the right to have sexual intercourse." The Lawrence Court noted that "[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," thereby recognizing that same-sex couples, like different-sex couples, may not merely perform isolated sexual acts but may have relationships in which they find meaning, purpose, and dignity.

---

33 See id. at 174 (Rehnquist, J., dissenting).
34 See Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2493 (Scalia, J., dissenting) (noting that the Roe v. Wade Court had not even attempted to establish that a right to abortion was deeply rooted in the nation's history and tradition).
36 Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2481 (citing Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey, 505 U.S. 833 (1992)).
37 Id. at 2478.
38 Id.
39 Id. at 2482.
The Lawrence Court outlined some of the pernicious effects of Bowers, explaining that "[w]hen homosexual conduct is made criminal by the law of the State, that declaration in and of itself is an invitation to subject homosexual persons to discrimination both in the public and in the private spheres." As the Court noted, "Indeed, Texas itself previously acknowledged the collateral effects of the law, stipulating . . . that the law 'legally sanctions discrimination against [homosexuals] in a variety of ways unrelated to the criminal law,' including in the areas of 'employment, family issues, and housing.'" As an additional point, the Court noted some of the direct and significant effects of a conviction under the statute. For example, as Justice O'Connor noted in her concurring opinion, a conviction would restrict the ability of an individual to pursue various professions in Texas and might require that individual to register as a sex offender were he or she to move to another state.

In overruling Bowers, the Lawrence Court prevented the imposition of some of the harms outlined above and undermined the purported justification for others. Thus, not only may a state no longer seek a conviction under sodomy laws in circumstances like these, but those who once justified discrimination against the LGBT community by arguing that adult, consensual sodomitical relations could be criminalized must now offer another ground upon which to rationalize their desired discrimination.

A separate but related point is that individuals who wish to deny equal rights to members of the LGBT community can no longer support their position by pointing to the Court's tone when addressing sexual orientation issues." Some of the harm Bowers caused was not a result of its substantive holding but rather its tone, which might felicitously be described as

40 Id.
42 Id. at 2482.
43 Id. at 2485-86 (O'Connor, J., concurring).
44 Romer v. Evans, 517 U.S. 620 (1996), also adopted a different tone, although the Court's denial of certiorari in Equality Foundation of Greater Cincinnati, Inc. v. City of Cincinnati, 525 U.S. 943 (1998), made Romer somewhat difficult to interpret since the language of the referendum proposition in Equality Foundation bore a strong resemblance to the language in the referendum proposition in Romer, which the Court held violated constitutional guarantees. 525 U.S. at 943-44 n.2; 517 U.S. at 624.
contemptuous towards those with a same-sex orientation.\textsuperscript{46} By contrast, the \textit{Lawrence} Court showed respect rather than contempt, acknowledging that "adults may choose to enter upon this [same-sex] relationship in the confines of their homes and their own private lives and still retain their dignity as free persons."\textsuperscript{46} While hardly offering a full-fledged endorsement, the Court nonetheless accords a kind of respectability to LGBT people and relationships not accorded in previous decisions.

The \textit{Lawrence} Court addressed the concern that some view sodomitical behavior as violating religious and moral principles, discussing "powerful voices . . . [that] condemn homosexual conduct as immoral."\textsuperscript{47} The Court understood that such views were "shaped by religious beliefs, conceptions of right and acceptable behavior, and respect for traditional family,"\textsuperscript{48} but noted that "the issue is whether the majority may use the power of the State to enforce these views on the whole society through operation of the criminal law."\textsuperscript{49} Concluding that the majority may not, the Court struck down the statute.\textsuperscript{50}

Of course, \textit{Lawrence} also has implications for those not in the LGBT community. By holding that the Due Process Clause protects sodomy, the \textit{Lawrence} Court is presumably invalidating any fornication statues remaining on the books.\textsuperscript{51} A separate question is whether statutes prohibiting adultery or prostitution are also at risk,\textsuperscript{52} although the majority made clear that the case before it did not involve prostitution\textsuperscript{53} and offered language suggesting how the case before it might be distinguished from one involving adultery.\textsuperscript{54} Thus, state statues

\textsuperscript{45} See Neill v. Gibson, 278 F.3d 1044, 1066 (10th Cir. 2001) (Lucero, J., dissenting) (discussing the Bowers Court's contempt towards lesbians and gays); Watkins v. U.S. Army, 837 F.2d 1428, 1453 (9th Cir. 1988) (Reinhardt, J., dissenting), superseded by 847 F.2d 1329 (9th Cir. 1988), withdrawn on reh'g by 875 F.2d 699 (9th Cir. 1989) ("[T]he anti-homosexual thrust of Hardwick, and the Court's willingness to condone anti-homosexual animus in the actions of the government, are clear.").
\textsuperscript{46} Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2478.
\textsuperscript{47} Id. at 2480.
\textsuperscript{48} Id.
\textsuperscript{49} Id.
\textsuperscript{50} See id. at 2484.
\textsuperscript{51} See D.C. CODE ANN. § 22-1602 (2004) (up to six months or $300 for committing fornication); IDAHO CODE § 18-6603 (Michie 2004) (same).
\textsuperscript{52} See Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2490 (Scalia, J. dissenting).
\textsuperscript{53} See id. at 2484.
\textsuperscript{54} See id. at 2478 (suggesting that the state should not set boundaries on relationships "absent injury to a person or abuse of an institution the law protects"). For a discussion of adultery as an abuse of marriage, see City of Sherman v. Henry,
regulating sexual conduct may now have to undergo reexamination, with some being quite vulnerable to constitutional challenge but others being quite likely to withstand an attack on federal constitutional grounds.

Further, a more general point might be made about how the Due Process Clause may be construed in the future. The Lawrence Court eschewed the Bowers history-and-traditions approach and instead suggested that "those who drew and ratified the Due Process Clauses of the Fifth Amendment [and] the Fourteenth Amendment . . . [understood that] times can blind us to certain truths and later generations can see that laws once thought necessary and proper in fact serve only to oppress." The Court understood that this would mean that challenges that might once have been dismissed out of hand by one generation might well be taken seriously by another, and noted that "[a]s the Constitution endures, persons in every generation can invoke its principles in their own search for greater freedom." Here, the Lawrence Court demonstrates that it rejects the static approach to due process analysis, leaving open the possibility that a variety of liberties once considered appropriately subject to state regulation may now be constitutionally protected.

B. Lawrence and the Right to Marry a Same-Sex Partner

Commentators discussing whether the United States Constitution protects the right of same-sex couples to marry will debate both whether and why Lawrence plays an important role in that analysis. Although Justice Scalia suggested in his Lawrence dissent that the decision provides the basis for recognizing same-sex marriage, there are a number of reasons to doubt that the Court is ready to take this step. Lawrence mentions or alludes to same-sex marriage in several places. However, nowhere in the opinion is there a suggestion that members of the Court believe the Constitution protects such a right. Moreover, the opinion does contain

928 S.W.2d 464, 470 (Tex. 1996) ("Adultery by its very nature undermines the marital relationship and often rips apart families.").

55 Id. at 2484.
56 Id.
57 Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2498 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
58 Id. at 2478; id. at 2487-88 (O' Connor, J., concurring); id. at 2490, 2495-98 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
evidence in several places that some members of the Court do not believe the right is protected.

The majority opinion alludes to same-sex unions but refuses to express an opinion about their constitutional status. For example, the Court noted that the Texas criminal statute seeks to "control a personal relationship that, whether or not entitled to formal recognition in the law, is within the liberty of persons to choose without being punished as criminals." Thus, some members of the Court may believe that the Constitution precludes criminalizing voluntary, adult, same-sex relations but does not also require that same-sex unions be given legal recognition. Certainly, this seems to be the view that Justice O'Connor now holds, and it is simply unclear how many other members of the Court share that view.

The Lawrence majority offered a general rule that states should not attempt to set boundaries on relationships "absent injury to a person or abuse of an institution the law protects." The Court did not clarify what it had in mind when discussing abuse of a legally protected institution. Perhaps the Court was thinking of marriage and was suggesting that adulterous relationships are not protected by the right to privacy because they tend to undermine marriages. Or, perhaps the Court was suggesting that recognizing same-sex marriage would involve an abuse of the institution of marriage, notwithstanding that other countries permit such unions to be celebrated.

The Lawrence Court made quite clear that the case before it did "not involve whether the government must give formal recognition to any relationship that homosexual persons seek to enter." That said, however, the Court did offer some

59 Id. at 2478.
60 See id. at 2484 (O'Connor, J., concurring) ("Texas' statute banning same-sex sodomy is unconstitutional.").
That this law as applied to private, consensual conduct is unconstitutional under the Equal Protection Clause does not mean that other laws distinguishing between heterosexuals and homosexuals would similarly fail under rational basis review. Texas cannot assert any legitimate state interest here, such as national security or preserving the traditional institution of marriage.
Id. at 2487-88 (O'Connor, J., concurring).
61 Id. at 2478.
62 See supra note 54.
63 See Michael Paulson, Vatican Warns on Same-Sex Marriage Broad Edict Has Message for Catholic Politicians, BOSTON GLOBE, Aug. 1, 2003, at A1 (noting that Belgium and the Netherlands recognize same-sex marriage and that such marriages have been recognized in Ontario and British Columbia, Canada).
64 Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2484.
very encouraging language in the opinion. For example, the Court noted that when "homosexual conduct is made criminal by the law of the State, that declaration in and of itself is an invitation to subject homosexual persons to discrimination both in the public and in the private spheres." The same point might be made about refusing to recognize same-sex marriages – such a policy is an invitation to discriminate because it says that same-sex couples are somehow unworthy. Indeed, if, as the Court said in Romer v. Evans, an act is unconstitutional when it "classifies homosexuals not to further a proper legislative end but to make them unequal to everyone else," and, as Justice Scalia suggests in his Lawrence dissent, "preserving the traditional institution of marriage is just a kinder way of describing the State's moral disapproval of same-sex couples," then one might expect the Court to recognize the unconstitutionality of same-sex marriage bans.

In criticizing Bowers, the Lawrence Court noted that the "longstanding criminal prohibition of homosexual sodomy upon which the Bowers decision placed such reliance is as consistent with a general condemnation of nonprocreative sex as it is with an established tradition of prosecuting acts because of their homosexual character." The Court thereby tried to undercut the suggestion that traditionally the law had intentionally and specifically imposed unique disabilities on the LGBT community, although one might nonetheless point out that laws aimed generally at nonprocreative acts have been used to justify the imposition of special burdens on those with a same-sex orientation. For example, the law upheld in Bowers was not aimed at the LGBT community in particular, but some claimed that the Court's decision in that case justified imposing unique disabilities on that community. It is worth noting that an analogous approach has been used to justify same-sex marriage bans. The inability of same-sex couples to have a child through their union has been cited as a reason not to

65 Id. at 2482.
67 Id. at 635.
68 Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2496 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
69 Id. at 2479.
70 See Bowers, 478 U.S. 186, 200 (1986) (Blackmun, J., dissenting) ("The sex or status of the persons who engage in the act is irrelevant as a matter of state law.").
71 See Romer, 517 U.S. at 636 (Scalia, J., dissenting) (suggesting that Bowers justifies the imposition of unique disabilities on those with a same-sex orientation).
allow them to marry, even though others unable to have children are not similarly precluded from marrying.

*Lawrence* suggests that the Court will look askance at state attempts to impose a disability on one group and not another if the groups are similarly situated. As Justice Scalia suggests in his dissent, the nonprocreation argument is not a plausible rationale for precluding same-sex couples from marrying, given that the sterile and elderly are allowed to marry. Indeed, it is even more implausible than Justice Scalia seems willing to admit. Given that LGBT couples are having and raising children, the procreation argument supports rather than undermines the claim that same-sex couples should be allowed to marry.

While some of the language and reasoning of the *Lawrence* opinion is very promising, the decision cannot be cited for the proposition that the Constitution protects same-sex marriage. The members of the Court have been careful either to express no opinion on this subject or to suggest that there is no constitutional right to marry a same-sex partner. Given that *Lawrence* leaves open rather than decides this issue, it may be helpful to see whether a case can be made from the jurisprudence existing prior to *Lawrence* for a constitutionally protected right to marry a same-sex partner.

### III. SAME-SEX MARRIAGE AND THE FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT

The right-to-marry jurisprudence has been evolving since the Court in *Loving v. Virginia* described it as "one of the vital personal rights essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness by free men." The Court has recognized the right's importance, both for society as a whole and for the individuals themselves. One key question, then, is whether same-sex

---

72 See Adams v. Howerton, 486 F. Supp. 1119, 1123 (C.D. Cal 1980) ("If propagation of the race is basic to the concept of marriage and its legal attributes, 'marriage' is again impossible and unthinkable between persons of the same sex.").

73 *Lawrence*, 123 S. Ct. at 2498 (Scalia, J., dissenting).

74 See Goodridge v. Dept. of Public Health, 798 N.E.2d 941, 964 (Mass. 2003) ("In this case, we are confronted with an entire, sizeable class of parents raising children who have absolutely no access to civil marriage and its protections because they are forbidden from procuring a marriage license."); Chuck Colbert, *Gay Catholics Refuse to Go Away or Be Quiet*, BOSTON GLOBE, Dec. 31, 2000, at 3 (discussing Catholic lesbian and gay baby boom).

75 388 U.S. 1 (1967).

76 Id. at 12.
marriage would serve the individual and societal interests that different-sex marriages serve.

A. Setting the Stage for Loving

In *Loving*, one of the most important marriage decisions, the Court struck down anti-miscegenation laws in Virginia.\(^7\) The *Loving* Court suggested that the laws violated both equal protection\(^8\) and due process guarantees.\(^9\) Yet a mere three years earlier in *McLaughlin v. Florida*,\(^10\) the Court had been unwilling to express an opinion about the constitutionality of interracial marriage bans.

In *McLaughlin*, the Court examined a Florida statute making interracial fornication and adultery a separate crime.\(^11\) The state justified its law as an attempt to “prevent breaches of the basic concept of sexual decency.”\(^12\) While not quarrelling with the state’s contention that it had a legitimate interest in preventing “illicit extramarital and premarital promiscuity,”\(^13\) the Court suggested that the state’s purposes could be served by statutes of “general application.”\(^14\)

The state of Florida offered another justification for the statute, however, pointing to its interracial marriage ban and arguing that its interracial cohabitation law was “ancillary to and serv[ing] the same purpose as the miscegenation law itself.”\(^15\) The Court rejected this argument “without reaching the question of the validity of the State’s prohibition against interracial marriage.”\(^16\) The Court noted that “even if we posit the constitutionality of the ban against the marriage of a Negro and a white, it does not follow that the cohabitation law is not to be subjected to independent examination under the Fourteenth Amendment.”\(^17\) The Court subjected the

---

\(^7\) 388 U.S. 1 (1967).
\(^8\) See id. at 12 (“There can be no doubt that restricting the freedom to marry solely because of racial classifications violates the central meaning of the Equal Protection Clause.”).
\(^9\) See id. (“These statutes also deprive the Lovings of liberty without due process of law in violation of the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.”).
\(^10\) 379 U.S. 184 (1964).
\(^11\) See id. at 184.
\(^12\) See id. at 193.
\(^13\) Id.
\(^14\) Id. at 194.
\(^15\) *McLaughlin*, 379 U.S. at 195.
\(^16\) Id.
\(^17\) Id.
cohabitation law to this independent examination and found it constitutionally wanting.

In McLaughlin, the Court did not strike down cohabitation laws generally, but only those specifically directed at interracial couples. In Lawrence, the Court struck down not just laws criminalizing same-sex sodomy, but all sodomy laws. It is simply unclear whether the Court will someday follow Lawrence with a decision striking same-sex marriage prohibitions as the Court followed McLaughlin with Loving. However, the past constitutional jurisprudence has privileged marital over non-marital relations and the Lawrence Court suggests that adult, non-marital, consensual relations are protected. Unless the Court is going to invert the traditional priorities and say that same-sex non-marital relations are protected but that same-sex marriage is not, the holding in Lawrence suggests that same-sex marriage may also be protected by the right to privacy.

B. The Right to Privacy

In Lawrence, the Court suggested that Griswold v. Connecticut was “the most pertinent beginning point” for an analysis of the constitutionality of Texas’s sodomy law. The Court noted that Griswold struck down a Connecticut law “prohibiting the use of drugs or devices of contraception” even by married couples. The Griswold Court had “described the protected interest as a right to privacy and placed emphasis on the marriage relation and the protected space of the marital bedroom.” Of course, relying on marital privacy would not seem to be of much help for those challenging Texas’s sodomy statute, given that the statute only applied to non-marital relations. However, the Lawrence Court wrote that “[a]fter Griswold, it was established that the right to make certain

---

68 See Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. 2472, 2482 (2003) ("Were we to hold the statute invalid under the Equal Protection Clause some might question whether a prohibition would be valid if drawn differently, say, to prohibit the conduct both between same-sex and different-sex participants.").
69 There may well be an exception for adulterous relations. See supra note 62.
70 381 U.S. 479 (1965).
71 See Lawrence, 13 S. Ct. at 2476 (discussing Griswold, 381 U.S. 479 (1965)).
72 See id. at 2476.
73 See id. at 2477 (citing Griswold, 381 U.S. at 485).
74 Because same-sex couples are not allowed to marry in Texas, the prohibited relations would presumably be performed by a non-marital couple. See TEX. FAM. CODE ANN. § 2.001 (Vernon 2003).
decisions regarding sexual conduct extends beyond the marital relationship." Here, the Court was presumably referring to Eisenstadt v. Baird, a case that the Court apparently read as protecting not only the right of unmarried individuals to have access to contraception but also to engage in sexual relations, at least if the individuals are adult and their relations are consensual.

It may seem surprising that Justice Scalia did not focus more on the first concurrence in Griswold, in which Justice Goldberg wrote that "it should be said of the Court's holding today that it in no way interferes with a State's proper regulation of sexual promiscuity or misconduct," and in which he and two other members of the Court cited Justice Harlan's dissent in Poe v. Ullman with approval. In his Poe dissent, Justice Harlan argued that the "right of privacy most manifestly is not an absolute. Thus, I would not suggest that adultery, homosexuality, fornication and incest are immune from criminal enquiry, however privately practiced." Yet there may well be a reason that Justice Scalia did not focus on the Griswold concurrence and Poe dissent, which a fuller discussion of Justice Harlan's analysis will bring to light. Justice Harlan argued that the

laws regarding marriage which provide both when the sexual powers may be used and the legal and societal context in which children are born and brought up, as well as laws forbidding adultery, fornication and homosexual practices which express the negative of the proposition, confining sexuality to lawful marriage, form a pattern so deeply pressed into the substance of our social life that any Constitutional doctrine in this area must build upon that basis.

Here, it is clear that Justice Harlan was envisioning a world in which same-sex relations did not occur within the

---

95 See Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2477.
96 405 U.S. 438 (1972).
97 See Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2477 (discussing Eisenstadt).
98 See id. at 2484 ("The present case does not involve minors. It does not involve persons who might be injured or coerced or who are situated in relationships where consent might not easily be refused.").
100 Justice Brennan and Chief Justice Warren joined Goldberg's concurrence.
See Griswold, 381 U.S. at 486.
102 See Griswold, 381 U.S. at 499.
103 Poe, 367 U.S. at 552 (Harlan, J., dissenting).
104 Id. at 546 (Harlan J., dissenting) (emphasis added).
context of a family setting but, instead, outside of one. Whether that was an accurate picture at the time is unclear, but it certainly is not accurate today, given various developments over the past several decades. Same-sex couples are now living together as families.\textsuperscript{106} Sometimes they raise children and sometimes they do not, but in any case it simply is not true that same-sex relations must take place outside of families rather than within them. If the Due Process Clause paradigmatically protects families, then it should also protect LGBT families.

A further point might be noted. Justice Harlan suggested that the constitutional doctrine that provides bulwarks against state interference must begin with the family. That does not suggest that the constitutional doctrine must end there. Rather, Harlan offers a prioritization. Family relationships must be protected even if sexual activity by those outside of a family is not. However, that hardly means that the latter cannot or should not also be protected.

The \textit{Lawrence} Court noted, "When 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."\textsuperscript{106} Here, the Court recognizes that same-sex relations may take place within the context of a relationship, and implies that such relationships are included within the family relationships protected under the Due Process Clause.

In his \textit{Poe} dissent, Justice Harlan distinguished between the state's "power either to forbid extra-marital sexuality altogether, or to say who may marry" and the State's power "when, having acknowledged a marriage and the intimacies inherent in it, it undertakes to regulate by means of the criminal law the details of that intimacy."\textsuperscript{107} Yet, it is not as if the state has absolute discretion with respect to regulating who may marry whom. As the \textit{Loving} Court made clear a mere six years later, state marital restrictions must not violate constitutional guarantees.

One might think that \textit{Loving} does very little to limit the power of the states to decide who can marry and that the states have free reign in this regard as long as they do not classify on the basis of race. Such a view has not been borne out in the

\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Lawrence}, 123 S. Ct. 2472, 2478 (2003).
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Poe}, 367 U.S. at 553 (Harlan J., dissenting).
subsequent jurisprudence. In *Zablocki v. Redhail*, the Court examined a Wisconsin statute that precluded certain Wisconsin residents from marrying without court permission. The state required courts to deny noncustodial parents permission to marry unless they could show that they were meeting and would continue to meet their child support obligations. Redhail, an indigent who wished to marry but who was unable to pay court-ordered support for a child that he had fathered out of wedlock, challenged the statute.

The *Zablocki* Court noted that the "leading decision of this Court on the right to marry is *Loving v. Virginia*," and explained that "[a]lthough *Loving* arose in the context of racial discrimination, prior and subsequent decisions of this Court confirm that the right to marry is of fundamental importance for all individuals." The Court did not limit the class for whom this right was so fundamental by excluding, for example, those either unwilling or unable to have children or those with a same-sex orientation, but said that it was important for everyone. Indeed, Justice Powell in his *Zablocki* concurrence suggested that the decision would have implications for those with a same-sex orientation.

The *Zablocki* Court did not merely announce that the "right to marry is part of the fundamental 'right of privacy' implicit in the Fourteenth Amendment's Due Process Clause," but instead tried to explain why that was so by putting it in the context of those rights that had already been recognized as falling within the right to privacy. The Court noted, "It is not surprising that the decision to marry has been placed on the same level of importance as decisions relating to procreation, childbirth, child rearing, and family relationships," since "it would make little sense to recognize a right of privacy with respect to other matters of family life and not with respect to the decision to enter the relationship that is the foundation of the family in our society."

---

109 See id. at 375.
110 See id.
111 See id. at 378.
112 Id. at 383.
113 *Zablocki*, 434 U.S. at 384.
114 Id. at 399 (Powell, J. concurring).
115 Id. at 384.
116 Id. at 386.
117 Id.
“legitimate and substantial interests” that the statute served,\textsuperscript{118} the Court nonetheless struck down the statute because “the means selected by the State for achieving these interests unnecessarily impinge on the right to marry.”\textsuperscript{119}

\textit{Zablocki} would seem to be very persuasive if not dispositive in the context under discussion here, given that LGBT couples are having and raising children.\textsuperscript{120} If, as \textit{Zablocki} states, it makes little sense to recognize a right of privacy with respect to other matters of family life but not to marriage, then it makes no sense to refuse to recognize the right of same-sex couples to marry.

In \textit{Adams v. Howerton},\textsuperscript{121} a federal district court addressed the validity of a same-sex marriage between an American and an Australian national. The court held that the marriage was invalid even though marriages were “sanctioned between couples who are sterile because of age or physical infirmity, and between couples who make clear that they have chosen not to have children.”\textsuperscript{122} The \textit{Adams} court explained that “if the classification of the group who may validly marry is overinclusive, it does not affect the validity of the classification.”\textsuperscript{123} Yet the court failed to understand that this is one of the reasons that same-sex marriages must be recognized regardless of whether a particular same-sex couple plans to have or raise children. Even were it true that the sole reason to permit members of a class to marry was to enable them to provide a more stable environment in which children might be born and raised, that still would provide justification for recognizing same-sex marriages. The interests implicated in being able to provide a stable, marital home for children apply to both same-sex and different-sex couples, and if those interests ground the right of different-sex couples to marry, they also should ground the right of same-sex couples to marry.

In \textit{Turner v. Safley},\textsuperscript{124} the Court discussed some of the constitutionally significant interests implicated in marriage. Marriages are “expressions of emotional support and public

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{118} \textit{Zablocki}, 434 U.S. at 388.
\item \textsuperscript{119} \textit{Id}.
\item \textsuperscript{120} See supra note 74 and accompanying text.
\item \textsuperscript{121} 486 F. Supp 1119 (C.D. Cal. 1980).
\item \textsuperscript{122} \textit{Id} at 1124.
\item \textsuperscript{123} \textit{Id}.
\item \textsuperscript{124} 482 U.S. 78 (1987).
\end{itemize}
commitment.”\textsuperscript{125} Furthermore, “the commitment of marriage may be an exercise of religious faith as well as an expression of personal dedication.”\textsuperscript{126} Finally, marriage “often is a precondition to the receipt of government benefits.”\textsuperscript{127} Given that all of these interests are also implicated for same-sex couples\textsuperscript{128} and the right to marry is of fundamental importance for all individuals, the right to marry a same-sex partner should be held to be constitutionally protected even bracketing Lawrence.

\textit{Lawrence} does add something to the debate, however. If, as suggested in \textit{Bowers} and reaffirmed in \textit{Lawrence}, the central focus of the substantive due process protections involve family-related matters, such as marriage and having and raising children, then one would expect that if sexual relations for different-sex and same-sex couples are protected even when occurring outside of the family context, then families comprised of same-sex partners should certainly be protected. It may be that Justice Scalia did not want to point to the prioritization that the Court has adopted precisely because this would mean that the existing jurisprudence protects same-sex marriage, especially after \textit{Lawrence}. Thus, the claim would not be that same-sex marriage might be recognized because the Court has given up all reasoning but rather that the Court’s previous jurisprudence compels the legal recognition of such unions. Indeed, Justice Scalia admits as much when he suggests that after \textit{Lawrence} no distinction can “be made between heterosexual and homosexual unions, insofar as formal recognition in marriage is concerned.”\textsuperscript{129}

While Justice Scalia is correct that after \textit{Lawrence} there is no constitutionally viable distinction between the right to marry a same- versus a different-sex partner, he is incorrect insofar as he is implying that there was a constitutionally viable distinction before \textit{Lawrence}.\textsuperscript{130} Even were the state

\textsuperscript{125} Id. at 95.
\textsuperscript{126} Id. at 96.
\textsuperscript{127} Id.
\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Lawrence}, 123 S. Ct. 2472, 2498 (2003) (Scalia, J., dissenting).
\textsuperscript{130} See id. (Scalia, J., dissenting) (“Today’s opinion dismantles the structure of constitutional law that has permitted a distinction to be made between heterosexual
permitted to criminalize sodomy outside of marriage, that would not imply that it could criminalize sodomy within marriage.\textsuperscript{131} Thus, even were Bowers still good law, that would not imply that a same-sex couple who had married could be prohibited from engaging in sexual relations. Nor would it mean that the state could prevent same-sex couples from marrying to prevent them from engaging in "criminal" sodomitical acts. Nonetheless, now that Bowers has been overruled, those specious arguments are no longer even tempting to make.

C. \textit{Equal Protection}

The argument above focuses on the substantive due process protections provided by the Fourteenth Amendment. A separate question is whether same-sex marriage bans violate equal protection guarantees. The comments offered by Justices O'Connor and Scalia in Lawrence suggest that at least four members of the Court are unlikely to accept the equal protection argument,\textsuperscript{132} although these comments also suggest that the Court is going to have to modify its equal protection jurisprudence in order to avoid striking down same-sex marriage bans on that basis.

Justice O'Connor made clear in her concurrence that she would have struck down the Texas statute on equal protection rather than substantive due process grounds.\textsuperscript{133} She suggested that rational basis review itself has tiers. Because "some objectives, such as 'a bare . . . desire to harm a politically unpopular group,' are not legitimate state interests,"\textsuperscript{134} the Court will apply "a more searching form of rational basis review to strike down such laws under the Equal Protection Clause."\textsuperscript{135} Under this more searching form of rational basis review, the Texas statute could not pass constitutional muster.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item 131 See Bowers, 478 U.S. 186, 216 (1986) ("[I]ndividual decisions by married persons, concerning the intimacies of their physical relationship, even when not intended to produce offspring, are a form of 'liberty' protected by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.").
  \item 132 Chief Justice Rehnquist and Justice Thomas both joined Justice Scalia's opinion. See Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2488 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
  \item 133 \textit{Id.} at 2484. (O'Connor, J., concurring).
  \item 134 \textit{Id.} at 2485. (O'Connor, J., concurring) (citing Dept. of Agric. v. Moreno, 413 U.S. 528, 534 (1973)).
  \item 135 \textit{Id.} at 2485 (O'Connor, J., concurring).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Justice O'Connor did not join the Court in overruling *Bowers.* She suggested that the promotion of morality was a rational basis for substantive due process purposes, even if not for equal protection purposes. She explained, “Moral disapproval of this group [those with a same-sex orientation], like a bare desire to harm the group, is an interest that is insufficient to satisfy the rational basis review under the Equal Protection Clause.” She thus would have struck down the Texas statute but would have reserved for another day whether the Due Process Clause precluded a neutral sodomy law.

Justice O'Connor recognized that because the Texas sodomy statute criminalized conduct one might argue that it did not discriminate against persons. However, she reasoned that the statute was “directed toward gay persons as a class” and thus was unconstitutional. Justice O'Connor noted, however, that she would view a challenge to same-sex marriage statutes somewhat differently. She suggested that “[u]nlike the moral disapproval of same-sex relations — the asserted state interest in this case — other reasons exist to promote the institution of marriage beyond moral disapproval of an excluded group.” Justice O'Connor failed to elaborate what those reasons might be, and the question to be answered at some future time is whether, as Justice Scalia suggests, “preserving the traditional institution of marriage’ is just a kinder way of describing the State’s moral disapproval of same-sex couples.” If Justice Scalia is correct, then it may well be very difficult indeed to provide any legitimate rationale for same-sex marriage bans.

At least two points might be made about Justice O'Connor’s apparent willingness to uphold same-sex marriage bans. First, the Wisconsin statute at issue in *Zablocki* was

136 See id. at 2484 (O'Connor, J., concurring).
137 Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2486 (O'Connor, J., concurring).
138 Id. (O'Connor, J., concurring).
139 See id. at 2487 (O'Connor, J., concurring) (“Whether a sodomy law that is neutral both in effect and application [citing Yick Wo v. Hopkins, 118 U.S. 356 (1886)] would violate the substantive component of the Due Process Clause is an issue that need not be decided today.”).
140 See id. at 2485 (O'Connor, J., concurring) (discussing Texas’s claims).
141 Id. at 2487 (O'Connor, J., concurring).
142 Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2488 (O'Connor, J., concurring).
143 Id. (O'Connor, J., concurring).
144 Id. at 2496 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
struck down on equal protection grounds. There, the state had legitimate and substantial reasons for its statute, which nonetheless did not suffice to save it. The class of individuals adversely affected by the statute – the indigent – was not suspect or quasi-suspect. Thus, even if the state were to have a legitimate reason for its same-sex marriage ban and was not simply wishing to express its moral disapproval of same-sex couples, it is not at all clear that the reason would suffice in light of the existing jurisprudence.

Second, it is not at all clear that rational basis review would be appropriate when examining this equal protection challenge. Justice Scalia's comments in his Lawrence dissent suggest why this is so, especially once his misleading analysis of Loving is explained and a more accurate analysis is considered in its stead. Justice Scalia recognized in his Lawrence dissent that the Texas “statute does distinguish between the sexes insofar as concerns the partner with whom the sexual acts are performed: men can violate the law only with other men, and women only with other women.” However, he concluded, “this cannot itself be a denial of equal protection, since its is precisely the same distinction regarding partner that is drawn in state laws prohibiting marriage with someone of the same sex while permitting marriage with someone of the opposite sex.”

Let us bracket his conclusion about whether the Texas statute passes muster under the Equal Protection Clause, especially since a majority of the Court seems to believe that it failed to pass muster even under the rational basis test. Let us also bracket his conclusory statement about whether same-sex marriage bans pass constitutional muster, since that is the matter at issue, and examine why he believes that

---

146 See id. at 388.
148 Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2495 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
149 Id. at 2495 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
150 See id. at 2482 (describing the equal protection argument as “tenable”); id. at 2484-85 (O’Connor, J., concurring) (suggesting the statute is unconstitutional on equal protection grounds).
151 Justice Scalia suggests that the same-sex sodomy ban cannot be unconstitutional because it incorporates the same distinction as the same-sex marriage ban. See id. at 2496 (Scalia, J., dissenting). His statement only makes sense if the same-sex marriage ban does not pass muster, although he does not provide reasons to support its constitutionality.
heightened scrutiny would not be required when examining the constitutionality of such statutes.

Justice Scalia realizes that both the Texas sodomy statute and same-sex marriage bans¹⁵² facially discriminate on the basis of sex, but argues that heightened scrutiny is not necessary for either. He understands that the anti-miscegenation laws at issue in Loving v. Virginia¹⁵³ would seem to be a clear counter-example to his analysis of whether same-sex marriage bans trigger heightened scrutiny, since the laws at issue in Loving "similarly were applicable to whites and blacks alike, and only distinguished between the races insofar as the partner was concerned."¹⁵⁴ However, he argues, the Court in Loving "correctly applied heightened scrutiny, rather than the usual rational-basis review, because the Virginia statute was 'designed to maintain White Supremacy.'"¹⁵⁵

Certainly, he is correct that the Loving Court found that the statutes at issue were designed to promote white supremacy.¹⁵⁶ However, the important issues are whether closer scrutiny was required to discover this invidious motivation and what would have happened had there been no such finding. Consider the Court's analysis in City of Richmond v. J. A. Croson Co.¹⁵⁷ The Court explained, "Absent searching judicial inquiry into . . . race-based measures, there is simply no way of determining what classifications are 'benign' or 'remedial' and what classifications are in fact motivated by illegitimate notions of racial inferiority or simple racial politics."¹⁵⁸ While some members of the Court have argued convincingly that it is sometimes possible to distinguish between benign and malicious discrimination,¹⁵⁹ the discrimination at issue in Loving and, for that matter, at issue in same-sex marriage

---

¹⁵² For an example of such a ban, see TEX. FAM. CODE ANN. § 2.001 (Vernon 2003).

¹⁵³ 388 U.S. 1 (1967).

¹⁵⁴ Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2495 (Scalia, J., dissenting).

¹⁵⁵ Id. at 2495 (Scalia, J., dissenting) (citing Loving, 388 U.S. at 6, 11).

¹⁵⁶ See Loving, 388 U.S. at 11.

¹⁵⁷ 488 U.S. 469 (1989) [hereinafter Croson].

¹⁵⁸ Id. at 493.

¹⁵⁹ See Adarand Constructors Inc. v. Pena, 515 U.S. 200, 243 (1995) (Stevens, J., dissenting) ("There is no moral or constitutional equivalence between a policy that is designed to perpetuate a caste system and one that seeks to eradicate racial subordination.").
bans, can hardly be characterized as benign. In any event, one would not expect Justice Scalia to rely on the purpose of the discriminator when deciding whether exacting scrutiny should be employed for a racial classification.

Justice Scalia's analysis is even more misleading because he mischaracterizes the Loving decision itself. The Loving Court made clear that even had there been no purpose to promote white supremacy, the anti-miscegenation statutes still would have been struck down. Further, even had the Loving Court not expressed this explicitly, the jurisprudence as it has since developed requires that "all racial classifications, imposed by whatever federal, state, or local actor, must be analyzed by a reviewing court under strict scrutiny." The lesson of Loving is not that racial classifications will be examined closely only when designed to promote white supremacy, but that racial classifications will be examined closely to root out invidious discrimination. Indeed, the Court had already made that lesson clear. In McLaughlin v. Florida, there was no showing that the state was trying to promote the superiority of one race over another, and the Court nonetheless struck down the statute expressly classifying on the basis of race. The McLaughlin Court made quite clear that "[j]udicial inquiry under the Equal Protection Clause... does not end with a showing of equal application among the members of the class defined by the legislation." Rather, the "courts must reach and determine the question whether the classifications drawn in a statute are reasonable in light of its purpose."

The claim here is not that marriage statutes that expressly classify on the basis of sex will be treated in the same way as will statutes that expressly classify on the basis of race.

---

160 For a discussion of some of the important interests implicated in marriage that would be denied to same-sex couples were they denied the right to marry, see supra notes 125-28 and accompanying text.

161 Cf. Croson, 488 U.S. at 520 (Scalia, J., concurring) ("[S]trict scrutiny must be applied to all governmental classification by race, whether or not its asserted purpose is 'remedial' or 'benign.'").

162 See Loving v. Virginia, 388 U.S. 1, 12 n.11 (1967) ("[W]e find the racial classifications in these statutes repugnant to the Fourteenth Amendment, even assuming an even-handed purpose to protect the 'integrity' of all races.").


165 See id. at 196.

166 See id. at 191.

167 See id.
The former classifications are subjected to a lower level of scrutiny than are the latter. Nonetheless, the claims are that sex-based classifications should not be subjected to a rational basis test and that, as Justice Scalia himself acknowledges in his *Lawrence* dissent, same-sex marriage bans involve sex-based classifications.9

Perhaps the Court will ultimately find that same-sex marriage bans pass constitutional muster. However, unless the Court is going to modify its current jurisprudence, Justice Scalia is incorrect that a statute disadvantaging same-sex couples and expressly classifying on the basis of sex does "not need to be justified by anything more than a rational basis, which . . . is satisfied by the enforcement of traditional notions of sexual morality." Rather than pass the rational basis test, which merely requires that the "classification drawn by the statute [be] rationally related to a legitimate state interest," such a classification must serve "important governmental objectives and . . . the discriminatory means employed . . . [must be] substantially related to the achievement of those objectives.'

To establish the constitutionality of a sex-based classification, it will not suffice merely to establish that the classification was not motivated out of animus towards one sex or the other. As the Court made clear in *United States v. Virginia,* "a party seeking to uphold government action based on sex must establish an 'exceedingly persuasive justification' for the classification." Indeed, the classification at issue in

---

168 But see United States v. Virginia, 518 U.S. 515, 596 (1996) (Scalia, J, dissenting) (suggesting that the majority had offered "a redefinition of intermediate scrutiny that makes it indistinguishable from strict scrutiny").

169 See supra note 148 and accompanying text.

170 In order for the Court to uphold the constitutionality of same-sex marriage bans, it will have to modify current constitutional jurisprudence in a number of respects. See generally MARK STRASSER, ON SAME-SEX MARRIAGE, CIVIL UNIONS, AND THE RULE OF LAW: CONSTITUTIONAL INTERPRETATION AT THE CROSSROADS (2002).


172 See id. at 2484 (O'Connor, J., concurring) (citing Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Ctr., 473 U.S. 432, 440 (1985)).


175 Id. at 524 (quoting Hogan, 458 U.S. at 724).
Virginia, which arguably was not motivated by animus, nonetheless failed to pass constitutional muster.

It is unclear whether same-sex marriage bans could survive heightened scrutiny. However, in *Baker v. Vermont* the Vermont Supreme Court employed something less than heightened scrutiny and nonetheless held that the state constitution's equal protection analog prevented the state from refusing to accord qualifying same-sex couples the benefits accorded to married couples. By the same token, in *Goodridge v. Dept. of Public Health*, the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts struck down that state's same-sex marriage ban using a possibly heightened rational basis test. While these are state supreme courts interpreting their own constitutions, their striking down the statutes under heightened rational basis tests makes it seem at best unlikely that same-sex marriage bans could withstand heightened scrutiny.

IV. WHY DOES LAWRENCE "INVOLVE" SAME-SEX MARRIAGE?

In his *Lawrence* dissent, Justice Scalia suggests that the majority opinion "does not involve' homosexual marriage only if one entertains the belief that principle and logic have nothing to do with the decisions of this Court." It is worth thinking about why Justice Scalia believes that *Lawrence* "involves" same-sex marriage when the Texas statute

---

176 *See id.* at 580 (Scalia, J., dissenting) (arguing that the "claim that VMI has elected to maintain its all-male student-body composition for some misogynistic reason" has been utterly refuted).

177 *Id.* at 558.


179 *See id.* at 880 n.13 (suggesting that heightened scrutiny would be more difficult to withstand than the scrutiny applied).


181 *See id.* at 889.


183 *See id.* at 961 ("[W]e conclude that the marriage ban does not meet the rational basis test for either due process or equal protection."); *id.* at 959 ("The Massachusetts Constitution protects matters of personal liberty against government incursion as zealously, and often more so, than does the Federal Constitution.").

challenged was Section 21.06(a) of the Texas Penal Code rather than Section 2.001 of the Texas Family Code.

A. Lawrence and the Pre-existing Priorities in Due Process Jurisprudence

Lawrence is important to consider for a number of reasons. It strikes down sodomy laws generally, which not only precludes states from criminalizing adult, voluntary, same-sex relations but also has important implications if the Court is going to adhere to the priorities that it has already articulated as being important in substantive due process jurisprudence. The Court has already made clear that relationships are privileged over relations and that family matters are at the core of what due process protects. If the Constitution protects the right to engage in non-marital sexual relations regardless of the respective sexes of the participants, then it certainly also protects family relationships from state impingement, regardless of whether the family is made up of members of the LGBT community. This protection not only extends to one’s children but to one’s life partner as well. If the previous jurisprudence is not suddenly going to undergo transformation, then Lawrence suggests that substantive due process protects the right to marry a same-sex partner.

B. Lawrence as Representing an Evolution in Attitude

As a separate but related point, Lawrence represents a significant change in tone. Romer v. Evans was an improvement over Bowers because Romer struck down an amendment that disfavorably classified those with a same-sex orientation “not to further a proper legislative end but to make them unequal to everyone else.” The Romer Court made clear that it “is not within our constitutional tradition to enact laws of this sort.”

---

185 TEX. PENAL CODE ANN. § 21.06(a) (Vernon 2003). This is the statute that criminalized certain sexual relations between members of the same sex.
186 TEX. FAM. CODE ANN. § 2.001 (Vernon 2003). This is the statute which precludes same-sex couples from getting married.
187 See supra notes 93-131 and accompanying text.
189 Id. at 635.
190 Id. at 633.
Yet *Romer* was ambiguous in that it was difficult to determine whether the amendment was unconstitutional precisely because "its sheer breadth [was] so discontinuous with the reasons offered for it that the amendment seem[ed] inexplicable by anything but animus toward the class it affect[ed]."\(^{191}\) Were that the amendment’s fatal flaw, then one might expect that the electorate could have achieved a similar result if only it had been more patient and had adopted a piecemeal approach rather than tried to do everything in one fell swoop.\(^{192}\) If that was all that *Romer* stood for, then it would not be particularly supportive of the LGBT community except, perhaps, as a statement that it is impermissible for the state to make members of the LGBT community into pariahs.\(^{193}\)

*Lawrence* does not lend itself to the same kind of minimalist interpretation. While the Court is mysterious about what it will say with respect to the constitutionality of same-sex marriage bans, its tone of acceptance of and respect for members of the LGBT community seems hard to mistake. That change in tone is important if only because it indicates that the Court no longer believes that LGBT individuals are second-class citizens deserving less protection than others.

**C. Lawrence as Laying Bare the Invidiousness of Bowers**

The *Lawrence* Court implied that *Bowers* had invidious effects.\(^{194}\) Yet the *Lawrence* dissent suggests something much stronger. Apparently, some members of the Court have taken *Bowers* to hold as a matter of law that second-class status may be imposed upon an entire group because of moral disapproval of that group.\(^{195}\) This casts a whole new light on the majority and dissenting opinions in *Bowers, Romer*, and *Lawrence*.

In his *Bowers* dissent, Justice Blackmun suggested, "Unlike the Court, the Georgia Legislature has not proceeded on the assumption that homosexuals are so different from other citizens that their lives may be controlled in ways that would

\(^{191}\) Id. at 632.


\(^{193}\) For this view, see Daniel Farber & Suzanna Sherry, *The Pariah Principle*, 13 CONST. COMMENT. 257, 266-70 (1996).

\(^{194}\) See *Lawrence*, 123 S. Ct. 2472, 2482 (2003) (holding that continuing *Bowers* "as precedent demeans the lives of homosexual persons").

\(^{195}\) See infra notes 196-242 and accompanying text.
not be tolerated if it limited the choices of those other citizens. One might have thought that Justice Blackmun was engaging in rhetorical exaggeration. While the Bowers Court had held that same-sex sodomy did not implicate a right deeply rooted in the nation's history and tradition and hence was not protected by the Due Process Clause, the same analysis applied equally to different-sex sodomy as well as to adultery, fornication, and a host of other activities. Thus, the decision, although disappointing and arguably wrong, need not have been doing anything invidious.

Certainly, lack of invidiousness does not excuse the Court's having offered a cramped and willfully blind reading of the case, the issue before it, and the past jurisprudence, thereby creating an arbitrary limit on the reach of substantive due process guarantees that undercut the nation's long-cherished values. Nonetheless, such a result, although deeply regrettable, is hardly the equivalent of a holding that those with a same-sex orientation can be singled out for disfavorable treatment.

Yet, Justice Blackmun may not have been engaging in rhetorical exuberance after all. To see that, it is important to consider Romer and then Lawrence. Romer might seem to be a surprising case to discuss when seeking to get at the "proper" interpretation of Bowers. At issue in Romer was an amendment to the Colorado Constitution (Amendment 2) that precluded

---

197 See Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2479 (suggesting that the longstanding prohibitions of sodomy could be explained in terms of a disapproval of nonprocreative acts).
198 See id. at 2496 (Scalia, J., dissenting) (suggesting that the rationale supporting sodomy statutes also supported a host of other statutes including those prohibiting fornication and adultery).
199 See id. at 2478 (suggesting that Bowers was wrongly decided at the time the decision was handed down).
200 See Bowers, 478 U.S. at 202-03 (Blackmun, J., dissenting) (discussing the Court's "cramped reading").
201 See id. at 201-02, 205 (Blackmun, J., dissenting) (suggesting that the Court was willfully blinding itself to the issue before it).
202 Cf. id. at 214 (Blackmun, J., dissenting) ("[D]epriving individuals of the right to choose for themselves how to conduct their intimate relationships poses a far greater threat to the values most deeply rooted in our Nation's history than tolerance of nonconformity could ever do.").
203 Apparently, Justice Scalia reads Bowers to have held this. See Romer v. Evans, 517 U.S. 618, 636 (1996) (Scalia, J., dissenting) ("In holding that homosexuality cannot be singled out for disfavorable treatment, the Court contradicts a decision . . . pronounced only 10 years ago [namely Bowers].").
gays, lesbians and bisexuals from receiving protected status. The Colorado Supreme Court had struck down the amendment on electoral process grounds, and the Romer Court affirmed but on a different ground, namely, that the amendment violated equal protection guarantees. Of interest here is not whether the amendment should have been struck down as a violation of equal protection or electoral process guarantees but, rather, why Justice Scalia argued that the case "most relevant" to the issue before the Romer Court was Bowers. After all, as Justice Scalia noted in his dissent, Colorado had repealed its sodomy law. Yet, according to Justice Scalia, the fact of the repeal was irrelevant, since if "it is constitutionally permissible for a State to make homosexual conduct criminal, surely it is constitutionally permissible for a State to enact other laws merely disfavoring homosexual conduct." What kind of laws? Those precluding the extension of protected status or, presumably, those precluding marriage.

To see how breathtaking this view is, consider adultery, a practice that is likely not protected even after Lawrence. Consider further that, unlike its action with respect to sodomy, the Colorado Legislature has not repealed its statute prohibiting adultery. One would expect that Justice Scalia

---

204 The amendment read:
No Protected Status Based on Homosexual, Lesbian, or Bisexual Orientation.
Neither the State of Colorado, through any of its branches or departments, nor any of its agencies, political subdivisions, municipalities or school districts, shall enact, adopt or enforce any statute, regulation, ordinance or policy whereby homosexual, lesbian or bisexual orientation, conduct, practices or relationships shall constitute or otherwise be the basis of or entitle any person or class of persons to have or claim any minority status, quota preferences, protected status or claim of discrimination.

See Romer, 517 U.S. at 624.

205 See id. at 625-26.

206 Id. at 626.

207 Id. at 635.

208 For a discussion of why the electoral process analysis was an eminently sensible approach, see generally Mark Strasser, From Colorado to Alaska by Way of Cincinnati: On Romer, Equality Foundation, and the Constitutionality of Referenda, 36 Hous. L. Rev. 1193 (1999).

209 Romer, 517 U.S. at 640 (Scalia, J., dissenting).

210 Id. at 645 (Scalia, J., dissenting) ("Colorado not only is one of the 25 States that have repealed their antisodomy laws, but was among the first to do so.").

211 Id. at 641.

212 See Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. 2472, 2498 (2003) (Scalia, J., dissenting) (suggesting that by overruling Bowers, the Lawrence Court makes it impossible to constitutionally justify same sex marriage bans).

213 See supra note 54 and accompanying text.

would suggest that heavy civil penalties could be imposed on adulterers or even on those who had an adulterous “orientation,”215 such as those married individuals who would kiss or embrace a non-spouse or, perhaps, who had a “tendency or desire to do so.”216 An individual burdened by such a statute might bring an as-applied challenge to establish that he or she had never engaged in adulterous behavior but the statute itself, allegedly, would pass constitutional muster.217

Let us focus on a particular possible civil penalty, namely, not being able to marry. Not so long ago, adulterers were precluded from marrying their paramours218 or, sometimes, marrying at all.219 Yet very few if any jurists and commentators in this day and age would suggest that a state could constitutionally preclude adulterers, much less those with an adulterous orientation, from remarrying. After all, the Zablocki Court struck down the Wisconsin statute at issue precisely because it absolutely prevented some from marrying and in effect coerced others into forgoing their right to marry.220 Yet Justice Scalia’s Romer and Bowers analyses would imply that adulterers could be precluded from marrying or remarrying.

Suppose that we apply Justice Scalia’s approach to the class of fornicators and those who have an “orientation” to fornicate. Presumably, Justice Scalia would suggest that states have the power to preclude fornicators from marrying.221 Those with such an orientation would be allowed to marry if successful in their as-applied challenge, that is, if they could establish that they had not in fact fornicated, but the statute itself could withstand constitutional scrutiny. Basically, this statute would impose possibly severe222 penalties on those

212 For Justice Scalia’s discussion of those with a same-sex orientation, see Romer, 517 U.S. at 642 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
216 See id. (Scalia, J., dissenting).
217 See id. at 643 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
221 For an example of a fornication statute, see VA. CODE ANN. § 18.2-344 (Michie 2003) (classifying fornication as a Class 4 misdemeanor). Presumably, such a statute is unenforceable after Lawrence. See text accompanying supra note 53.
222 Those uninterested in marrying might not consider this a severe penalty.
unwilling to delay having sexual relations until after marriage, and Justice Scalia would suggest that such matters are best left to the wisdom of the legislature.

Consider how the Lawrence dissenters might address a hypothetical case, Rablocki v. Zedhail, involving facts similar to those of Zablocki. Justice Scalia would point out that Zedhail had fathered a child out of wedlock.\textsuperscript{223} He would note that while Wisconsin does not have a law against fornication per se,\textsuperscript{224} it could have such a law without offending the Constitution, because fornication is neither implicit in the concept of ordered liberty nor a right that is deeply rooted in the nation's history and tradition. Justice Scalia would further point out that in Wisconsin the failure to pay child support can result in a felony conviction.\textsuperscript{225} He would then suggest that if "it is constitutionally permissible for a State to make . . . conduct [involving nonsupport] criminal, then surely it is constitutionally permissible for a State to enact other laws merely disfavoring . . . conduct [involving nonsupport].\textsuperscript{226} He would conclude that Wisconsin could preclude Zedhail from marrying, past jurisprudence to the contrary notwithstanding. Justice Rehnquist would either join Justice Scalia’s opinion or would write a separate one suggesting that the right to marry is not the sort of right that invariably triggers strict scrutiny.\textsuperscript{227} Justice Thomas might join either of those opinions or, perhaps, write his own in which he not only rejected the fundamental right to marry but also the general right to privacy.\textsuperscript{228}

These views contradict the current right-to-marry jurisprudence, although that jurisprudence does not require the Court to strike down any and all restrictions on marriage. As the Court made clear in Zablocki, "reasonable regulations that do not significantly interfere with decisions to enter into the marital relationship may legitimately be imposed."\textsuperscript{229} For example, in Sosna v. Iowa,\textsuperscript{230} the Court upheld Iowa’s one-year

\textsuperscript{223} See Zablocki, 434 U.S. at 377-78.
\textsuperscript{224} The state does have a law against public fornication. See Wis. Stat. § 944.15 (2003).
\textsuperscript{225} See Wis. Stat. § 948.22 (2003) (specifying conditions under which failure to pay child support is a felony).
\textsuperscript{227} See Zablocki, 434 U.S. at 407 (Rehnquist, J., dissenting).
\textsuperscript{228} See Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. 2472, 2498 (2003) (Thomas, J., dissenting).
\textsuperscript{229} See Zablocki, 434 U.S. at 386.
\textsuperscript{230} 419 U.S. 393 (1975).
residency requirement for divorce. However, that was precisely because the statute at issue did not deprive the appellant of the right to marry but merely delayed its exercise. Here, we are postulating a complete deprivation of the right to marry. The current due process jurisprudence simply does not permit the deprivation of that right unless the statute at issue "is supported by sufficiently important state interests and is closely tailored to effectuate only those interests."

There are two distinct issues that must not be conflated. One involves the refusal of the Lawrence dissenters to accept or apply current privacy or right-to-marry jurisprudence. Another involves their apparent belief that Bowers permits same-sex marriage bans in particular because, allegedly, Bowers stands for the proposition that those with a same-sex orientation can be singled out for disfavorable treatment, notwithstanding the explicit disavowal in Bowers that equal protection issues were even being addressed.

It should be little wonder that Justice Scalia suggested in his Romer dissent that the challenged amendment was merely "a modest attempt by seemingly tolerant Coloradans to preserve traditional sexual mores against the efforts of a politically powerful minority to revise those mores through use of the laws." On his view, Bowers established that it was permissible for the states to impose any of a number of disabilities on members of the LGBT community, and Colorado had not chosen to exercise that power as fully as it might have.

When the Romer Court wrote that a state cannot "deem a class of persons a stranger to its laws," it was rejecting a view that the Lawrence and Romer dissenters actually seem to hold, namely, that Bowers permits a kind of open season on

231 See id. at 410.
232 See id.
233 See Zablocki, 434 U.S. at 388.
235 See Bowers, 478 U.S. 186, 196 n.8 (1986) ("Respondent does not defend the judgment below based on the Ninth Amendment, the Equal Protection Clause, or the Eighth Amendment."). See also Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. 2472, 2486 (2003) (O'Connor, J., concurring) ("The only question in front of the Court in Bowers was whether the substantive component of the Due Process Clause protected a right to engage in homosexual sodomy. Bowers did not hold that moral disapproval of a group is a rational basis under the Equal Protection Clause to criminalize homosexual sodomy when heterosexual sodomy is not punished.") (citation omitted).
236 Romer, 517 U.S. at 636 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
237 Id. at 635-36 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
members of the LGBT community. The Romer and Lawrence dissenters should be commended for their forthrightness. They do not merely suggest with a wink and a nod that a neutral law might slyly be applied in a way that would disadvantage a particular group without running afoul of Yick Wo limitations. Rather the Romer dissent boldly argues that Bowers permits members of the LGBT community to be singled out for disadvantageous treatment and the Lawrence dissent implies that discrimination against the LGBT community in particular is legitimate and a constitutional right. Rather than engaging in rhetorical exaggeration, the Bowers dissents and the Romer and Lawrence majority decisions almost understate the view that they are opposing. If that opposing view is not invidious, it seems difficult to imagine what would qualify.

D. Lawrence and Same-Sex Marriage

Even before Lawrence, the constitutionally significant interests established in the right-to-marry jurisprudence were equally applicable to same-sex and different-sex couples. Both types of couples may have children to raise and may consider marriage as an expression of emotional support, public commitment, and religious faith. Some commentators would explain the apparent anomaly in the failure to recognize the unconstitutionality of same-sex marriage bans by talking about a "gay exception," while others would simply claim that this is a refusal to accord same-sex couples "special rights." Justice Scalia helps to settle that debate in his Romer and Lawrence dissents, where he suggests that same-sex marriages are constitutionally protected not if members of the LGBT

---

238 See Stephen E. Gottlieb, The Philosophical Gulf on the Rehnquist Court, 29 RUTGERS L.J. 1, 16 (1997) (reading Romer as saying that open season on the LGBT community is unsupportable).

239 See Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2487 (O'Connor, J., concurring) (discussing limitations of Yick Wo v. Hopkins, 118 U.S. 356 (1886), on the application of facially neutral laws).

240 See id. at 2497 (Scalia, J., dissenting).


242 Cf. Lino A. Graglia, Judicial Review: Wrong in Principle, A Disaster in Practice, 21 MISS. C. L. REV. 243, 249 (2002) ("The Court has recently overturned the decision by the people of Colorado made by referendum to preclude the grant of special rights to homosexuals.").
community are accorded special rights, but simply if they are accorded the same rights as everyone else. Apparently, Justice Scalia’s complaint is that by overruling Bowers and thereby making clear that the LGBT community cannot be singled out for disfavorable treatment, the Lawrence Court makes it impossible to offer a constitutionally viable argument justifying same-sex marriage bans. Of course, neither the Lawrence majority nor the Lawrence concurrence believes that the Constitution permits states to create the kind of second-class citizenship that three members of the Court apparently believe would pass constitutional muster, and it remains to be seen what implications, if any, this newly announced equality will have.

V. CONCLUSION

Lawrence is important for a number of reasons. It suggests that adult, consensual, non-marital relations are protected by the Due Process Clause. It also suggests that tests turning on history and tradition and the concept of ordered liberty should not be used to determine what the Due Process Clause protects. The decision adopts a much more respectful tone towards members of the LGBT community and may provide the basis for someday recognizing a right to marry a same-sex partner.

The Lawrence majority recognized that “times can blind us to certain truths and later generations can see that laws once thought necessary and proper in fact serve only to oppress.”243 It is simply unclear whether the current Court can recognize what Justice Scalia and two other members of the Court admit – the current equal protection and due process guarantees require the recognition of same-sex marriage. We shall simply have to wait and see how many generations of Supreme Court Justices are required before the Court can see that same-sex marriage bans are neither necessary nor proper but in fact serve only to oppress.

243 Lawrence, 123 S. Ct. at 2484.