

widespread cultural stereotype.

In evoking this stereotype, language is important. The radical right used to use *gay marriage*; now it's *homosexual marriage*. One reason, I believe, is that marriage evokes the idea of sex, and most Americans do not favor sex that isn't heterosexual. The stereotype of marriage is heterosexual. *Gay* for the right connotes a wild, deviant, sexually irresponsible lifestyle.

But *gay marriage* is a double-edged sword. President Bush chose not to use the words *gay marriage* in a State of the Union address. I suspect that the omission occurred for a good reason. His position was that *marriage* is defined as being between a man and a woman, and so the term *gay marriage* should be an oxymoron, as meaningless as *gay apple* or *gay telephone*. The more *gay marriage* is used, the more normal the idea of same-sex marriage becomes, and the clearer it becomes that *marriage* is not defined to exclude the very possibility. The grammar is important. *Gay* is grammatically a modifier specifying a kind of marriage. If you understand the expression, then it is not a contradiction in terms and marriage is not "defined" to exclude gays.

Because marriage is central to family life, it has a political dimension. As I discussed earlier, and at greater length in my book *Moral Politics*, conservative and progressive politics are organized around two very different models of married life: a strict father family and a nurturant parent family.

The strict father is moral authority and master of the household, dominating the mother and children and imposing needed discipline. Contemporary conservative politics turns these family values into political values: hierarchical authority, individual discipline, military might. Marriage in the strict father family must be heterosexual marriage: The father is manly, strong, decisive, dominating—a role model for sons, and for daughters a model of a man to look up to.

The nurturant parent model has two equal parents, whose job is to nurture their children and teach their children to nurture others. Nurturance has two dimensions: empathy and responsibility, for oneself and others. Responsibility requires strength and competence. The strong nurturing parent is protective and caring, builds trust and connection, promotes family