**The Great American Hustle: A Response to the American Association of Pediatrics’**

**Role in Getting Americans to Impulse-Purchase Same-Sex Marriage**

***Jeff Myers, Ph.D.***

“Ya got trouble, my friend, right here,
I say, trouble right here in River City…

Mass-staria!
Friends, the idle brain is the devil's playground!”

“Professor” Harold Hill, *The Music Man*

**Anatomy of a Hustle**

Meredith Wilson’s *The Music Man* tells the story of the classic American hustle: “Professor” Harold Hill pulls one over on the citizens of River City using a tried and true method employed by sham salesmen, sham evangelists, and sham politicians alike:

* Play on people’s guilt feelings.
* Publicly win the heart of the most credible but resistant person.
* Play the victim so people will feel protective and make your case for you.
* Launch the whole campaign on a national holiday, when everyone is in the mood.

*Music Man* opens on a train with sleazy salesmen chanting about their plans to hustle unsuspecting citizens into turning over their cash for goods they do not want or need. The chugging rhythm communicates inevitability: the train has left the station and there is no going back.

If you were going to hustle an entire nation into supporting something that would utterly undo the definition of marriage as we know it, *The Music Man* is a perfect playbook:

* Play on people’s guilt feelings: how can you justify withholding marriage from people who want it and will, in fact, make it better? How can you do this to the *children*?
* Spotlight advocates like Rob Portman—the quiet, harmless Republican who was too bland to be invited to do media interviews in the past. Follow this by getting the devil himself—Dick Cheney—to come out in your favor. Nobody wants to be a bigger jerk than Cheney; people will convert en masse out of sheer shame.
* Appeal to pity: avoid reasoned debate and discussion and instead put forward likeable advocates of your policy, measure the public’s response, and use the poll results as proof that you’re right.
* Be sure the whole thing plays during Spring Break and preferably just before Easter weekend so you can attach your cause to people’s desire to be cleansed of their sins.

If you play it right, all opposition will collapse. No American wants to be left behind. They’ll either get in line or they’ll close the curtains and pretend nothing is happening.

Americans have always had a special place in their hearts for a good hustle, though we never admit to being victims ourselves. This is how hustlers get away with it. After all, who wants others to know they’ve been conned? So, everyone talks himself into thinking he’s made a rational decision and is doing precisely what he wants to do. Partial proof for this, I predict, will be in the way people respond to this article with word-for-word recitation of the lines fed to them by the hustlers:

* “How can you be so cynical?”
* “I’ve never seen such hate and bigotry.”
* “Equal love for equal people.”
* “This is the Christian thing to do.”

Go ahead and post. I’m waiting.

**AAP and the Benefits of Same-Sex Marriage**

Pro-same-sex-marriage forces believe Americans’ one remaining hesitation about same-sex marriage is its effect on children. There is no ignoring the fact that social experimentation always ends up hurting the most vulnerable, and a raft of research demonstrates that sexual experimentation on the part of parents is strongly correlated to negative outcomes such as crime and substance abuse, whereas the children most likely to succeed as adults are those who grow up with a mother and father.[[1]](#endnote-1)

In the 1970s, advocates of same-sex marriage responded to such compelling evidence by positioning the traditional family as a social evil. Exhibit one was Lawrence Casler, a psychology professor whose academic study included observing and interviewing nudists. Casler asserted, “Marriage and family life have been largely responsible...for today’s prevailing neurotic climate, with its pervasive insecurity, and it is precisely this climate that makes so difficult the acceptance of a different, healthier way of life.”[[2]](#endnote-2)

As a friend of mine points out, every worldview is willing to sacrifice something on the altar of its convictions. If we are primarily animals then the sexual impulse is the strongest impulse we have. Therefore, we should be willing to sacrifice *everything* on the altar of sexual freedom including innocence, the safety of children, protection of the unborn human, thousands of years of accumulated wisdom, indeed, what it means to be human altogether.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Because most people’s consciences will not allow them to admit to thinking this way, a new argument has developed: marriage provides so many benefits for children that we ought to expand the definition of marriage to include more people. If marriage provides happiness and security, and parents’ unhappiness and insecurity are what hurt kids, *opposing* same-sex marriage is akin to *favoring* the hurting of children.

This is the form of argument employed by the American Association of Pediatrics (AAP) in their March 21st announcement, reprinted faithfully in the *New York Times* and copied word for word by hundreds of news sources across the country. A big deal was made out of the fact that the AAP underwent a four-year review of the literature and published their results in a ten-page report with 60 citations, leaving the impression that the overwhelming mass of evidence shows that gay marriage “helps children.”

Of course, those who read past the headline will find a more nuanced argument. There is no evidence that gay marriage *helps* children. Therefore, the AAP asserts instead that the *absence* of gay marriage *hurts* children.

It is true that man/woman marriage helps children. This is why the government, whose primary interest is maintaining civilization, is involved in marriage in the first place. But stamping a government imprimatur on any loving human union and calling it marriage ignores the fact that marriage has a stabilizing influence because of what it *is*, not because of what people *want it to be*. And marriage is, according to legal scholars writing in the Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy, “the union of a man and a woman who make a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other of the type that is naturally (inherently) fulfilled by bearing and rearing children together.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

The Bible couldn’t have said it any better. It’s not just about the adults involved: every child deserves a mother and a father and to settle for less from the outset is to short-change the most vulnerable among us.

Man/woman marriage is the only kind of marriage that has been demonstrated to have a stabilizing influence on society. To say that marriage *as we want to define it* is a stabilizing influence is to commit a category error of major proportions. It’s like saying “We know oranges are healthy to eat, therefore we are going to call the foods we like ‘oranges.’”

So, does the AAP statement prove that gay marriage “helps children” as the *New York Times* headline claims? No, it does not.

First, the AAP statement is not, and never claims to be, an academic study. Instead, it is a *policy* argument that cherry picks studies to drive the reader to its preordained conclusion. The *New York Times* says the AAP’s conclusion was reached after a four-year literature review, but the AAP’s own website sources its statement to a position paper it copyrighted in 2009, four years ago, when the so-called literature review is supposed to have begun. In other words, the outcome was determined before the research even started. Any grad school paper taking this approach would earn a well-deserved “F.”

Second, the studies cited are questionable. Much of the AAP statement is based on problematic studies such as a longitudinal examination of lesbian mothers (no mention of spouses, which is supposedly the point of the statement) in which the kids turned out well. As compelling as their conclusions sound, these studies were based on convenience samples. *This means people signed up to be studied*. If you take a group of well-off, well-educated people who volunteer to be studied, you’re going to end up with different results than if you study people as they actually are, as Mark Regnerus’ controversial but vindicated study did. Based on a widely available and non-partisan data set, Regnerus demonstrated that being raised by parents involved in same-sex relationships was significantly correlated with several negative social outcomes, including vulnerability to forced sexual encounters. Regnerus claimed to have wanted to study more stable same-sex families, but such families seemed to be unstable by their nature.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Third, the *New York Times* describes the AAP’s statement as something “new.” This is simply inaccurate. There is nothing new in the statement. No new data. No new studies. About half of the vaunted 60 sources are census data or reports from government hearings. Several are positions statements from gay advocacy groups or books written by gay activists. Aside from the census data, most of the references are from between seven and seventeen years ago. Of the current data, practically all are responses to Regnerus’ 2012 study or restatements of previous positions. This is important because the AAP statement was positioned in the press as the final, authoritative word on the marriage question, made by objective medical doctors who care about children, based on a conclusive and exhaustive review of the latest research. It is nothing of the sort. It is a hustle, and a very clever one at that.

Fourth, and this is critical, the AAP’s expressed concern is of children’s access to healthcare and government benefits. At most this calls for changes in healthcare and insurance regulations, not for same-sex marriage per se. The authors believe—without supporting evidence—that permitting same-sex marriage is the best way to solve the problems facing children. But unless the AAP can *make* gay and lesbian parents get married and stay married, this is simply a non-sequitur.

Fifth, the authors claim that what is destabilizing about gay and lesbian relationships is that they are socially stigmatized. If the stigma is removed stability will result, they argue. We know relational instability and social stigma are correlated, but what evidence is there that the stigma causes the instability rather than the other way around? Rather than provide evidence, the AAP statement seems to say, “We are doctors, we are right, and the future will prove it.” This toxic logical-fallacy brew of special pleading and argument-to-the-future is a poor form of argument generally, but when it becomes the *primary* *reason* for a massive change in social policy, we ought to be concerned.

Simply put, the kind of thinking found in the AAP statement would be considered unacceptable in virtually any other social policy debate. Expanding the definition of marriage is no more likely to solve adults’ relationship problems, or their subsequent effects on children, than expanding the definition of an “A” grade is to make all kids smart.

What we should be seeing in Washington is a move to change stifling healthcare and insurance regulations so more kids are covered, and a redoubling of efforts to help struggling moms and dads keep their marriages together rather than get divorced. These, however, are not the nature of the arguments being made, which makes one suspect that children are merely being used as bait to secure the commitment of well-meaning but gullible politicians to radical social policies.

**Will We Suffer Buyer’s Remorse?**

So the hustle is on. Progressives are sure they can get American to impulse-purchase same-sex marriage. The problem with playing to the impulse-purchase mentality, though, is that people usually wake up with a bad case of buyer’s remorse and a closet full of slicer-dicers, home gyms, wearable blankets and vacuum-powered hair trimmers. Or, in this case, with a whole new marriage policy designed by people committed to “pushing the parameters of sex, sexuality, and family” and “transforming the very fabric of society,” as Paula Ettelbrick, former legal director of the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund put it.[[6]](#endnote-6)

What the hustlers fail to understand is that the entire indoctrination apparatus is tenuously built on what Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson call “peripheral persuasion,” which occurs when the one being persuaded is distracted, lazily processes the persuasive message, and makes a mindless decision.[[7]](#endnote-7)

But mindless decisions have serious consequences. In the end, hustlers and those hustled will lose and lose alike because propaganda is never a long-term substitute for rational, open discussion. Thomas Jefferson said, “Truth is great and will prevail if left to herself, that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict, unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate**.**”

#  The question remaining is whether on the same-sex marriage issue Americans will allow gay activists to use manipulation, appeals to pity, and the hate-and-bigotry-card to *foreclose* debate, or whether they will insist on a full and open inquiry on the nature of marriage in all its aspects—historical, theological, sociological, and legal. Let’s hope it is the latter.

###

*Jeff Myers, Ph.D. is president of Summit Ministries*

[www.summit.org](http://www.summit.org)

1. See, for example, Mark Regnerus, “How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study,” *Social Science Research*, Vol. 41, 2012, pp. 752–770. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Robert Rimmer, “An Interview with Robert Rimmer on Premarital Communes and Group Marriages,” *The Hu­manist* (March/April 1974), p. 14. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. A particularly horrifying example of this way of thinking is Mary Elizabeth Williams’ article at Salon.com, “So what if abortion ends a life?” Williams concludes the article with this line: “And I would put the life of a mother over the life of a fetus every single time — even if I still need to acknowledge my conviction that the fetus is indeed a life. A life worth sacrificing.” <http://www.salon.com/2013/01/23/so_what_if_abortion_ends_life/> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Sherif Girgis, Robert P. George, and Ryan T. Anderson (2010), “What is Marriage?” *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, Vol. 34, p. 246. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Regnerus, *Social Science Research*, Vol. 41, 2012. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Quoted in William B. Rubenstein, *Since When is Marriage a Path to Liberation? Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Law* (NY: New York Press, 1993], pp. 398, 400. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. See Anthony R. Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson, *Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* (New York: W.H. Freeman and Company, 2001). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)