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So, What's Really at Stake in the Gay Marriage Debate? Part One

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Human society is a complex reality, but certain constants have framed that reality for human beings. One of those constants has been the institution of marriage. The respected status of the heterosexual pairing, set apart for exclusive rights and respected for its functions for the society, is among the most important of those constants. Even where deviations from this pattern occur, they are of interest merely for the fact that they are *deviations* from this norm.



The legalization and normalization of same-sex marriage undermine that constant. What had been a clear picture now becomes confusing. Marriage had been universally understood to be heterosexual. Now, it is something else. The picture is further confused by alienating the heterosexual breeding and parenting function from marriage. Not only does marriage appear now to be what it never was before, the essential functions of marriage are up for grabs.

The pictures in the mind change. The pictures in books for children change. Mommy and Daddy give way to Mommy and Mommy, Daddy and Daddy, or any number of variations on the relationship theme. Marriage is dethroned as a cultural constant and even as a predictable reality. The institution of marriage is destabilized and transformed before our eyes — and especially in the eyes of the young.

Keep that in mind when you consider a recent public school field trip for first-graders in San Francisco. Here is the shape of the future — if same-sex marriage is sustained. As the *San Francisco Chronicle* reports:

A group of San Francisco first-graders took an unusual field trip to City Hall on Friday to toss rose petals on their just-married lesbian teacher - putting the public school children at the center of a fierce election battle over the fate of same-sex marriage.

The 18 Creative Arts Charter School students took a Muni bus and walked a block at noon to toss rose petals and blow bubbles on their just-married teacher Erin Carder and her wife Kerri McCoy, giggling and squealing as they mobbed their teacher with hugs.

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Mayor Gavin Newsom, a friend of a friend, officiated.

So a class of six-year-olds was taken on a field trip to join in celebrating a same-sex marriage ceremony. Liz Jaroflow, interim director of the school, defended the field trip as an educational experience. As she explained, "It really is what we call a teachable moment." She went on to explain that the educational value had to do with the legitimization of same sex marriage as a civil rights issue. "I think I am well within the parameters," she insisted.

‘As far as I’m concerned, it’s not controversial for me,’ she stated. “It’s certainly an issue I would be willing to put my job on the line for.” Well, in San Francisco her job is probably safe. But this “teachable moment” will not be restricted to San Francisco. Not by a long shot.

It turns out that parents had the right to use an “opt out” provision to keep their children at the school, and not at the ceremony at City Hall. According to the paper, two families did just that. Two. Eighteen students participated in the field trip. This, you must understand, is the new normal.

California voters have the opportunity to defend and restore marriage in their state by approving “Proposition 8” on November 4. That proposition would define marriage as the union of a man and a woman — period. At least one of the children at the downtown ceremony wore a “No on 8” button to the event. The charter school used children as campaign fodder.

California is among the states with the most extensive sex education programs. Often known as “comprehensive sex education,” these programs go far beyond matters of reproduction. The students are taught about marriage. If “marriage” includes legalized same-sex marriage, then that is the definition presented to students.

The battle over Proposition 8 is a struggle over some of the most fundamental principles of life, society, and meaning. In the eyes of same-sex marriage advocates the battle is for equality, dignity, and respect for homosexual relationships. In the eyes of same-sex marriage opponents, the battle is for the preservation of an institution essential for human happiness and thriving.

Both sides in this debate understand that issues right at the core of human dignity are at stake. Each side understands that the decision on this question will shape the future of our civilization. And, make no mistake, both sides know that the children are watching. Just ask the first-graders from the Creative Arts Charter School.

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