

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

"Ex-Gays" Need X-Men

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There is a resolution being proposed by a single Disney stockholder to amend the company's non-discrimination policy to explicitly include the prohibition of discrimination based on "ex-gay" status. Disney has wisely and predictably advised its stockholders to vote "no". It is the first such resolution of its kind that I've heard of, but given the overblown proselytizing nature of the so-called Religious Right's "Ex-Gay Movement", it probably won't be the last. Bring it on.

As a certified sexuality educator, I know that the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists (AASECT), as well as the American Psychological Association (APA), and the American Psychiatric Association, strongly call into question the possibility of a person being "ex-gay". So, to begin with, I don't believe such a creature exists. Were a corporation to actually name them, it would be like them adding "fairies" to their non-discrimination policy. But even if a gay or lesbian person could actually successfully choose to no longer be attracted to people of the same sex, and could really create strong feelings of attraction for people of the other sex; they wouldn't be called "ex-gay" any more than I would be referred to as a person who was formerly straight. A person who is suddenly attracted to people of the other sex would be called "heterosexual", and heterosexuals are covered in corporate non-discrimination policies. Non-discrimination policies that prohibit intolerance against employees because of their feelings of erotic or romantic attraction use the words "sexual orientation". That covers everyone, even the make-believe "ex-gays".

There are only three recognized sexual orientations in the science of human sexuality: heterosexual, bisexual, and homosexual (although some people argue that asexual is also an orientation.) You have to fall in one of these categories. There are literally millions of people in the world who once called themselves "heterosexual". Many of them were married—or are still married—to a spouse of the other sex. When these individuals acknowledge their homosexual feelings, they are not referred to as "ex-straight". They are called homosexuals or gay.

If people who claim to have changed orientations from homosexual to heterosexual feel that they should have their own category in the lexicon of sexual orientation, and that this new name should be used in corporate non-discrimination policies, in fairness, the policies would logically also say that the companies do not discriminate "on the basis of sexual orientation, be it heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, ex-gay, ex-straight, and ex-bisexual". When it mentions "marital status" it should include "ex-married". And when it speaks of gender identity, it could include "ex-women" and "ex-men", but then again, people might think it's a reference to Wolverine, Storm, and Cyclops.

This effort to have the existence of so-called "ex-gay" people recognized by corporations is, in reality, an attempt to stop corporations from affirming the dignity and value of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people by eliminating or amending diversity training on sexual orientation, and by helping the Religious Right bring light to their efforts at reparative therapy and 12-step

programs for homosexuals. Ex-gays are described in the Disney proposal as "men and women with unwanted same-sex attractions who leave homosexuality by gender affirming therapy, faith based ministries, Homosexuals Anonymous support groups, or other non-judgmental environments". The sponsor of this Trojan horse proposal would likely next seek to have all corporate diversity training on gay issues balanced with a presentation on how gay people can learn to control their desires. Companies would be pressured to create and fund Ex-gay Employee Resource Groups.

I think that the people who are wasting the Disney stockholders' time with this anti-diversity message are living in Fantasyland. The resolution, as they well know, is silly, and it has no chance of ever passing. But that's not their goal. What these religious fundamentalists seek is a public forum on their attempts to convert homosexuals into heterosexuals. They should be careful. They may get what they wish for, and regret it. Since the dawning of the so-called "ex-gay movement", newspapers and magazines have been filled with stories of how the male leaders of these organizations have been arrested for soliciting sex with a man in a public restroom, or they've been photographed in a gay bar. In the latter example, the poster boy for Focus on the Family's ex-gay program insisted he was only in the gay bar to go to the bathroom.

To succeed in their quest, so-called "ex-gay" people should seek the help of the real X-men. Perhaps their superpowers might be effective in creating the illusion that a person can change his or her sexual orientation. On the other hand, if the ex-gays do team up with the X-men, the guys will undoubtedly fall in love with Wolverine, and the women will surely fall in love with Storm, and then the ex-gays will be ex-ex-gays, who are more commonly referred to as homosexuals.