

Boycotts, hypocrisy, and the Christian Right's favorite scare tactic

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Article

As many readers may be aware, the American Family Association (sponsor of conservative Christian news site OneNewsNow) has organized a boycott of McDonald's. (At various times during the past decade AFA has also boycotted Ford, Target, and Disney.) According to AFA's official "Boycott McDonald's" website, the fast food chain's sin is "refusing to remain neutral in the culture wars". McDonald's is a member of the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce and has donated money to the organization. Richard Ellis, Vice President of Communications at McDonald's USA, is on the NGLCC's board of directors.

The "Boycott McDonald's" website explicitly states that "[the boycott] is not about how homosexual employees are treated", but other statements in various AFA documents indicate that this should not be taken at face value. Only two sentences further, the boycott website follows with "McDonald's has chosen not to remain neutral but to give the full weight of their corporation to promoting the homosexual agenda, including homosexual marriage". "The homosexual agenda", of course, means "any kinds of protections for LGBT employees". Many statements on AFA's main website make it abundantly clear that same-sex marriage isn't the only issue- they are opposed to any kind of fair and equal treatment for LGBT people.

Some examples:

-From "Principles Which Guide AFA's Opposition to the Homosexual Agenda": "We oppose the effort to convince our culture that because individuals participate in homosexual behavior, they have earned the right to be protected like racial and other minority groups." In other words, they are opposed to extending non-discrimination policies and antidiscrimination and hate crime protections to LGBT people.

-From "Same Sex Marriages": "The terms homophobia, gay, diversity, and intolerant are used to divert attention describing the actual sexual behavior involved. This same type of reasoning is used by companies that provide Domestic Partner benefits for their employees based on bedroom behavior of their homosexual employees. The companies never describe the bedroom behavior of those employees that are granted Domestic Partner benefits." Here, AFA makes it clear that they object to partner benefits of any kind. The argument they employ is embarrassingly ludicrous. Do they actually think that domestic partnership benefits are granted based on what people do in bed? ("I'm sorry, Jeff. It looks like you and Wayne haven't been having enough anal sex lately. We're going to have to take Wayne off your insurance policy.") The criteria for DPB eligibility are usually financial interdependence and/or

evidence of a binding legal commitment (power of attorney document, etc.). AFA also apparently believes that companies offering DPBs have a moral obligation to describe what same sex couples do in bed. Are they proposing that employee handbooks be turned into sex manuals? (That would be a very odd stance, considering that AFA is staunchly anti-pornography.)

While McDonald's recent affiliation with the NGLCC may be the proximate cause of the boycott, it seems somewhat doubtful that AFA would reverse its position if McDonald's dropped its membership without changing several corporate policies. McDonald's scored 85 out of 100 on HRC's Corporate Equality Index in 2007. Among other things, they offer DPBs (including to unmarried heterosexual couples) and cover transition-related medical expenses (though their non-discrimination policy does not explicitly include gender identity). AFA's boycott website doesn't directly address McDonald's fair treatment of LGBT employees, but many of the other organizations supporting the boycott do, including AFTAH (Americans for Truth About Homosexuality).

Ultraconservative news site WorldNetDaily interviewed AFTAH's Peter LaBarbera in a July 19th article entitled "Boycott over McDonald's 'gay' promotions grows". LaBarbera's promoted the boycott using his favorite scare tactic- demonizing trans women.

Excerpted from the article:

Your dollars for Happy Meals and Big Macs could end up paying for sex-change operations of McDonald's employees if the home of the Golden Arches continues its promotion of homosexuality, according to a pro-family group that has joined an expanding boycott of the fast-food restaurants and its Ronald McDonald's mascot...

LaBarbera told WND that the agenda supported by the NGLCC is pretty extreme. It recommends, for example, companies should "permit the [transsexual/cross-dressing]* transitioning employee to restrooms that correspond to his or her full-time gender presentation, regardless of where the individual is in the transitioning process".

"In other words, if a 'transgender man' or, say, employee at a McDonald's believes his supposed 'gender' is really a woman, so he wears a dress and high heels, he should be able to use the female restroom. That surely would do wonders for the productivity and workplace environment of female employees and customers at a small business, including all those local McDonald's franchises!"

LaBarbera said.

He said other advice from NGLCC would include:

- Use politically correct, 'inclusive' language: 'Ensure that invitations to company events use terms like partner or significant other rather than spouse.'
- Provide 'adoption assistance' for homosexual 'domestic partners' - thus the corporate world helps create households for children that are intentionally fatherless or motherless.
- Providing health care coverage to transsexual employees for so-called 'medically necessary surgical procedures' - will your Quarter-Pounder purchase help subsidize 'sex-change' operations for gender-confused men?...

So much for AFA's rhetoric that the boycott "is not about how homosexual [and presumably also transgender] employees are treated".

While LaBarbera is obviously upset that the NGLCC encourages equal treatment of same-gender headed families, he unleashes a disproportionate amount of venom on trans people (specifically trans women, as he and others in the Religious Right apparently perceive them as more of a threat than trans men).

He doesn't even bother to get his terminology right. He refers to an employee transitioning from male to female as a "transgender man", when "transgender man" actually refers to a person assigned female gender at birth who transitions to male. (I suspect that this phrasing was an attempt by LaBarbera to mock the terms used by trans people and allies, since he usually labels trans women "gender-confused men", as in third bullet point below the direct quote.) He then, comically, explains that the hypothetical MtF McDonald's employee would "wear a dress and high heels" to work. LaBarbera does know what actual trans women look and dress like- he frequently cross-posts photos of private citizens that MassResistance snaps at LGBT events without the subjects' permission- and he knows that they don't wear heels and dresses every day any more than cis women do. But the truth isn't sensational enough, so he embellishes. The fact that a trans woman working at McDonald's would still wear the same uniform the rest of the employees do won't stir up the boycotters.

LaBarbera then implies that a trans woman who presents as female on the job is somehow a threat to female employees: "That surely would do wonders for the productivity and workplace environment of female employees and customers at a small business, including all those local McDonald's franchises!" He presents no evidence, scientific or anecdotal, to support this statement- probably because there isn't any.

AFTAH, WorldNetDaily and others portray the NGLCC's support for equal access to medical treatment for trans people as "shocking" and "radical", when in fact it is also the position of the mainstream medical establishment. Earlier this month, the American Medical Association adopted Resolution 122, which opposes the arbitrary exclusion of treatment for GID (gender identity disorder, also called gender dysphoria) from insurance coverage:

Whereas, Our American Medical Association opposes discrimination on the basis of gender identity... Whereas, Gender Identity Disorder (GID) is a serious medical condition recognized as such in both the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th Ed., Text Revision) (DSM-IV-TR) and the International Classification of Diseases (10th Revision)... Whereas, GID, if left untreated, can result in clinically significant psychological distress, dysfunction, debilitating depression and, for some people without access to appropriate medical care and treatment, suicidality and death... Whereas, An established body of medical research demonstrates the effectiveness and medical necessity of mental health care, hormone therapy and sex reassignment surgery as forms of therapeutic treatment for many people diagnosed with GID... Whereas, Health experts in GID, including WPATH [the World Professional Association for Transgender Health], have rejected the myth that such treatments are "cosmetic" or "experimental" and have recognized that these treatments can provide safe and effective treatment for a serious health condition... Whereas, Our AMA opposes limitations placed on patient care by third-party payers when such care is based upon sound scientific evidence and sound medical opinion... Whereas, The denial of these otherwise covered benefits for patients suffering from GID represents discrimination based solely on a patient's gender identity...

RESOLVED, That our American Medical Association support public and private health insurance

coverage for treatment of gender identity disorder (New HOD Policy); and be it further RESOLVED, That our AMA oppose categorical exclusions of coverage for treatment of gender identity disorder when prescribed by a physician.

The Religious Right's feigned ignorance of Resolution 122 is unsurprising, since they alternately ignore and deride mainstream medical groups such as the AMA- they have their own. On July 2nd, OneNewsNow (the American Family Association's online news service) published an article on Resolution 122 entitled "Transgenderism-Purely Psychological?", featuring comments from Dr. David Stephens of the Christian Medical and Dental Associations. Stephens counters the solid research the AMA cites in its resolution with religious rhetoric: "Well, the Bible does tell us very clearly that mutilation of the body is wrong, and it's sad that these people have this psychological disorder -- but it should be treated from a psychological perspective." Never mind all the studies demonstrating that treating GID purely "from a psychological perspective" doesn't work; if scientific findings clash with a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible, the CMDA tosses them out. Their website makes it clear that they're more interested in evangelical Christianity than scientific medicine- their statement on homosexuality reads like one of the Family Research Council's anti-gay tracts. The CMDA "opposes the practice of homosexual acts on biblical, medical, and social grounds", characterizing a homosexual or bisexual orientation as a "lifestyle obsessed with and/or dominated by personal sexual fulfillment".

The CMDA homepage helpfully provides a "Christian Doctor Search" link for evangelicals who prefer doctors who won't let inconvenient scientific evidence interfere with their treatment.

The Religious Right's promotion of its LGBTphobic McDonald's boycott with misinformation (disinformation?) and inaccurate stereotypes is complemented by its hypocritical coverage of another boycott. At around the same time AFA's boycott of McDonald's was a dominant theme in the fundamentalist-evangelical media, a coalition of LGBT groups and allies launched a boycott of several hotels owned by San Diego businessman Doug Manchester. Manchester donated \$125,000 to Protect Marriage, an organization working to enshrine marriage discrimination into the California Constitution.

From OneNewsNow's July 15th article on the Manchester boycott:

Randy Thomasson of the Campaign for California Families says the activists are being "mean spirited." "They are trying to grind a person into the dust, and they are really against free speech," he adds.

A boycott of a business that donated money to take rights away from LGB Californians is "mean spirited" and "against free speech", but AFA's attempt to force a fast-food chain to conform to its ideology is somehow admirable. Double standards abound.

I for one hope that AFA's boycott of McDonald's ends up doing evangelicals a favor- namely, helping them drop a few pounds. (According to a 1998 study by Professor Ken Ferraro of Purdue University, 27% of Baptists meet the definition of obesity, as opposed to 17% of Catholics and only 1% of Buddhists and Jews.)

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