

# Ep 32: Nick Duffy on 'conversion therapy'

<https://www.secularism.org.uk/podcast/2020/08/ep-32-nick-duffy-on-conversion-therapy>

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(Emma Park, EP): You're listening to episode 32 of the National Secular Society podcast hosted

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since it is not widely reported? And finally, should groups which advocate

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by Emma Park. I will be discussing the issue of what

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some form of conversion therapy for LGBT+ people

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is known, contentiously, as 'gay conversion' therapy. In the UK and

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be deprived of their charitable status? To answer these questions I'll be

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other countries, certain very conservative or evangelical

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speaking to Nick Duffy, Current Affairs editor at LGBT newspaper

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religious organizations, mainly, but not exclusively, Christian,

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Pink News. Later in the episode, I'll be joined by

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advocate counselling and other practices which

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Megan Manson, Head of Policy and Research at the National Secular Society,

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purport to help their adherents somehow get rid of their sexuality or gender

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to discuss the NSS's position. I'm joined now by Nick Duffy, Current

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identity when this is not in line with their

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Affairs editor at Pink News. Nick,

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group's religious teachings but what effect does this so-called

0:01:20.080,0:01:26.880

what exactly is conversion therapy? Who does it? And who are its target?

0:00:37.360,0:00:42.160

therapy have on people who undergo it? Should and can gay conversion therapy be

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(Nick Duffy, ND): Uh, that's a good question. Um, when people are asked about conversion therapy

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banned by law? How do you even define the practice

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the first thing they picture is perhaps

some kind of horrific

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pseudo-medical treatment like  
electro-shock therapy

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or chemical castration - the sort of things  
that people like Alan Turing were

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historically subjected to or perhaps  
they picture

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children being packed off to a 'pray-the-  
gay-away' camp which was popularized in

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the US in the 80s and 90s  
where huge organizations were set up

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with uh support, often from  
religious organizations and conservative

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groups,  
but actually when we look at what

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conversion therapy is in the UK today  
it takes generally the form of

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individual pseudo-counselling services  
on a one-to-one basis

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uh with a more emotionally  
manipulative approach

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where counsellors try to convince people  
that their sexual orientation or gender

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identity

is often the result of childhood

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abandonment issues or sexual abuse  
um, which we know is untrue, uh, and it's

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fairly commonly practiced by a range of  
groups. (EP): And

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who exactly are these therapists or  
counsellors?

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Are they clinically, medically trained? (ND):  
No. So, really there's three distinct types

0:02:40.160,0:02:45.680

of conversion, conversion therapy  
we're aware of in the UK. Uh, so the first

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um and, and most prominent - the one that  
people may have heard about - is a group

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called The Core  
Issues Trust uh, which is registered as a

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charity in Northern Ireland.  
It goes through very little effort to

0:02:56.480,0:02:59.360

conceal its work  
and claims to be able to help people

0:02:59.360,0:03:03.760

manage their sexual  
attraction. It's run by a man called Mike

0:03:03.760,0:03:06.480

Davidson. He  
occasionally calls himself Dr Mike

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Davidson - he has a PHD in education -

um, you can do your own judgment on that.

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Um, they generally operate on the model of being quite prominent

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and provocative about their work but actually the second

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type of conversion therapy we see and perhaps the most common

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um is grassroots conversion therapy in religious communities

0:03:26.159,0:03:30.720

where people, often struggling with their sexual orientation and gender identity,

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are shepherded towards, often just spiritual counsellors or people in the

0:03:36.480,0:03:38.799

community and this is where it gets quite

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nefarious because it's hard to track what goes on in those communities.

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I recently attended a Core Issues Trust event and

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there I met an Imam from East London who was there to learn

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from, sort of, the experts about applying it within

0:03:54.159,0:03:57.920

his own religious field. And the third

type we're seeing,

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which is a growing issue recently, is therapies directed at trans teens - often

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we think of conversion therapy as a gay thing,

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actually people of all genders and sexualities have been subjected to it

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historically and today all parts of the LGBT community

0:04:13.599,0:04:19.519

can be targeted by conversion therapy. (EP): What sort of supposed pseudo treatments

0:04:19.519,0:04:22.320

are involved? You said they, they talked about, it gets very

0:04:22.320,0:04:26.000

emotional.... What sort of things do they try and get these people to do who are

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undergoing this so-called therapy? (ND): So, depending on the therapy that's on offer, a

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lot of it is faith-based. The evangelical Christian treatments which

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we're more familiar with um, will preach the message that God can

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cure you if you pray hard enough and unfortunately there's quite a lot of

0:04:44.479,0:04:48.320

people who are left with serious trauma - they feel like they're a bad Christian

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because they're praying and they're praying and the gay isn't going away.

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It isn't always necessarily like that and Core Issues Trust

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has ties to the, to the Christian world but also

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does offer, sort of, more secular based treatments where

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aside from focusing on religion, they do, sort of, preach the message

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that you can individually manage sexual attraction

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or gender identity in a way that we know is just not possible or accurate.

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(EP): What sort of effects does this supposed therapy

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have on people who, who undergo it, who um voluntarily or for whatever reason go to

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these therapists or counselors? Does it have a

0:05:28.880,0:05:32.880

very negative effect on them?

(ND): Absolutely. To be honest, the biggest

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problem with conversion therapy is that it doesn't work um, and many of the early pioneers of the treatment in the US

0:05:39.360,0:05:43.759

have disavowed their work. We had an example only a few weeks ago

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where a formerly high-ranking figure in Exodus

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International which was one of the, sort of, pioneers in the field of

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conversion therapy, came out, apologized for his work and said he was marrying a

0:05:54.639,0:05:57.440

man.

From that - there was a source of

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amusement from that but also

we can't forget that conversion therapy

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does have a lasting

and physically nefarious impact - it can

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not only rob people of,

in some cases, decades of their lives

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denying who they truly are

but studies have shown it is linked to

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an increased risk of suicide, depression, self-harm and emotional trauma.

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It does leave a long lasting impact for people who are

0:06:21.360,0:06:25.759  
duped into it and some of them  
experience

0:06:25.759,0:06:28.960  
the ramifications for decades. (EP): Now you  
said

0:06:28.960,0:06:33.120  
duped into it - who exactly undergoes this  
therapy?

0:06:33.120,0:06:36.319  
What are their motivations? Do they do it  
voluntarily or

0:06:36.319,0:06:40.400  
are they forced into it? (ND): That really does  
depend on the

0:06:40.400,0:06:45.039  
therapy on offer - so, Core Issues Trust,  
the main practitioner in the UK,

0:06:45.039,0:06:51.520  
claims to only offer its services to  
voluntary adults but the crux of the

0:06:51.520,0:06:54.240  
issue is  
in religious communities that's not

0:06:54.240,0:06:57.680  
necessarily the case. There are many  
cases of teens

0:06:57.680,0:07:02.240  
who have been forced into treatment by  
their parents

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where they are subjected to sort of  
the counseling type treatment against

0:07:07.919,0:07:11.199  
their will.  
(EP): What, what about the evidence base if

0:07:11.199,0:07:13.360  
there is any?  
You said that the problem with gay

0:07:13.360,0:07:18.720  
therapy is that it isn't  
effective - is there any scientific basis

0:07:18.720,0:07:22.560  
for what these  
so-called therapists are doing? (ND): The exact

0:07:22.560,0:07:26.160  
opposite in fact.  
Nearly every medical psychological

0:07:26.160,0:07:29.360  
counselling body in the world has  
disavowed conversion therapy.

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In the UK we have a memorandum of  
understanding uh, where the

0:07:33.199,0:07:37.440  
NHS and the British Association for  
Counseling and Psychotherapy

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have made clear that there is no basis  
for conversion therapy - that it doesn't

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work.  
Earlier this year we saw the UN's

0:07:45.440,0:07:49.440  
independent expert on LGBT rights  
calling for a global ban on conversion

0:07:49.440,0:07:52.960  
therapy again  
citing the, the evidence that it simply

0:07:52.960,0:07:56.800  
doesn't work.  
Often what conversion therapists are

0:07:56.800,0:08:00.720  
appealing to is  
just sort of a base homophobia - they have

0:08:00.720,0:08:04.960  
no evidence and no scientific basis for  
their claims whatsoever.

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(EP): You mentioned the Core Issues Trust in  
Northern Ireland and

0:08:08.080,0:08:11.199  
Christian world, is gay conversion  
therapy

0:08:11.199,0:08:14.800  
limited to Christian groups or is it  
also practiced in other religious groups

0:08:14.800,0:08:17.919  
in the UK?  
(ND): So, Core Issues Trust which is the the

0:08:17.919,0:08:22.000  
main practitioner of conversion therapy  
that gets the most publicity

0:08:22.000,0:08:25.120  
does come at it from a Christian  
background but

0:08:25.120,0:08:31.440  
it does occur in, in all faiths and  
we are aware of examples in Islam and in

0:08:31.440,0:08:35.120  
other faiths within the UK where people  
struggling with their

0:08:35.120,0:08:40.000  
sexuality or gender identity are  
pressed towards conversion therapy. (EP):  
Now

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it's been  
banned in Germany and it's also been

0:08:42.719,0:08:46.480  
banned in parts of the US,  
Canada and parts of Canada and parts of

0:08:46.480,0:08:49.360  
Australia but,  
and in a few other countries, but in

0:08:49.360,0:08:53.600  
general gay conversion therapy has not  
been banned by most countries in the

0:08:53.600,0:08:58.560  
world. Why do you think this is?  
(ND): It's been a long struggle to get it

0:08:58.560,0:09:02.399  
taken seriously as an issue to be honest.  
I've been reporting on conversion

0:09:02.399,0:09:07.440  
therapy for six or seven years now.  
When I started most politicians hadn't

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heard of it, didn't really know what it  
was

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um, there was little uh, effort to get it  
banned. The

0:09:13.040,0:09:16.880  
the larger LGBT movement had bigger fish  
to fry as it was

0:09:16.880,0:09:21.680  
and now we're seeing finally some  
efforts to take action against it.

0:09:21.680,0:09:24.880  
So, as you said, Germany has imposed a ban,  
Canada has, we're

0:09:24.880,0:09:28.000  
up to 20 US states now and quite  
crucially,

0:09:28.000,0:09:32.480

in his platform, Joe Biden has pledged support for a federal law to ban it.

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So yeah, we we are now seeing a more concerted effort to tackle the issue.

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(EP): Why do you think there's been that change towards more awareness of it? Has

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it just been a matter of time? or has the issue of gay conversion therapy,

0:09:44.880,0:09:48.240

has it become more serious? Has the practice become more widespread?

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(ND): I'm not sure if it's necessarily become more widespread as such

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but in the, in the UK in particular we have seen

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a more concerted effort towards banning it. There are now specific

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campaign groups set up that are really pressing on this issue and

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and really scrutinizing it, and again, LGBT rights has such an evolving field

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that a few years ago talking about conversion

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therapy probably wasn't at the top of many campaigners to-do lists whereas

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now it is really getting attention as more evidence comes out about

0:10:18.399,0:10:24.720

the harms that happen because of it. (EP): Boris Johnson has condemned the practice

0:10:24.720,0:10:28.240

of gay conversion therapy and other ministers have too but

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it's not yet banned in the UK. (ND): Uh, to give a bit of

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context, under Theresa May, Theresa May was the

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first prime minister to pledge to put forward a ban on

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conversion therapy which she did in 2018 in an LGBT action plan.

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Unfortunately like many of the other promises in that document at the time it

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has gone largely unfulfilled and we've seen a revolving door

0:10:49.839,0:10:52.160

of equality ministers over the past few years

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where they haven't really made any progress over the past couple of years.

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If anything, the commitment has been

slightly walked back under Boris Johnson

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who has recently  
said that he'd like to ban the practice

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but in his speeches about it  
he's referred to further study and

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and looking into the issue further um,  
which is

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behind where other countries are  
internationally and also is frankly the

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language the government usually use when  
they're looking to kick an issue into

0:11:17.200,0:11:20.720

the long grass.  
(EP): Yeah, this is pretty vague and yeah,

0:11:20.720,0:11:24.160

waffly,  
definitely. Um, but what about other

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organizations outside the government?  
yeah, you wrote

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recently in Pink News about Barclays  
Bank

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shutting down the accounts that Core Issues  
Trust held with it,

0:11:34.800,0:11:38.240

um, so what's the story there? why did  
Barclays do that? and are

0:11:38.240,0:11:41.760

other organizations doing a

similar thing?

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(ND): Absolutely and there is now a growing  
public acceptance and understanding of

0:11:45.519,0:11:47.680

the issue  
in the way that there wasn't a few years

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ago. We have now seen  
a determination from a lot of companies

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to take this kind of thing seriously.  
So, Facebook and Twitter have both

0:11:56.000,0:11:58.639

recently committed to  
not permitting the promotion of

0:11:58.639,0:12:03.279

conversion therapy on their platforms  
uh, which is a great step uh, specifically

0:12:03.279,0:12:06.880

as we've seen  
issues around Facebook uh hosting apps

0:12:06.880,0:12:11.760

for conversion theory groups in the past.  
Core Issues Trust have also been, become

0:12:11.760,0:12:14.720

sort of a persona non grata - a number  
of

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companies have denied them services - so,  
they attempted

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to hold a screening at a View cinema in  
2018

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which was cancelled. They've had various

back and forth fights with payment  
0:12:26.800,0:12:29.600  
providers and yes, most recently  
Barclays have  
0:12:29.600,0:12:33.839  
denied them banking services which is  
really, I think, an artifact of the way  
0:12:33.839,0:12:36.560  
that companies are taking these issues  
more seriously now.  
0:12:36.560,0:12:39.600  
There is perhaps a note of caution on  
this however  
0:12:39.600,0:12:44.240  
uh which is Core Issues Trust do have  
close ties to the Christian Legal Centre  
0:12:44.240,0:12:48.320  
who are notorious for a forthright  
defense of their,  
0:12:48.320,0:12:52.320  
their clients so a company should be  
wary about their interactions with  
0:12:52.320,0:12:54.320  
groups that are practicing conversion  
therapy  
0:12:54.320,0:12:58.720  
um, there could and has been some legal  
ramifications  
0:12:58.720,0:13:04.000  
uh for those that have um attempted to  
cut ties with Core Issues Trust in  
0:13:04.000,0:13:07.519  
in terms of getting threatening letters  
and so forth.  
0:13:07.519,0:13:10.240

(EP): We've been talking about legal ban,  
we've  
been talking about things that  
0:13:10.240,0:13:14.000  
individual companies have done.  
Do you think that a legal ban is the  
0:13:14.000,0:13:18.160  
only satisfactory solution?  
Well, what about the rights of Christian  
0:13:18.160,0:13:22.720  
groups as they say,  
for example? (ND): So, I think it is important  
0:13:22.720,0:13:25.120  
that there is legal efforts to ban the  
practice  
0:13:25.120,0:13:29.760  
um well, number one it doesn't work and  
then number two it can cause  
0:13:29.760,0:13:34.079  
lasting damage and when we look at laws  
that are coming in other places  
0:13:34.079,0:13:38.399  
most of those laws are directed towards  
banning conversion therapy for minors  
0:13:38.399,0:13:42.560  
or where it is fraudulently offered  
towards adults,  
0:13:42.560,0:13:46.639  
um but I think that there must also be  
work to educate people  
0:13:46.639,0:13:51.360  
and tackle stigma around LGBT issues. At  
the end of the day, conversion therapy  
0:13:51.360,0:13:54.800  
only has a hook  
if people think being LGBT is wrong and

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if you take that away from them, you take their main tool for motivating

0:13:59.600,0:14:02.959

people to undergo conversion therapy away so I think it is

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important that it does go hand in hand with outreach to groups

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as well. (EP): Playing devil's advocate for a minute,

0:14:10.079,0:14:14.320

surely they would say well, you know, we we don't do anything against people's

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will, it's just if people believe that homosexuality is

0:14:18.320,0:14:21.519

wrong then we offer some help for them. I mean, what

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would your response be to that? (ND): So, I think it is one thing to promote a

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treatment that doesn't work. Um, frankly there's lots of things you can go out

0:14:28.720,0:14:31.040

and buy that don't work but I think it is

0:14:31.040,0:14:34.560

particularly nefarious to offer a treatment which they know doesn't work

0:14:34.560,0:14:37.519

and also know causes serious harm to people

0:14:37.519,0:14:41.279

and does lead to higher rates of suicide and

0:14:41.279,0:14:43.600

depression and self-harm and other things that we've

0:14:43.600,0:14:47.440

talked about. I think at the end of the day, they are, they are providing a false

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promise and it's not only morally wrong and

0:14:50.639,0:14:54.399

ethically wrong I would very much hope that one day it's also legally wrong.

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(EP): As far as the Core Issues Trust in Northern Ireland is concerned, the

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National Secular Society has recently challenged

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its right to have the status of a charity um, and therefore have various

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tax breaks. Do you think that organizations that

0:15:08.000,0:15:11.920

promote conversion therapy as part of their overall religious

0:15:11.920,0:15:16.399

purpose should be able to keep their charitable status? (ND): Uh, no. I

0:15:16.399,0:15:20.160

particularly welcome the step from the National Secular Society. I think it is

0:15:20.160,0:15:23.839  
perverse that groups like Core Issues Trust can benefit from

0:15:23.839,0:15:28.240  
the systems our country has set up to help real charities and

0:15:28.240,0:15:31.680  
I think it would be a welcome step for the charity commission to review their

0:15:31.680,0:15:36.240  
charitable status.  
(EP): Now, the Core Issues Trust - just looking

0:15:36.240,0:15:39.920  
at their website -  
they have actually posted a response to

0:15:39.920,0:15:42.880  
criticisms made by the National Secular Society

0:15:42.880,0:15:46.800  
of its stance towards gay conversion therapy and just quoting from that it

0:15:46.800,0:15:50.320  
claims that, quote  
"the National Secular Society accuses the

0:15:50.320,0:15:53.759  
trust of causing harm by actively promoting conversion

0:15:53.759,0:15:56.880  
therapy. On the contrary, the trust promotes

0:15:56.880,0:16:01.040  
client autonomy and advocates therapeutic and counselling choice for

0:16:01.040,0:16:04.800  
individuals dissatisfied with unwanted sexual attractions,

0:16:04.800,0:16:08.000  
feelings and behaviors or gender confusions" - that's the end of the

0:16:08.000,0:16:12.959  
quote. So the Core Issues Trust seems to be claiming that it does not promote

0:16:12.959,0:16:16.480  
conversion therapy  
but at the same time it advocates

0:16:16.480,0:16:18.800  
therapy and counselling for people who are

0:16:18.800,0:16:24.480  
somehow in its view sexually confused.  
What is your response to this? Is there a

0:16:24.480,0:16:29.519  
distinction to be made between active promotion of conversion therapy

0:16:29.519,0:16:34.399  
and the promotion of client autonomy? (ND): I think Core Issues

0:16:34.399,0:16:37.680  
Trust  
are masters of deflection and, and Mike

0:16:37.680,0:16:41.120  
Davidson is a very intelligent man and he's very good at

0:16:41.120,0:16:45.839  
writing statements that sort of negate the harm that their therapy causes.

0:16:45.839,0:16:49.519  
Um, I think there is clear evidence that conversion therapy

0:16:49.519,0:16:54.320  
does cause harm, doesn't work and the suggestion that it's an individual

0:16:54.320,0:16:57.600  
choice could  
apply for many, sort of, scam treatments

0:16:57.600,0:17:00.639  
that  
in this country we just rightly accept

0:17:00.639,0:17:04.240  
shouldn't  
take place. I don't necessarily see it as

0:17:04.240,0:17:07.039  
a matter of  
individual choice as such because what

0:17:07.039,0:17:10.480  
people are buying into at the end of the  
day is a lie.

0:17:10.480,0:17:13.760  
(EP): Finally Nick, what do you think are the  
next steps for

0:17:13.760,0:17:18.240  
um, campaigning against conversion  
therapy in this country?

0:17:18.240,0:17:22.799  
(ND): Um, I think it is really important to  
keep up momentum on the government,

0:17:22.799,0:17:26.640  
to make sure that they do not backslide  
on the commitments that they made

0:17:26.640,0:17:30.000  
in 2018 and that Boris Johnson has  
reiterated since,

0:17:30.000,0:17:34.080  
that they do explore bringing forward a  
legal ban on the practice and

0:17:34.080,0:17:38.080  
they do that as soon as possible as we  
are falling behind

0:17:38.080,0:17:41.600  
many other countries on this as they  
seek to make progress.

0:17:41.600,0:17:46.960  
Um I think it is also a positive step  
that we are seeing companies take action

0:17:46.960,0:17:49.919  
where conversion therapy happens and  
where those

0:17:49.919,0:17:53.280  
groups have ties to them and we are  
seeing more and more companies

0:17:53.280,0:17:56.799  
address their links to those groups and  
the services they provide.

0:17:56.799,0:18:00.880  
Again, the, at the core of conversion  
therapy is the idea that

0:18:00.880,0:18:05.280  
being LGBT is wrong and that it's  
something you should aspire not to be

0:18:05.280,0:18:09.600  
and I think it is particularly important  
as well that we challenge that notion

0:18:09.600,0:18:14.000  
and if we take that away,  
we take away their most powerful tool. (EP): If

0:18:14.000,0:18:16.559  
listeners  
are interested in getting involved in

0:18:16.559,0:18:19.520  
this issue more, what would you suggest  
they do?

0:18:19.520,0:18:23.039  
(ND): So, we write about conversion therapy  
regularly on Pink News - you can read our

0:18:23.039,0:18:25.600

coverage.

There is a campaign group set up called

0:18:25.600,0:18:30.480

Ban Conversion Therapy which has been recently making strides towards keeping

0:18:30.480,0:18:33.840

pressure up on the government.

I'd recommend writing to your MP making

0:18:33.840,0:18:36.480

sure that this is an issue that stays on the table

0:18:36.480,0:18:41.039

as the government sort of delays on what they want to do about it and

0:18:41.039,0:18:44.960

people remain aware of it. (EP): Nick Duffy, thank you very much for a really

0:18:44.960,0:18:48.559

interesting talk.

(ND): Thank you.

0:18:52.559,0:18:57.360

(EP): I'm now joined by Megan Manson of the National Secular Society to reflect

0:18:57.360,0:19:01.360

on my conversation with Nick. So Megan, first of all, I talked briefly with Nick

0:19:01.360,0:19:07.840

about the National Secular Society's campaign against the Core Issues Trust

0:19:07.840,0:19:12.320

and then the question of whether some, something, a body like the Core Issues

0:19:12.320,0:19:16.080

Trust

should be um, a charity. I mean, could you

0:19:16.080,0:19:19.919

go a bit more into

what what the NSS was saying about that?

0:19:19.919,0:19:23.520

(Megan Manson, MM): That's right

so we noticed that there'd been a debate

0:19:23.520,0:19:25.919

in

the Northern Ireland assembly on this

0:19:25.919,0:19:28.559

issue of gay conversion therapy. It had come up

0:19:28.559,0:19:32.480

and the health minister at the time - that's Robin Swann - he expressed that

0:19:32.480,0:19:35.919

it's the first time he'd really come across this issue so

0:19:35.919,0:19:39.679

we thought well, if this is the first time he's really um, addressed

0:19:39.679,0:19:42.960

conversion therapy he should really be aware that there is a

0:19:42.960,0:19:46.400

charity that's registered by the Northern Ireland charity commission

0:19:46.400,0:19:50.400

that quite explicitly promotes it, and that's Core Issues Trust. I mean, they

0:19:50.400,0:19:53.039

call it

change orientated therapy - they don't

0:19:53.039,0:19:57.679

like the term conversion therapy - but essentially that is, that's what they do.

0:19:57.679,0:20:01.039

As they phrase it, they offer therapy for people

0:20:01.039,0:20:04.640

seeking to leave homosexual behaviours and feelings.

0:20:04.640,0:20:08.960

So we raised this with the Health Minister and we also

0:20:08.960,0:20:12.320

sent a letter to the Northern Ireland charity commission as well and said well,

0:20:12.320,0:20:15.760

you know, the whole point of charities is that they serve a public benefit

0:20:15.760,0:20:21.760

and they don't harm people and as Nick mentioned, conversion therapy doesn't

0:20:21.760,0:20:25.360

work and it can cause harm, quite serious harm

0:20:25.360,0:20:28.640

so that's why we wrote to the charity commission and the

0:20:28.640,0:20:32.559

Health Minister saying well, why is this a charity? Why,

0:20:32.559,0:20:35.919

how's this being allowed to register as a charity? What public benefit does it

0:20:35.919,0:20:40.799

possibly serve?  
(EP): Yep, so I, I suppose the NSS's point then

0:20:40.799,0:20:43.840

is that the problem with saying that a body

0:20:43.840,0:20:47.600

can be a charity and have all these tax benefits and so forth

0:20:47.600,0:20:50.640

just on the basis that it has this purpose of

0:20:50.640,0:20:54.799

the advancement of religion is really problematic.

0:20:54.799,0:20:57.919

(MM): Definitely and that I think is a core issue

0:20:57.919,0:21:02.480

that as far as I know, all the charities that promote gay conversion therapy or

0:21:02.480,0:21:05.679

seem to be, you know, within that field are religious

0:21:05.679,0:21:11.120

ones which is not surprising because the stigma about being lesbian or gay or

0:21:11.120,0:21:15.039

bisexual is basically rooted in conservative

0:21:15.039,0:21:17.600

religious values. So, it's not surprising that we'd see

0:21:17.600,0:21:22.000

that. And that's.... the real problem is that charity

0:21:22.000,0:21:25.039

law enables these religious organizations

0:21:25.039,0:21:27.840

because charity law recognizes the advancement

0:21:27.840,0:21:30.799

of religion as in itself a charitable purpose

0:21:30.799,0:21:36.640

and so in theory a charity should be able to demonstrate a public benefit

0:21:36.640,0:21:40.320

but in the case of religious charities I don't think that's necessarily happening,

0:21:40.320,0:21:43.600

I think that providing an organization is advancing a

0:21:43.600,0:21:46.480

religion, that the charity commission recognizes

0:21:46.480,0:21:51.360

as a religion they, they basically can get away with doing an awful lot of

0:21:51.360,0:21:54.320

things that are not in the public benefit, for example,

0:21:54.320,0:21:58.240

promoting gay conversion therapy. (EP): So, if your, if your religion says that

0:21:58.240,0:22:02.880

being gay is a sin, then you can promote stopping people

0:22:02.880,0:22:07.760

from being gay or promote celibacy um under the guise of

0:22:07.760,0:22:11.200

promoting your religion. (MM): Absolutely, that is essentially part of the religion

0:22:11.200,0:22:14.080

that's exactly right - you are, you are promoting the tenets of the religion,

0:22:14.080,0:22:17.919

you're doing what the charity law, what charity law says you should be

0:22:17.919,0:22:20.480

doing as a religion is promoting that doctrine.

0:22:20.480,0:22:23.520

(EP): And then this is again a theme that we often see

0:22:23.520,0:22:26.720

in the issues the NSS deals with - that the purposes

0:22:26.720,0:22:31.200

of religions may be things which people who don't share in those beliefs find

0:22:31.200,0:22:33.840

extremely intolerant or just out of keeping with

0:22:33.840,0:22:40.080

secular values. Another, I think, issue that raised by my conversation

0:22:40.080,0:22:44.880

with Nick was this idea of how to stop conversion therapy. Now Boris

0:22:44.880,0:22:47.679

Johnson has talked about banning gay conversion

0:22:47.679,0:22:52.480

therapy. He hasn't done so yet, and religious groups on the other hand

0:22:52.480,0:22:55.919

say that those which support gay conversion therapy or some form of

0:22:55.919,0:22:58.960

it say that it's, it would be anti-democratic, it would be

0:22:58.960,0:23:03.919  
intolerant to try and stop them having  
their rights to preach what they believe

0:23:03.919,0:23:06.400  
in.  
What's the solution here? Is the worry

0:23:06.400,0:23:10.320  
that if conversion therapy were banned  
it would be, it would be too difficult

0:23:10.320,0:23:17.200  
to find a definition of what  
conversion therapy is um, that could be

0:23:17.200,0:23:21.679  
banned legally? (MM): Yes, I think there  
really  
is a problem here with trying to define

0:23:21.679,0:23:25.280  
uh conversion therapy because there are,  
it is a very broad range

0:23:25.280,0:23:28.880  
of different practices so I can, I do  
have some sympathies there

0:23:28.880,0:23:32.640  
when people are asking for a ban, what  
exactly do we ban?

0:23:32.640,0:23:37.200  
So, there is one interesting case for  
example - there's an organization called

0:23:37.200,0:23:43.039  
Living Out,  
which it basically says it supports

0:23:43.039,0:23:47.679  
religious people who want to conform to  
biblical standards when it comes to

0:23:47.679,0:23:50.799  
relationships.

So in other words it says well, if you

0:23:50.799,0:23:55.919  
have these same-sex attractions,  
it encourages you to to not uh, follow up

0:23:55.919,0:23:59.200  
on them and to....  
basically it promotes celibacy if you

0:23:59.200,0:24:02.799  
are LGBT.  
Now this is an interesting one because

0:24:02.799,0:24:06.559  
they were  
originally rejected by the charity

0:24:06.559,0:24:10.880  
commission when they  
wanted to register but

0:24:10.880,0:24:15.039  
eventually after sort of looking into it,  
the charity commission decided to

0:24:15.039,0:24:19.679  
reverse its decision  
in 2016 and accepted it on the register

0:24:19.679,0:24:24.799  
saying oh well, actually we, you know, it  
does sort of meet the definitions for

0:24:24.799,0:24:29.760  
charity law to be recognized as a charity  
and this prompted a conservative MP

0:24:29.760,0:24:33.120  
Michael Freer  
to say well, how could this possibly be

0:24:33.120,0:24:36.159  
in the public benefit? and he actually  
said well, it's just

0:24:36.159,0:24:40.559  
gay cure therapy rebranded and, is how he

expressed it.

0:24:40.559,0:24:44.080

So, you know, I'm not 100 per cent sure whether Living Out,

0:24:44.080,0:24:48.159

because it's promoting celibacy could be considered conversion therapy or not

0:24:48.159,0:24:53.200

but certainly I can see how it's not serving a public benefit and it

0:24:53.200,0:24:57.360

is potentially causing harm by telling people that you know, if

0:24:57.360,0:24:59.520

you're, if you're gay that you should repress

0:24:59.520,0:25:02.480

those feelings. I think that, that is, that's not in the public benefit to be

0:25:02.480,0:25:05.919

telling people that. So it's one where I probably would say

0:25:05.919,0:25:10.400

well no, the charity commission should not have uh registered them. (EP): Now,

0:25:10.400,0:25:13.200

yeah, so that would be one thing just telling people

0:25:13.200,0:25:18.480

um who are LGBT+ to, to restrain themselves from being involved

0:25:18.480,0:25:22.320

in any sexual activities then another form I guess would be um what

0:25:22.320,0:25:25.919

Nick was talking about which is some form of therapy which just

0:25:25.919,0:25:31.120

involves counseling or preaching or trying to tell people that, that being

0:25:31.120,0:25:34.320

gay is not what God wanted but I think there are other forms, more

0:25:34.320,0:25:37.440

extreme forms, that have been reported on, the NSS has

0:25:37.440,0:25:40.799

reported on as well, um in terms of different ways of,

0:25:40.799,0:25:44.240

slightly more sinister ways of converting people, aren't there?

0:25:44.240,0:25:47.919

(MM): Oh yes, that's right, so um I think in 2017

0:25:47.919,0:25:52.240

the Liverpool Echo reported on quite an extreme example.

0:25:52.240,0:25:56.640

So they did some undercover work into a church called Mountain of Fire and

0:25:56.640,0:26:02.000

Miracles, which is a Pentecostal church, and the particular branch they looked at

0:26:02.000,0:26:05.600

was doing some form of conversion therapy which involved starvation.

0:26:05.600,0:26:09.360

And so that's obviously a very extreme form of this

0:26:09.360,0:26:14.640

and there was a more recent um, case with another church called Winners

0:26:14.640,0:26:20.720

Chapel, again another Pentecostal church and um that time the undercover reporter

0:26:20.720,0:26:24.240

managed to get some film footage of what went on and

0:26:24.240,0:26:28.080

the therapy that was filmed took the form

0:26:28.080,0:26:33.120

of a sort of exorcism so there was, there was laying on of hands, there was

0:26:33.120,0:26:37.279

speaking in tongues and sort of trying to exorcise the gayness out - I'm not too

0:26:37.279,0:26:40.480

sure what the the mentality is - the guy who was doing it

0:26:40.480,0:26:45.039

sort of called it a complete mind reorientation, so he was using some sort

0:26:45.039,0:26:48.799

of pseudo-psychological terms, you know, there's a

0:26:48.799,0:26:52.559

little bit of overlap here between a sort of pseudoscience and pure

0:26:52.559,0:26:56.400

religion and again and it kind of illustrates there is a real,

0:26:56.400,0:26:59.760

a broad spectrum of uh different practices under this

0:26:59.760,0:27:03.600

this conversion therapy. (EP): Yeah it almost sounds like a form of brainwashing.

0:27:03.600,0:27:07.120

(MM): Yeah, the reporter said that, you know, he he felt that those sessions themselves

0:27:07.120,0:27:11.279

were quite traumatic and he said that no real thought was given as to how that

0:27:11.279,0:27:14.240

would have affected him emotionally. It was quite dramatic and I

0:27:14.240,0:27:17.360

can imagine if you've been wrestling with these feelings that you feel

0:27:17.360,0:27:20.960

ashamed of that this will just exacerbate, you know, that, that

0:27:20.960,0:27:24.960

desperation and that shame that you feel. (EP): So that certainly might,

0:27:24.960,0:27:28.000

might be something which has potentially very negative

0:27:28.000,0:27:32.159

psychological effects on, on people who undergo it even if they do it of their

0:27:32.159,0:27:34.720

own free will in some sense but perhaps they might feel

0:27:34.720,0:27:37.760

pressure but I mean given this wide variety

0:27:37.760,0:27:43.600

of what gay or LGBT conversion therapy, so-called, can involve, I mean is,

0:27:43.600,0:27:47.120

is banning it the best solution? What, What's the NSS view on this?

0:27:47.120,0:27:50.960

(MM): Well I think when it comes to minors, people under

0:27:50.960,0:27:56.720

18, I think that it's probably easier to do that without, sort of, going into

0:27:56.720,0:28:01.919

the territory of well, how much do you curtail freedom of choice and, and

0:28:01.919,0:28:05.679

autonomy? It is a very difficult question. Yeah, we can't ignore the fact that, as

0:28:05.679,0:28:08.880

always, as with all cases of secularism it's about finding an appropriate

0:28:08.880,0:28:11.679

balance between protecting people from harm

0:28:11.679,0:28:16.080

and giving people autonomy. (EP): So maybe with adults it's more difficult but with

0:28:16.080,0:28:19.919

minors the case is clearer isn't it? (MM): I think so yeah, they're a lot more

0:28:19.919,0:28:23.679

vulnerable, generally. The issue of choice - I'm not really sure if minors who are

0:28:23.679,0:28:25.279

under, you know, intense pressure from their

0:28:25.279,0:28:29.360

families and are going through a part of their lives where they are sort of

0:28:29.360,0:28:33.440

questioning a lot of their sexuality, I think that in that

0:28:33.440,0:28:36.240

case there is a role for the state to take

0:28:36.240,0:28:40.640

extra measures to protect them. (EP): Is the issue here partly that some

0:28:40.640,0:28:45.120

religions, especially more, more conservative forms of Christianity

0:28:45.120,0:28:49.200

or Islam or similar religions even if they don't actively support gay

0:28:49.200,0:28:53.360

conversion therapy, they perhaps support in children as well

0:28:53.360,0:28:58.720

as adults, a mindset of disapproving of being sexually

0:28:58.720,0:29:03.039

different from the perceived norm? (MM): Absolutely and um, I think

0:29:03.039,0:29:06.080

Nick touched on this as well - that really the

0:29:06.080,0:29:09.360

the best way to end conversion therapy is to end the demand.

0:29:09.360,0:29:13.919

So, conversion therapy flourishes when people who are LGBT

0:29:13.919,0:29:17.840

feel ashamed of being LGBT and it's as simple as that so if people

0:29:17.840,0:29:21.520

didn't feel that it was a problem they would not seek to change their

0:29:21.520,0:29:24.399

orientation.

So that's really where this comes from,

0:29:24.399,0:29:28.720

is trying to challenge the ideology behind

0:29:28.720,0:29:33.600

what fuels conversion therapy and what's quite shocking is these particular

0:29:33.600,0:29:38.720

ideologies are being promoted in the state school system. Our research

0:29:38.720,0:29:43.360

in 2018 found that many state-funded faith

0:29:43.360,0:29:45.520

schools in particular, Catholic schools - they

0:29:45.520,0:29:49.520

tended to be a bit more um detailed and a bit more explicit about

0:29:49.520,0:29:52.240

what they teach as part of their relationship and

0:29:52.240,0:29:56.399

sex education - they were teaching the idea that

0:29:56.399,0:30:01.279

being gay was disordered, that was the uh, the word that one of the schools used,

0:30:01.279,0:30:05.360

that same sex relationships were unacceptable, that was another

0:30:05.360,0:30:09.520

phrase that came up, and essentially they were saying that sex is something that

0:30:09.520,0:30:12.480

is reserved for christian marriage - by that they mean

0:30:12.480,0:30:14.480

between a man and a woman - so if you, if that's,

0:30:14.480,0:30:17.919

if you cannot get into that marriage, then it's not for you and you should be

0:30:17.919,0:30:20.880

celibate and this is an idea that's being taught

0:30:20.880,0:30:24.000

to children enrolled in state education so essentially

0:30:24.000,0:30:27.520

an arm of the state is promoting this pretty harmful

0:30:27.520,0:30:30.559

idea that somehow there's something defective

0:30:30.559,0:30:35.360

with you if you are not straight and that basically this, this whole

0:30:35.360,0:30:38.720

dimension of human existence is denied to you

0:30:38.720,0:30:42.080

because you happen to like people of the same sex.

0:30:42.080,0:30:46.640

(EP): So yeah, a lot of work for the government

to do and not just merely about

0:30:46.640,0:30:50.159  
banning conversion therapy, if  
perhaps that's not really the best

0:30:50.159,0:30:52.559  
solution, perhaps the best solution is to  
really focus on

0:30:52.559,0:30:56.399  
promoting more tolerant and pluralistic  
education for children at a young,

0:30:56.399,0:30:59.600  
younger age too. Megan Manson, thank you  
very much.

0:30:59.600,0:31:05.840  
(MM): Thank you.

0:31:06.640,0:31:11.120  
(EP): That was episode 32 of the National  
Secular Society podcast hosted by Emma

0:31:11.120,0:31:13.519  
Park.  
My guest speakers were Nick Duffy and

0:31:13.519,0:31:16.480  
Megan Manson.  
If you would like to help us challenge

0:31:16.480,0:31:20.240  
unfair religious privilege and support  
freedom of and from religion in Britain

0:31:20.240,0:31:23.200  
today  
why not become a member of the NSS? Full

0:31:23.200,0:31:29.919  
details are on our website  
at [secularism.org.uk/podcast](http://secularism.org.uk/podcast). If you liked this  
podcast, you can find

0:31:29.919,0:31:33.679  
more episodes and more information about

this episode on the website.

0:31:33.679,0:31:45.679  
Thanks for listening.