

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

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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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therapy on offer - so, Core Issues Trust,
the main practitioner in the UK,

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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

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necessarily the case. There are many
cases of teens

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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

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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

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independent expert on LGBT rights
calling for a global ban on conversion

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therapy again
citing the, the evidence that it simply

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doesn't work.
Often what conversion therapists are

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appealing to is
just sort of a base homophobia - they have

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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

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Christian world, is gay conversion
therapy

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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

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main practitioner of conversion therapy
that gets the most publicity

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does come at it from a Christian
background but

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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

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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

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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

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the larger LGBT movement had bigger fish
to fry as it was

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and now we're seeing finally some
efforts to take action against it.

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So, as you said, Germany has imposed a ban,
Canada has, we're

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up to 20 US states now and quite
crucially,

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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,

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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

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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 unfilled and we've seen a revolving door

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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

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recently committed to
not permitting the promotion of

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

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as we've seen
issues around Facebook uh hosting apps

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

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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

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providers and yes, most recently

Barclays have

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denied them banking services which is really, I think, an artifact of the way

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that companies are taking these issues more seriously now.

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There is perhaps a note of caution on this however

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uh which is Core Issues Trust do have close ties to the Christian Legal Centre

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who are notorious for a forthright defense of their,

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their clients so a company should be wary about their interactions with

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groups that are practicing conversion therapy

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um, there could and has been some legal ramifications

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uh for those that have um attempted to cut ties with Core Issues Trust in

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in terms of getting threatening letters and so forth.

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(EP): We've been talking about legal ban, we've

been talking about things that

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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

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that there is legal efforts to ban the practice

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um well, number one it doesn't work and then number two it can cause

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lasting damage and when we look at laws that are coming in other places

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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

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and tackle stigma around LGBT issues. At the end of the day, conversion therapy

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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

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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

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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

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

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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

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and does lead to higher rates of suicide and

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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

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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

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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

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

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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

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I think it would be a welcome step for the charity commission to review their

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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
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