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### The Right to Love

Even now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, gay conversion camps *still* exist. The reason this topic was brought to my attention, is because I feel like with all the changes our society is going through, with all the LGBTQ rights that have been established, conversion camps should be made illegal. All the progress we've worked so hard for has to be enjoyed by all members of our community. That can't happen if it is still legal to emotionally and/or physically torture LGBT people into rejecting who they are (Stafford). Don't you think that that's a violation to someone's rights? You're basically getting sent to a place where they "Pray the gay away." In my opinion, gay conversion camps violate individual rights and should be illegal, especially for minors.

Conversion Therapy is one thing that is never really brought to the attention of the media. One night during one of my 1AM Twitter scrolling shenanigans, I came across a tweet about how if Mike Pence becomes Vice President, he/she fears he will make going to conversion camp some kind of law, because he does support them, after all. I had no idea this kind of thing even existed, so I wanted to expand further on the topic so others can be educated as well.

Conversion therapy is a form of psychological treatment designed to change a person's sexual orientation from "gay" or "bi" to "straight". Or in other words: "In conversion therapy,

practitioners use a variety of methods designed to literally make someone stop being gay”(McNamara). In one of the tweets, TeenageCloseted states that he/she was at a conversion camp for about 6 months, at only 15 years old. The twitter user then explains the camps “tactics”, which was done in a two part system.

This two part system was done by first, “deconstruction of one’s self.” So basically they break you down to the point where you have the deepest self-loathing towards yourself. This step is done by various types of “treatment” such as electroshock therapy, beating an inanimate object pretending that it’s a person who they think you have issues with causing you to be gay, such as a dad that left or an abusive mother. They also used methods like: Exposing people to negative sensations when viewing gay porn, using "therapy" to tie gay behavior to family dysfunction and making people believe that they are inherently bad for being gay (McNamara). The camp explained that 50% of their patients kill themselves before or near the completion of this process. TeenageCloseted then verifies by saying that he/she met 50 people while being there, and 27 of the 50 killed themselves, all between the ages of 13 and 17. The second stage was when they would “rebuild you” in their image. So basically teaching you how to be straight. “All they taught was repression. They even encouraged suicide because “at least we wouldn’t be gay anymore.” (Teenager).

Although many different organizations, medical, federal and scientific, have expressed concern over conversion therapy and fear it to be potentially harmful, it has yet to become a federal issue. Research done at San Francisco State University shows that highly rejected LGBTQ young people are more than 8 times as likely to have attempted suicide, nearly 6 times as likely to report high levels of depression and anxiety, and more than 3 times as likely to use

illegal drugs (“The Lies”). One of the major effects that have on people who get sent to conversion camps is depression. Most if not all hate themselves in the end of the therapy. Some even either attempt or commit suicide.

Late in the year of 2014, President Obama came out against the concept of conversion therapy after the tragic death of Leelah Alcorn, who was a transgender teen in Ohio who was forced to undergo versions of such therapy. Leelah’s parents denied her ever coming out as trans, and tried to seem confused about why their “son” would ever do this. Leelah scheduled her suicide note to be posted to her tumblr account a few hours after her death. In the note she mentions how her parents withdrew her from school and isolated her from her friends and social media. On her 16th birthday she asked to go through the transition process, and her parents rejected her request. Instead, they sent her to conversion therapy where they would tell her that she's just being selfish and wrong for feeling that way. It got so bad that she didn't want to live anymore. Leelah is one of the many transgender teens to be rejected by their family, therefore committing suicide (Wikipedia).



Conversion therapy not only reinforces gender stereotypes and perpetuates the stigma surrounding homosexuality, but can actually harm the people it purports to help. LGBTQ youth generally tend to be more at risk for depression and substance abuse than their peers, not because of their sexuality, but because of rejection and negative social attitudes. In fact, according to the Family Acceptance Project, LGBTQ teens who experience rejection because of their sexual-orientation, or gender nonconforming behavior are at an even higher risk for substance abuse, depression, risky sexual behaviors, and suicide than their LGBTQ peers who experience acceptance (Standard).

I get it. You're a parent who doesn't want their kid to be gay. But is something like conversion therapy really worth losing your child over? Since the tragic death of Leelah Alcorn, Cincinnati placed a ban on conversion therapy. Conversion Therapy is also banned in California, Oregon, Illinois, Washington D.C., and New Jersey. In my opinion, banning conversion therapy in just 6 states is not enough. It needs to be banned everywhere. Because of conversion therapy, parents have lost their children, people have lost friends, and their loved ones. Times are changing and we live in a world where gay marriage is legal. So why do people still try to force the gay away?

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