



Mr. Jo Colman
CEO
Psychology Today
115 E. 23rd St., 9th Floor
New York, NY 10010

Mr. John Thomas
Vice President, Publisher
Psychology Today
115 E. 23rd St., 9th Floor
New York, NY 10010

February 23, 2015

Re: Conversion Therapists Advertising on Psychology Today Website

Dear Mr. Colman and Mr. Thomas:

I write to express the concern of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) with certain advertisements on the *Psychology Today* website by practitioners offering conversion therapy. So-called “conversion therapy” is a dangerous and discredited practice, sometimes practiced by licensed mental health providers, that falsely claims to change one’s sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. By offering a venue for these medically debunked practices, *Psychology Today* lends them a veneer of credibility and helps these practitioners take advantage of vulnerable families and children. We urge you to retract all current advertisements for conversion therapy on the *Psychology Today* website and disallow future postings for conversion therapy or by those known to practice conversion therapy. We further urge you to post an article on the website condemning conversion therapy and making clear that advertisements for conversion therapy have no place on *Psychology Today*.

The Human Rights Campaign is America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBT citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. As an advocate for LGBT young people, HRC believes that no young person should be coerced or subjected to dangerous practices that lack legitimate medical purpose, such as conversion therapy.

On February 14, 2015, HRC became aware that licensed Marriage & Family Therapist Thomas Schmierer was advertising conversion therapy services through the *Psychology Today* website (see attached). Mr. Schmierer is based in California and the group therapy sessions offered are based in Riverside, California. While California law makes clear that these practices may not be offered to minors, the advertisement does not clarify that minors may not participate in the advertised sessions.



These practices are based on the false idea that being LGBT is a mental illness that needs to be cured, an idea that has been rejected by every major mental health group for decades. Several jurisdictions, including California, New Jersey, and the District of Columbia, have enacted legislation to set professional standards for state-licensed mental health providers and to clarify that conversion therapy is not an acceptable or responsible professional practice when applied to young people under age 18.

There is no credible evidence that conversion therapy can change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, and it is abundantly clear that conversion therapy poses devastating health risks for LGBT young people. These dangerous practices can lead to depression, decreased self-esteem, substance abuse, homelessness, and even suicidal behavior, and for this reason the nation's leading mental health organizations have roundly decried them. Unfortunately, due to discrimination against LGBT people and the fact that professional rules have not kept up with this widespread understanding, some licensed mental health professionals continue to engage in conversion therapy.

Research shows that young people experience conversion therapy as a form of family rejection, and LGBT youth who experience family rejection face increased health risks. In one study, such youth were 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, and 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs compared with peers who had not experienced such rejection. Providers who engage in conversion therapy under the veneer of state license can mislead families about the risks involved, leading to negative psychological outcomes and irreparable damage to family cohesiveness.

Psychology Today has the opportunity to take a leadership role in protecting the public from these harmful and illegal practices by taking prompt action to limit this type of advertisement and creating awareness about the danger of conversion therapy. We hope that as a publication that has had a long track record of inclusion and affirmation for the LGBT community in its articles and features *Psychology Today* will take swift action protect the LGBT community from these harmful and deceptive practices.

We would appreciate a timely response to this request so that HRC can consider additional appropriate action. **We request that you respond within 48 hours.** If you should have any questions regarding this request or wish to discuss collaboration to limit the advertisement of conversion therapy, please contact me at 202-216-1514 or by email at Fred.Sainz@hrc.org.

Sincerely,

Fred Sainz
Vice President for Communications & Marketing/Human Rights Campaign



HUMAN
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Attachments:

- Screen capture of advertisement by licensed Marriage & Family Therapist Thomas Schmierer on *Psychology Today* website
- Compiled Policy and Position Statements on Conversion Therapy