

The Wayback Machine - <https://web.archive.org/web/20010619075216/http://www.geocities.com:80/davidma...>
 This article was published on May 12,2000 by the Las Vegas Bugle. The author was Bill Schafer, editor of the Las Vegas Bugle.

Author's note:

The full impact of my interview with Jayce Cox and Ron Lawrence really didn't hit me until I sat, alone in the newsroom in the wee small hours of the morning, transcribing the tape. Jayce underwent intense psychological torture in trying to be "cured" of his homosexuality. This torture was administered by people whom he trusted completely. The significance of going public with his story was summed up by Jayce:

The [Mormon] Church has power, and we're taught to be afraid of that. Maybe not told, but you don't ever want to speak out against the Church. You don't want to be labeled an Apostate, because our culture will condemn you and you will not be accepted. I know that for me even saying anything negative that has anything to do with the church, there will be serious repercussions for me.

But I'm not condemning the church, I'm not condemning the teachings, I'm condemning those people who, in the name of the church, did terrible things to me and to tons of other people. They deserve to be condemned. But it's not the church that I'm condemning. And you have to separate the church from the Mormon culture . People confuse that they're the same thing. They're not necessarily the same thing. There's the teachings. And then, over the hundred and fifty or sixty years that we've been in the west, there's this culture that's evolved that goes side by side with the church, but that's not the same thing. And I'm not condemning the church, but I have to condemn the cultural beliefs that homosexuality is a sin next to murder, and that it's ok to abandon your children if this is what they are."

Jayce still holds tightly to his Mormon beliefs and teachings. He says he still wants to be a good Mormon. "I'm still a Mormon, and I still believe, and they can't take that away from me. The faith is inside me, whether my name is on the roll -- it really doesn't matter anymore."

"I dreamed that I was in a fairly erotic situation with another man, and then midway through, I would just be electrocuted." Jayce Cox says he doesn't have the dream on a weekly basis any more, and he's relieved. Now it's just every couple of months that he bolts up, startled and shaking, in the middle of the night. He attributes this recurring dream to the aversion therapy administered at Brigham Young University.

Jayce tells his story:

It's 1995. He is sitting in an office on the campus of BYU, where his counselor has attached electrodes to his hands, arms, torso and genitals. His Mormon Bishop gave him a referral to the counselor. Jayce is shown pornographic images of men having sexual encounters. Then, ZAP! His body tingles, then aches from the electrical shock administered by his trusted counselor. He is scheduled for twice-weekly sessions for four months. "Toward the end of the program I could press a button and it would stop the shock and then a picture of a woman would come on."

But Jayce is 19 years old and he willingly goes back for more. He gives them his college savings -- \$9,000 - - for the treatments which are promised to cure his homosexuality.

* * *

"They promised me it would work, and who doesn't want to live a life that's normal and acceptable in your society and have your family embrace you?" he asks rhetorically.

Therapist Ron Lawrence of Community Counseling Center in Las Vegas says this "reparative therapy" is "equivalent to what I would call the kind of torture that people experienced in Nazi concentration camps." Jayce displays the scars on his hands and tells of more scars where the electrodes were placed "on my torso, and [breathing deeply as though reliving some excruciating pain] on my genitalia."

The words don't come easily to Jayce as he explains why he so willingly gave up his education savings -- and put his earning potential on hold -- in order to endure what Lawrence describes as "assault and battery, abuse".

"You're taught that the leaders of the church will never lie to you, never deceive you and you're taught to believe them blindly," Jayce explains. "I believed the counselors. I believed it would work. I believed that through that [reparative therapy], faith, temple attendance and prayer and fasting I would be healed. I believe that through God anything's possible. And I was told it would work. It probably sounds really naive, but I truly believed it would work."

In trying to deal with his sexuality, Jayce says he considered suicide "many, many times. I just thought it

would be better for me to die [then], without committing the sin of homosexuality, than to live a life and to have that over me. And that it was less of a sin for suicide and I didn't want to die and not be able to go back to God. That's what we're taught, that if you are homosexual, or if you're a sinner, there's no returning to heaven, and that's your Hell. It was better for me to take my life than to bring the shame of being homosexual on my family and my community and have everyone know 'he was a good Mormon, and now he's gay. and how shameful that is for his church and for his family.'"

"The whole suicide thing is almost set up," Lawrence explains. "The other thing that some of these reparative therapists do -- and to me this is ghastly -- they tell people they are better off to go out and have impersonal sex than be in a committed relationship with another man because the committed relationship ... is against God's law and it's better to go out and do something impersonal. So, as a result, they're encouraging people to risk their health and their life in regard to HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases."

"The American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Association of Social Workers have all come out with major policy statements against reparative therapy saying there's absolutely no proof that it can take a gay person and make them straight," Lawrence explains. "In fact, the only thing it really does, if it has any success at all, is it teaches people how to be traumatized actors and actresses."

"Gay men," he says, "have been experiencing this for years and what BYU has insisted, as well as the Mormon Church, is that they stopped this program in the early eighties and it happened to Jayce in '94 and '95 so that's not true. Jayce and I really believe that this process is so secretive it may still be going on."

"Unfortunately I have another young man that's about to come down [from Utah], whose reparative therapy was even more recent. It was, I think, only two years ago. As the aversive stimulus they used ammonia -- putting ammonia up his nose -- the smell of ammonia connected with the stimulus of male-male pornography. He's about to come down and be in a little bit of treatment here. ... His therapist is saying he's a little too vulnerable yet to talk, but we're hoping."

Lawrence says he has seen numerous cases of young men damaged by reparative therapy and he's doing everything he can to stop the practice. "I have files full of dossiers on people that are perpetrators of this crime ... and from time to time I get to respond in a public forum or I get to write a licensing agency. I will continue to be out there in strong advocacy for the person who's been victimized, for the cessation of this practice, and for some clear, sensible thinking about gay and lesbian issues, both in the treatment community and in the spiritual community."

Bringing criminal or civil charges against the counselor, the University, or the Church might be difficult. According to Jayce, "his counselor's name was Michael Keates. That's the name he gave me, and I used the name of Greg Smith. We were told to use pseudonyms, not ever give our real names. I know he didn't give me his real name, and I had to sign waivers that I wouldn't hold him, BYU, or the Mormon church responsible, that I would never discuss what happened, period, that it was to remain confidential between myself and him. A family in Provo -- they lead what we call Family Fellowship, which is a Mormon version of PFLAG -- they've been sending me photos of people who they think may have been the perpetrator. So far I have not been able to identify him, but they're very adamant that we do and I feel that we should."

"I actually feel quite sorry for these people," Jayce explains, "because they were raised in a culture where they had to hate themselves. They're so full of self-hate this is the only way that they feel they can cope. Albeit it is very wrong and it has to stop but I have a hard time fully condemning them without realizing that it's not all their fault. It's the culture that we come from that has trained us so well to hate ourselves, we'll do practically anything."

Jayce says there are other consequences in the Mormon culture for being gay. Last August when he told his parents he was gay, "my father asked me never to come home. He told me I was no longer one of his children, that I shouldn't have contact with my siblings. until they're 18 and can make their own decision. ... I have a brother and a sister who don't want to have any contact with me, and I have two other sisters. One of them is 18 and we still have contact, and I have a 12 year old sister and she still calls me occasionally but she has to do it pretty quietly."

With the practice of reparative therapy condemned by the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Association of Social Workers, what kind of people still practice it? Says Lawrence: "The reparative therapist himself is often times a licensed professional, they are often a religious fanatic. But -- here's the kicker -- they can also be another gay or lesbian person that uses the reparative therapy on other people to push down their own homoerotic impulses. In other words, by going out and selling a bill of

goods to the community, they help to keep themselves in check by taking others along with them."

"What I would say is happening is the religious right is orchestrating this huge propaganda campaign that's in favor of reparative therapy, that's coming up with all these people who have successfully changed their sexual orientation, and basically, these are people who have learned to be very skillful actors and actresses who, out of guilt toward their religious teachings, have been able to push down their homoerotic impulses and pretend that they're straight."

But Lawrence explains "pushing down" these impulses can lead to disaster. "I have several patients who've gone through reparative therapy and what happens is, a lot of times the homoerotic impulses build up to the point where they're like a nitrogen bomb. I mean the force is so great and they reach this breaking point. They go off into the community and they do everybody. They have this literal closet explosion and they go out into the community and become extremely promiscuous. The thoughts behind this promiscuity is 'What's the difference, I'm going to Hell anyhow,' so a lot of my clients have come in here with some kind of sexually transmitted disease, or HIV infection, that is directly related to that explosion."

Jayce says he did not go through a major explosion. "I think I put on a pretty good show that I was fairly emotionally healthy, but deep down I had a lot of demons that kept me awake at night. I have always been able to put on a good face, but before I came to Ron I was just a mess. I couldn't keep my relationships working with other men, nothing seemed to be working in my social life and in my family life, but the people at work thought I was the perfect Mormon. I had a lot of problems. I was probably a lot more promiscuous than I ever should have been. But luckily, I came away unscathed."

People have other reactions to "pushing down" their natural homoerotic impulses, says Lawrence, and "the result of all reparative therapy, for the most part, is what I call post traumatic stress disorder. In other words, the person who is subjected to this type of therapy comes out pretty much like a combat veteran from Viet Nam. ... There are symptoms that go with post traumatic stress disorder: the person usually has an exaggerated startle response, they're usually scanning the horizon more than other people, looking for possible dangers, there will be a response to a cue, in other words, things that set you off physiologically. ... When Jayce first came to me he had a lot of those symptoms."

The cue that Jayce still responds to is pornography. "Just the sight of porn, no matter what it is, makes me very physically ill. I can't stomach it, I can't see it, I can't even stand to be in the same room with it. It's a mess I can't handle."

Lawrence explains: "Basically, the same thing -- the same instrument used to create the aversive stimulus -- is now a symbol of trauma for Jayce, and if he looks at any type of pornography he becomes nauseated and wants to throw up. That symptom is starting to go away too, I think. But usually these folks are left with a raft of post traumatic symptoms ... especially sexual addiction, substance addiction of some kind, or even over-eating. The old Freudian word for that is displacement as a defense mechanism."

Lawrence considers himself successful in treating the trauma. "The person who is in recovery from reparative therapy, [needs to] find thematic material that validates their story and their lives, as far as being gay is concerned, some type of validation that really supports who they are in the healing process."

Jayce explains what he found. "The biggest thing for me was, in the Mormon faith you're taught that you have to seek revelation from God and that he can speak to you about what your problem is, or what your question is and with that in mind, I would pray daily. Well I was praying wrong. I was praying that he would fix me, that he would make me straight, that he would allow me to love women the way I was supposed to love them. But I got to the point where I was engaged to a girl, and it didn't feel right and I knew deep down that it was the wrong thing to do to her and for myself; that it just wasn't right. And I prayed and prayed and prayed. 'What I should do about it?' and I truly felt like God said to me that he created me this way, that I'm okay, and that I don't have to hate myself anymore."

"When I first felt that, I thought 'There's no way. I could get that from satin or whatever. That's just my mind talking.' That can't be, because that's not what God would say. And this happened in the temple here. I went back a second and third time and I got that same impression. It was so overwhelming. I knew I was gay because God created me to be gay, he loves me the way I am and I don't have to change, that I don't have to hate myself and that I'm okay. That's what saved me. I think if I hadn't felt that I would have just gotten married, gotten into a destructive path, probably cheated on my wife, probably had children and then eventually fell apart -- committed suicide or left my wife and kids. I see that happening to people who don't accept themselves. I know a lot of them and it just breaks my heart that we are not allowed to feel the love of God when everyone else is. We're the only group in the church that is excluded from His love, and that's just wrong."

Jayce still has hope. We're coming into a new day where it's ok to be gay, and people are seeing positive homosexual role models on TV. It's in the forefront. It's in the news and children can see there's a name for the feelings they have and there are people out there who are acceptable, who are normal, and who are just like them.

"Growing up, I didn't know of any homosexual who was a positive roll model. There was a kindergarten teacher in our school who the school district asked to leave because he was gay. [I felt] he was wicked, that he was trying to destroy our families and our children. So with that in mind, I always thought, 'that's me and I'm that bad.' But I think now it's not going to happen as much, and I think we really can make a stand here and hopefully stop this."

A positive influence on Jayce has been "those people who are out and open and who are willing to say 'Hey, I'm gay, and yes I can contribute to society as a whole and I'm an exceptional person and I'm gonna come out and I'm not going to be quiet about it anymore.' The people who are loud, who are outspoken, I have a lot of respect for because that takes strength and courage, and I don't know that I necessarily have that, but I need to get it because I have a story that needs to be told and because I don't want this to happen to anyone else.

Jayce knows a young Mormon man who's gay. "He's on his mission right now and he's so gung ho. He's just like me when I was his age, and I just fear that when he comes back, the program will still be going, and he will enroll because he knows that's what he's supposed to do, in his mind, and it will hurt him. I just don't want anyone else to hurt. Too many of the people who have gone through it don't seek help and their lives are destroyed. I love my church and I love the teachings, but I just feel a lot of shame for them."

"Through my knowing Ron I've been able to share my story with my mother, who's actually a very wonderful person who lives in Montana, who's very supportive. It's brought us closer together and it's helped me to realize I have survived, and through surviving I can help others survive."

"I'm not going to let shame bind me any more. I'm not going to let the church put me in a position where I feel I have to hide myself and hide my name and hide my face. I don't want to give them that power. They've had enough power over me for too many years and I think if I can let them know that I'm not going to just sit here and be quiet, then things might get better. It might get more difficult for me, but in the long run, I'll be better off. I just don't want to hide in silence anymore."

"Whose hands is the blood really on?" Lawrence asks. "I mean there's such a thing as murdering someone indirectly and causing someone indirectly to loose their life. These people who perpetrate reparative therapy are causing these types of explosive behavior, so on whose hands is the blood and the deeper question is, who will wash it off? Because, as far as I'm concerned they're murderers and I'll stick by that until I take my last breath.

