

RESEARCH AND REALITY

Free
to 
CAUSE *Change*

SURVEY OF **78** EX-LGBT PEOPLE

Does “Conversion Therapy”
(Counselling) Constitute
Harm or Help?


CAUSE
COALITION **AGAINST** UNSAFE
SEXUAL EDUCATION



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Contact details:

CAUSE (Coalition Against Unsafe Sexual Education)

P.O. Box 5231. Cranbourne 3977. Victoria. Australia.

Email: cause.victoria@gmail.com

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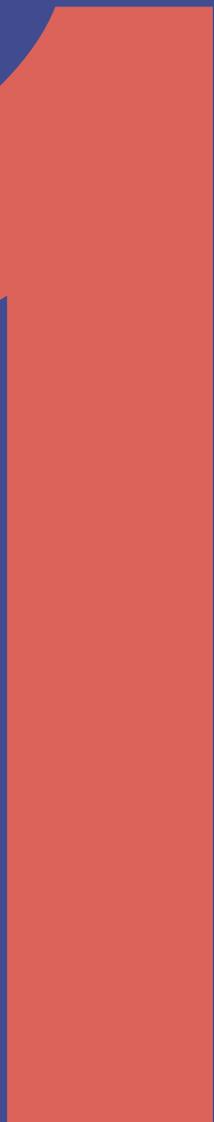
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Free To Change: survey of 78 ex-LGBT people.

AUTHORS: PROFESSOR JOHN WHITEHALL, DR CON KAFATARIS, MR ED SPARRIUS.



Introduction

Free to Change study authors: Professor John Whitehall, Dr Con Kafataris, Mr Ed Sparrus.

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Advocates for banning “conversion therapy” do so on the basis that sexual orientation and gender identity are innate and immutable and, this being so, efforts to change are inherently harmful and should be criminally punishable. When public policy is based on incorrect or incomplete assumptions, poor policy with detrimental consequences is the inevitable result. It is therefore vitally important to test the accuracy of this underlying assumption. It is insufficient to simply believe that sexual orientation and gender identity are fixed and immutable because popular opinion declares it to be so. Nor should public policy be guided only by the deeply felt convictions of a politically radical minority. For the criminalisation of “conversion therapy” to produce the benefit intended, the assumption that change is impossible, and efforts to produce it damaging and futile, must actually be correct.

Issues relating to sexuality and gender identity are complex and may vary significantly between individuals. Definitions of “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” are still under construction and vary considerably over time. Opinions differ as to whether such things are fixed or fluid. The idea that humanity can be neatly categorised into different sexual orientations, or that deep feelings of being the opposite gender will inevitably be lifelong, or that none of these aspects of identity develops in a particular way in response to socialisation or environment are highly contestable. To legislate new social norms and enforce acceptance of these ideas is to ignore the lived experience of those who have found change both possible and beneficial.

The report by Melbourne’s La Trobe University, *Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice*, relies on the testimony of 15 individuals who found “conversion therapy” harmful and damaging. They have explained that “as survivors, we want Australians to know it is not just the practice of conversion therapy that is harmful, but that much of the damage is done by the ideology that underpins the pseudo-therapies.” They object particularly to the representation of any form of sexuality or gender identity as “brokenness” that should be fixed. Their assertions that banning conversion therapy is not only right but necessary demands us first to accept that:

1. minority sexual orientations or gender identities are never fluid; or
2. that, since one is not better than another, denying individuals assistance in seeking change will have no negative impact on their lives; and
3. that change does not sometimes occur organically in the course of exploring previous life trauma or abuse.

The authors of La Trobe’s *Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice*, claim to have set up a comprehensive study of all LGBT therapy experiences. The evidence presented here demonstrates a glaring gap in their research. Their report, arguably by design, examines only one side of the question and looks only at negative experiences. All that is necessary to counter-act their claims that “conversion therapy” is universally damaging and harmful to the extent that it demands criminal legal penalties, is evidence that just one person who experienced unwanted same-sex attraction or just one person who experienced gender dysphoria, has found lasting change and/or relief through counselling. This report presents the collated experiences of 78 such people. The questionnaire remains open and our survey sample continues to grow.

The current report presents the collated results of testimonies from 78 ex-LGBT people which challenge the evidence presented in La Trobe’s report and attest to very different experiences. This cohort of “ex-gay” or “ex-trans” individuals is a minority group, drawn from the LGBT community, which is itself a minority group.

¹<https://www.starobserver.com.au/news/national-news/australia-has-the-potential-to-lead-the-world-in-eliminating-gay-conversion-therapy/176615>

Given this, the size of the sample group more than five times as large as that presented in La Trobe's study is significant. Particularly, the study aimed to elicit information about the types of therapy these people accessed and for how long. The study also aimed to assess whether the change from an "LGB" or "T" identity or lifestyle has been associated with positive or negative life outcomes for the individuals concerned.

The results significantly challenge the conclusion of La Trobe's report that "conversion therapy" is harmful. It is also important to notice that the characterisation of "conversion therapy" as "bigoted quackery" or involving torturous treatments from "the dark ages" is a gross misrepresentation. Legal remedies already exist to prevent torture in Victoria. It is inaccurate and melodramatic to imagine an epidemic of unethical counsellors strapping their clients to chairs, plunging them in ice baths or administering electro-shock therapies.

Rather, the therapies mischaracterised as torturous "conversion therapies" involve regular talking, prayer, or counselling techniques in which a client decides what issues he/she would like to address, elects what to discuss and disclose, and what goals he/she would like to establish for the treatment process. It is the clinician's role to explore the issues the client raises during the session, and to assist the client with gaining clarity and evaluating the pros and cons of the options available to them to the end of establishing self direction, autonomy, and inner harmony and peace.

This being the case, the proposed legislation would have the effect of declaring "no-go" zones in the conversations LGBT people can have with their friends, pastors and therapists. Therapists who wish to escape criminal prosecution and keep their licences will assiduously avoid any issues that touch on gender identity or sexuality or simply refuse to take on LGBT clients. Although this legislation purports to help LGBT people, the potential for it to hurt them is abundantly clear. Under the current proposals, LGBT people will be uniquely disadvantaged by reduced access to therapies which, according to the 78 respondents to our survey, were not only beneficial but, in many cases, life-saving.

The Free To Change study creation and operation had a number of contributors. Dr. Con Kafataris was responsible for the study questionnaire and a guide in its construction, operation and interpretation. Professor John Whitehall oversaw and advised on the study's operation and interpretation. Ed Sparrus was responsible for the mechanics of the web portal and the study's day to day operation.

Professionals with their individual skills have contributed to the surrounding materials accompanying the statistical part of the Free To Change study in an effort to give it context.

Dr. Con Kafataris reviewed the commonly referenced literature that claims conversion therapies are harmful and don't work. His review exposes the fallacious claims that such materials and studies are prolific. They aren't.

Professor John Whitehall, paediatrician, has now been studying the phenomena of childhood gender dysphoria and the modern transgender movement from a medical and social perspective for over five years. He discusses the complications associated around the current treatment of gender dysphoria in children.

John Steenhof, Australian lawyer outlays what he sees are the legal flaws and consequences in the conversion therapy legislations that governments are implementing.

Dr David Pickup is a US psychologist at the coalface who operates the largest sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) clinic in the Texas. He writes of his clinical experiences with LGBT people whom he treats for unwanted same-sex attractions or gender identities.

Jon Uhler is a US psychologist with a life experience in treating the sexually abused and sexual abusers. He writes from his experience about the damage done to the many clients he has treated and the resultant LGBT orientations contributed to by such abuse. Jon discusses the further damage that will be done by legislations that would seek to stop the very therapies that has helped countless people.

(Each of these authors being fully responsible for their own content and have written without reference to each other.)

CAUSE (Coalition Against Unsafe Sexual Education) extends its great appreciation to the many people in the Ex-LGBT communities who directly contributed to the creation and support of the study. Particularly **Dr. Shirley Baskett** for her advice and **Leah Gray** who openly shared her life experiences and contributed to the many videos on the website.

And at its very heart, those brave souls who are the oppressed of the oppressed, the Ex-LGBT people who are at risk of persecution yet engaged with the study to answer the questionnaire and provided their stories of change, some so determined to demonstrate that the current narratives are false, that they were prepared to even be identified in the online videos and stories.

The Goals of This Study

The purpose of the Free To Change study is to examine whether it can be shown that people from the LGBT community can change their sexual orientation, or change their gender identity back to their natal sex. The study explores four critical aspects of any such potential change being:

- whether people change their sexual orientation or gender identity,
- whether such change is beneficial,
- whether they used counselling (conversion therapy), and
- whether change is long lasting.

The study is based exclusively on the testimony of formerly LGBT individuals who have left their LGBT lives behind.

This Study's Method of Data Collection

We have created an online portal where ex-LGBT people can come of their own free will to answer a questionnaire about their lived experiences. The results of this questionnaire were collated to provide the statistics presented in this study. The questionnaire can be found on the Free To Change portal by clicking on the "Start Here" button on the home page (<https://www.freetochange.org/>). We also provided the facility for participants to upload their testimonies of change in either a video, audio or written format. (<https://www.freetochange.org/ex-lgbt-stories-of-change/>)

The questionnaire attracted 78 respondents. This is over five times the number of participants on which the La Trobe contrary study, *Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice*, is based.

The survey portal is still active, and others will be included in later revisions.

While we were actively looking for people who used "Conversion Therapy" (counselling), around 77% indicated they had the study also includes individuals who experienced change with regard to their sexual orientation or gender identity without outside assistance.

Method of Expressing the Collected Data

The participants were asked to rate their personal wellness on a 0–10 Likert scale both pre- and post-change with reference to six particular life indicators: suicidal ideation, anxiety, self-image, relationships, physical health and promiscuity.

The change in the value of each of these life indicators across the cohort, is expressed in the data as a percentage of a 100-point scale. For example, if a participant submitted their evaluation of their pre- and post-change suicidal ideation as 8 and 2 respectively, this is a difference of 6 points on the 0–10 Likert scale. Expressed on a 0-100 point scale, this would be a 60% difference in suicidal ideation. If, as in this illustration, there is a reduction post-change, that is then expressed on the 100 point % scale as -60%. (Negative 60%).

The Study's Strengths

The researchers have been careful, insofar as it was possible, to ensure the study draws on authentic, verifiable experiences of identifiable participants:

- Every participant had to register their name and a point of contact.
- Participants could nominate an alias to protect their identity so as to encourage honest and complete responses. (The link between the participants and their alias has been recorded by the study's authors should it be required for the purposes of verification).
- Each participant's authenticity was verified by staff of ex-LGBT ministries.
- The study obtained statistical data on the participants and their lived experience.
- 33 of the respondents chose to upload testimonies and these are available in full for the purposes of corroboration on the Free to Change website. (<https://www.freetochange.org/ex-lgbt-stories-of-change/>)
- To ensure transparency the questionnaire is also freely accessible to view on the Free To Change Web portal.

The Study's Limitations

This study contains some of the same limitations as the contrary studies used by the LGBT activists to argue for the harms of “conversion therapy”:

- The data is based on the personal experience of a volunteer (and therefore is a non-random) sample group.
- The hypothesis that same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria is genetically predetermined and fixed throughout life lacks scientific proof. Similarly, there is no scientific method of “proving” the veracity of the changes in sexual orientation or gender identity as claimed by the participants in this study.
- The study relies on honest reporting of the sample. The majority of the participants are known within ex-LGBT networks. We engaged with ex-LGBT ministries to verify, insofar as is possible, the testimonies provided.

Extra Notes

- There were a small number of submissions (2) that we rejected because the answers provided were self-contradictory or the respondent did not meet the qualifying criterion of experiencing a changed sexual orientation or gender identity. In each case we emailed the participant and asked them to verify or correct their submission but received no response.
- Initially, issues relating to gender identity and relationship status were conflated into a single question. In cases involving gender dysphoria, two questions are needed to enable respondents to identify more clearly whether change related to their feelings of gender dysphoria, their feelings of same-sex attractions/relationships or both. This meant that the post-change sexual orientation of a number of the respondents could not be clearly ascertained.
- Since the original publication of this study the respondents were contacted to clarify their position. While not all replied, those that did now clarify the entire cohort's post change gender identity. However, the post change level of gender dysphoria for the entire cohort is not clear.
- This error has been corrected for future respondents so that they can now separately answer whether they still suffer gender dysphoria or not and to what level, and what their post-change relationship status is.
- It was also noted that numerous respondents of the LGB group also suffered gender dysphoria. These new questions are also asked of the LGB group.

This statistical part of the study examines the following:

SECTION 1 The demographic of the study cohort

SECTION 2 Did participants in the survey change their sexual orientation / gender identity?

SECTION 3 Ex-transgender post - change gender identity, relationships & gender dysphoria.

SECTION 4 Is the reported change in sexual orientation or gender identity long lasting?

SECTION 5 To what extent and for what time were therapies (counselling) used?

SECTION 6 Is the change away from LGBT lives in this cohort shown to be beneficial?

SECTION 1

The demographic of the study cohort

With the sole requirement that respondents identify as ex-LGBT, the sample group was otherwise unrestricted. In consequence, the study attracted respondents from a wide range of age groups, countries of origin, ethnicities and educational levels. Although predominantly Caucasian, the sample is otherwise demographically diverse.

A large proportion of the cohort (n=53 or 67.9%) had a tertiary education, indicating a strong capacity to contribute intelligently to this study.

TABLE 1 - DEMOGRAPHICS

COHORT SIZE: 78						
Characteristic						
Age at time of study	18-35	36-50	51-65	66+		
Number	20 / 78	19 / 78	33 / 78	6 / 78		
(%)	25.6%	24.4%	42.3%	7.7%		
Biological sex	Male	Female				
Number	46 / 78	32 / 78				
(%)	59%	41%				
Country	Australia	United States Canada	United Kingdom	France, Israel, Malta, Brazil, Europe	Asia	
Number	29 / 78	35 / 78	5 / 78	7 / 78	2 / 78	
(%)	37.2%	44.9%	6.4%	9%	2.5%	
Education level	Tertiary	Secondary	Primary			
Number	53 / 78	22 / 78	3 / 78			
(%)	67.9%	28.2%	3.8%			
Ethnicity	Australian/ Caucasian/ white/ European	Pakistani/ Arabic	Maori/ NZ	Asian	Latino/ Hispanic	Jewish
Number	59 / 78	5 / 78	2 / 78	5 / 78	5 / 78	2 / 78
(%)	75.6%	6.4%	2.6%	6.4%	6.4%	2.6%

TABLE 2 - SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY CHANGE STATISTICS

COHORT SIZE: 78					
Characteristic					
Age when intervention started	< 20	21-35	36-50	51-65	
Number	16/78	47/78	12/78	3/78	
(%)	20.5%	60.3%	15.4%	3.8%	
Years since intervention started	<= 5 Years	6 – 9 years	10 – 19 years	20 – 29 years	>= 30 years
Number	12/78	10/78	20/78	19/78	17/78
(%)	15.4%	12.8%	25.6%	24.4%	21.8%
Type of therapy received	Only professional counselling	Only religious counselling	Both professional and religious counselling	All professional and religious counselling	No professional or religious counselling
Number	13 / 78	20 / 78	28 / 78	61 / 78	17 / 78
(%)	16.7%	25.6%	35.9%	78.2%	21.8%
Years since any therapy started	<= 5 Years	6 – 10 years	11 – 19 years	20 – 29 years	>= 30 years
Number	8 / 61	9 / 61	15 / 61	14/ 61	15/ 61
(% of 61)	13.1%	14.8%	24.6%	23.0%	24.6%
Years since professional therapy started	<= 5 Years	6 – 10 years	11 – 19 years	20 – 29 years	>= 30 years
Number	4 / 41	6 / 41	10 / 41	11 / 41	10 / 41
(% of 41)	9.8%	14.6%	24.4%	26.8%	24.4%
Average length of time	Professional counselling	Religious counselling			
(Years)	5.4	7.4			
Support Received	Prayer	Support group	Family support	Peer support	Camps
Number	53 / 78	37 / 78	15 / 78	34 / 78	7 / 78
(%)	68%	47.7%	19.2%	45.6%	10%

SECTION 2

Did participants in the survey change their sexual orientation / gender identity?

To identify what change the participants experienced the questionnaire inquired as to the participants pre-and post-change sexual orientation and gender identity.

CHART 1 – REPORTED SEXUAL ORIENTATION / GENDER IDENTITY (PRE-CHANGE).

Pre-Change Sexual Orientation / Gender Identity

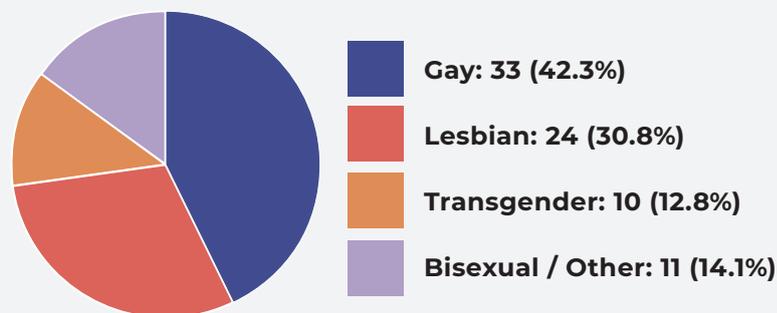
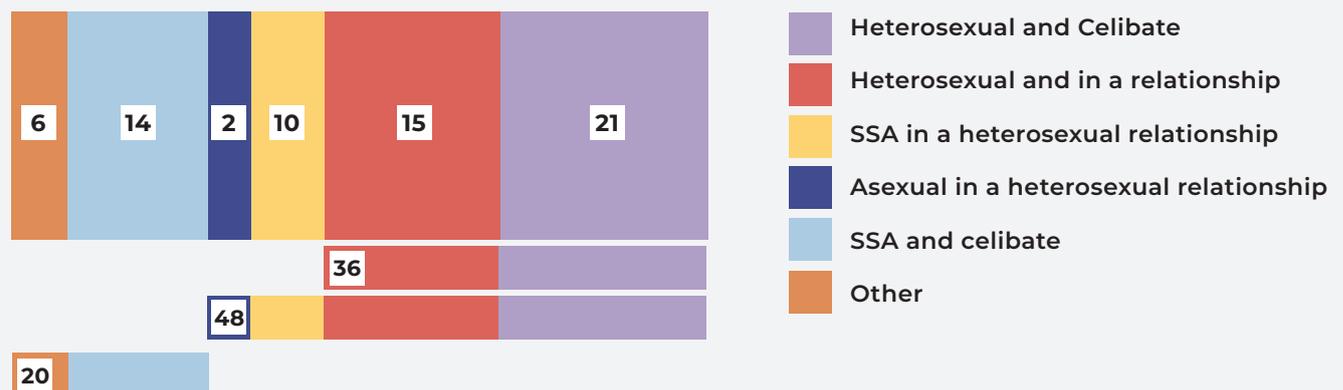


CHART 2 - REPORTED SEXUAL ORIENTATION / GENDER IDENTITY (POST - CHANGE) OF THE LGB COMPONENT OF THE COHORT.

Post Change Status of Former LGB



RESULT: These figures indicate that out of the 62 former LGB people:

- 36 (52.9%) are now exclusively heterosexual
- 48 (70.6%) are now living heterosexual lives
- A further 20 (29.4%) are still same-sex attracted, or classified themselves as “other”, but are no longer involved in SSA or other relationships.

SECTION 3

Ex-transgenders post - change gender identity, relationships & gender dysphoria

The study questioned the gender and relationship status of participants post-change. Within the limitations explained earlier the pre-change transgender reported the following:

TABLE 3 - GENDER IDENTITY / SEXUAL ORIENTATION – TRANSGENDER COHORT.

GENDER IDENTITY / SEXUAL ORIENTATION - TRANSGENDER COHORT					
COHORT SIZE: 10					
Status post- change. (Pre-change orientation = TG.)	Heterosexual and married or relationship	Heterosexual and celibate / not in a relationship	No longer gender dysphoric	Still suffer a level of gender dysphoria	Gender dysphoria status unknown
Number / 10	4 / 10	6 / 10	4 / 10	3 / 10	3 / 10
%	40%	60%	40%	30%	30%
Average level of reported residual gender dysphoria				0.1%	

RESULT: Of the 10 former transgenders in the sample:

- 10 (100%) report their post-change sexual orientation as heterosexual and having a gender identity congruent with their natal sex
- 4 (40%) report that they are in heterosexual relationships.

The testimonies that transgender participants submitted to the Free To Change website make for compelling viewing. Respondents discuss, for example, the realisation in adulthood that a transgender identity affirmed in childhood was not permanent. Their experiences of de-transitioning then involve the need to come to terms with permanent physical and irreversible medical interventions undertaken to “affirm” a transgender identity they now regret. (<https://www.freetochange.org/ex-lgbt-stories-of-change/>)

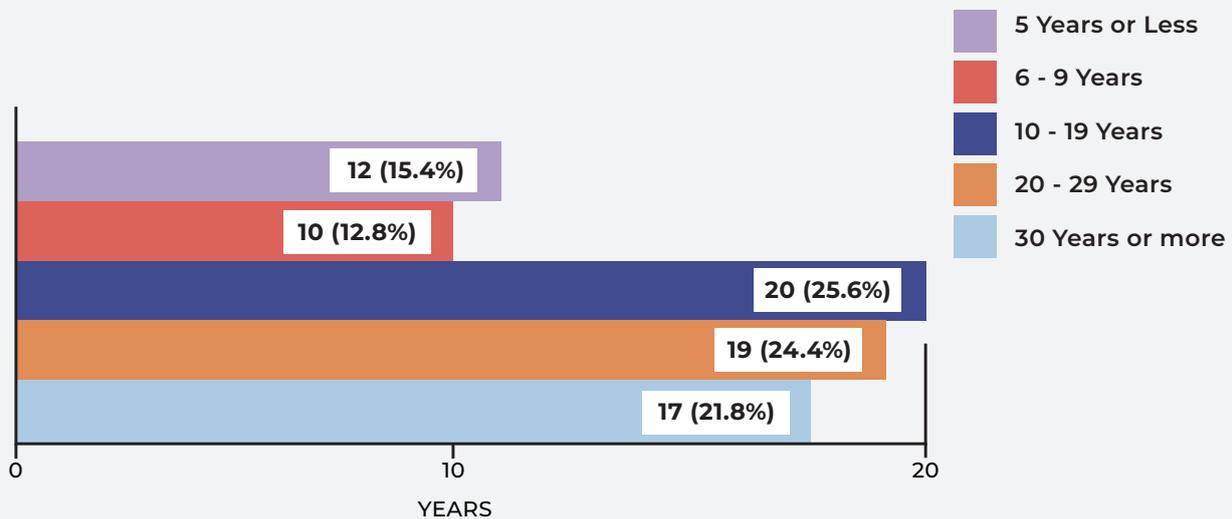
SECTION 4

Is the reported change to sexual orientation or gender identity long lasting?

This question asked about whether changes experienced in sexual orientation or gender identity have been transient or long-lasting.

CHART 3 - CHANGE PERSISTENCE WITHIN THE COHORT.

Number of Participants / Time Since Intervention (Change) Started



RESULT: The data clearly shows that change for this cohort is long lasting. Of the 78 individuals in the cohort:

- 17 (21.8%) had begun change 30 years ago or longer.
- 56 (71.8%) had begun change 10 years ago or longer.

SECTION 5

To what extent and for what time were therapies (counselling) used?

A major aspect of the survey was to investigate whether and for what period of time professional and/or religious counselling (conversion therapy) was used by the participants to effect the change in their sexual orientation or gender identity.

CHART 4 – REPORTED USE OF PROFESSIONAL AND / OR RELIGIOUS

Types of Therapy Accessed



A major point of this study was to determine if and how much counselling (conversion therapy) was used by this cohort.

TABLE 4 - COUNSELLING UTILISATION

COHORT SIZE: 78

Characteristic					
Type of counselling accessed	Total who accessed religious or counselling	Total who accessed professional counselling	Total who accessed religious counselling	Total who accessed both religious and professional counselling	Total who accessed prayer support
Number of the cohort accessing counsellors	61 / 78	41 / 78	48 / 78	28 / 78	53 / 78
% of cohort accessing counsellors	77%	52.6%	61.5%	35.9%	68%
Average length of time the counselling was used		5.4 years	7.4 years		

RESULT: Those who experienced change with counselling (conversion therapy) often utilised these services for a considerable number of years. Counselling appears to have been a significant in supporting and effecting the desired change. **Note from the table: 61 (77%) used counselling, 53 (68%) used prayer support.**

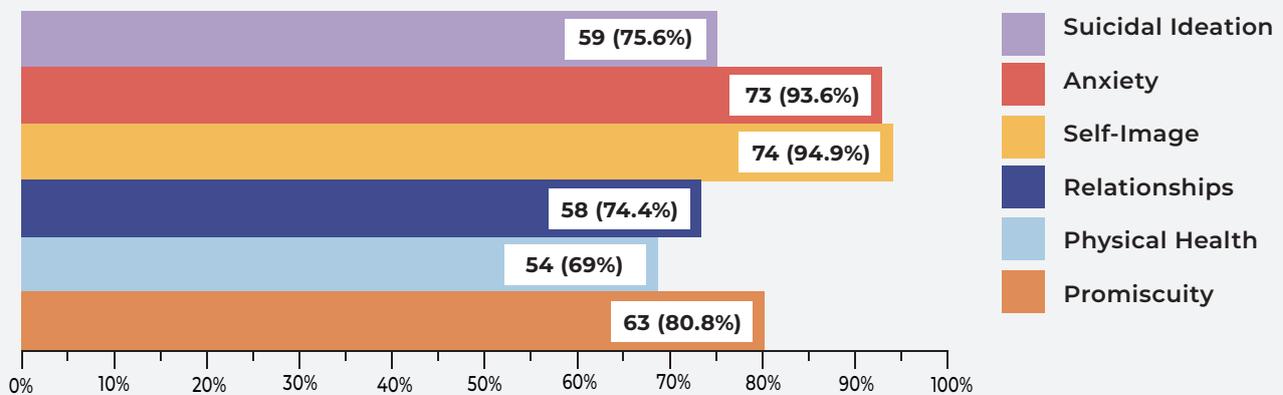
SECTION 6

Is the change away from LGBT lives in this cohort shown to be beneficial?

The study calculated the percentage of the cohort who reported an improvement in each of the wellness rating of their life indicators.

CHART 5 - THE PERCENTAGE OF THE COHORT WHO EXPERIENCED BENEFICIAL CHANGE IN 6 LIFE WELLNESS INDICATORS.

Cohort/Life Indicator - Percentage Reporting Improvements After Change

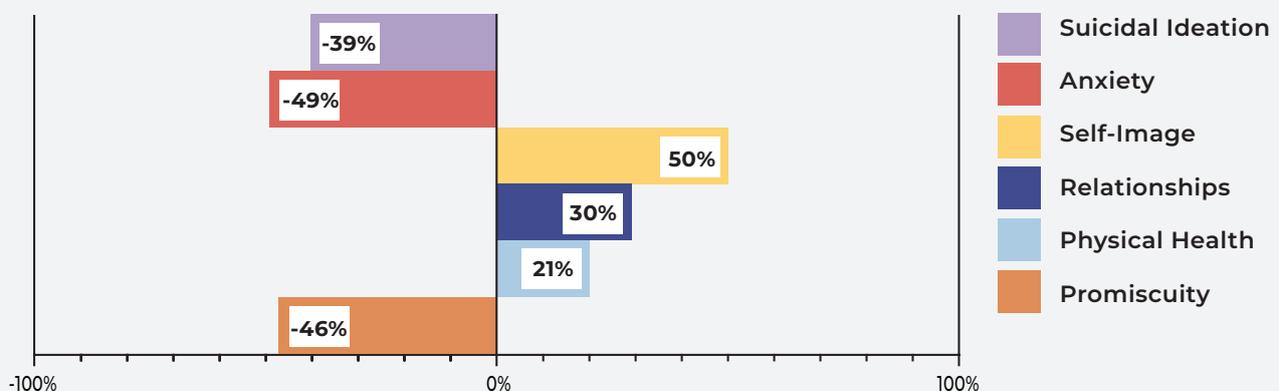


The study questionnaire asked participants to rate any variation in wellness in 6 life indicators from pre- to post-change. The following charts tables display the averaged change across the cohort on a -100% <- 0 ->100% scale.

CHART 6 - VARIATION IN THE 6 LIFE WELLNESS INDICATORS

The Average Change in Wellness in six Life Indicators.

Change displayed as percentage points, based on data collected from self-evaluated 0-10 Likert Scales. An increase expressed as a positive value. A decrease expressed as a negative value.



RESULT: The vast majority of this cohort reported that after leaving their LGBT lifestyles they experienced a notable improvement in their quality of life.

Outcomes

TABLE 5 - OUTCOMES WITH RESPECT TO MEASURED VARIABLES						
COHORT SIZE: 78						
Variable	Anxiety	Self-image	Suicidal ideation	Promiscuity	Relationships	Physical health
Number who showed improvement	73 / 78	74 / 78	59 / 78	63 / 78	58 / 78	54 / 78
% who showed improvement	93.6%	94.9%	75.6%	80.8%	74.4%	69.0%
Average improvement raw score. 0 - 10	4.9	5.0	3.9	4.6	3.0	2.1
Average improvement expressed as % from a baseline	49%	50%	39%	46%	30%	21%

Free To Change statistical study conclusions

The statistics supplied to the Free To Change study by 78 self-proclaimed former LGBT participants who, at one time, lived with same-sex attractions or gender dysphoria, clearly demonstrated that:

1. They changed their sexual orientation and gender identity.
2. They did so by extensively accessing professional and/or religious counselling, which today is placed in the category of “conversion therapy”.
3. The majority reported that their change is long lasting, indicating the change is permanent.
4. The data reveals that the change in participants’ lives and/or the counselling they received is associated with extensive improvements in the quality of their lives.
5. It should be noted that not one participant made any mention of the claimed abuses in the La Trobe *Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice* paper. However, it should be well noted that a number claimed harm from counsellors who discounted their wishes and even berated them for wanting to change their LGBT lives.

The study shows that 58 (74.35%) of the cohort of 78 ex-LGBT people now are in heterosexual relationships or consider themselves heterosexual. It should be noted that while some in the group remain same-sex attracted, these participants still reported that their lives had improved by leaving their LGBT lifestyles behind.

Suicide rates are typically claimed to be the compelling reasons that “conversion therapy” legislation should be implemented. However, LGBT people who wish to pursue the option of coming out of LGBT lives must have the right to access support to do so from the state and society, rather than being condemned to experiencing increased suicidal ideation by not being able to access counselling due to laws created by the state.

It is of fundamental importance to note from the statistics of this study that being able to change their sexual orientation or gender identity has potentially saved many of these participants’ lives. 75.6% of participants had a notable average baseline reduction in suicidal ideation of 39%.

The same is borne out by the video, audio and written testimonies that were uploaded to the website. Some of these individuals warn that, should professional and/or religious counselling be outlawed, this will result in the loss of LGBT lives.

Contrary to the narrative pushed by proponents of the anti-conversion therapy legislation, this study shows there are a considerable number of people in the LGBT community who have unwanted same-sex orientations or gender identity issues and who benefit from help through counselling.

The Free to Change survey portal is at
<https://www.freetochange.org>

The survey statistics can be accessed at
<https://www.freetochange.org/survey-results/>

The participants testimonies can be accessed at
<https://www.freetochange.org/ex-lgbt-stories-of-change/>

Enquiries can be sent to support@freetochange.org

Childhood gender dysphoria and anti-conversion therapy laws.

AUTHOR: PROFESSOR JOHN WHITEHALL



Childhood gender dysphoria and anti-conversion therapy laws.

In less than a few decades, childhood gender dysphoria has grown from a rare psychological problem to a national problem of health and legislation. In the five years from 1975 to 1979, only eight cases were reported to the children's hospital in Perth Western Australia. Now two to three children present *every week*.

Previously diagnosed as a mental disorder, identification with a gender incongruent with chromosomes is now promoted as a normal variant of sexuality, possessing a prominent locus on The Rainbow. So normal is this condition alleged to be, laws have been passed to ensure its protection. In Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) it is now a criminal act (punishable by lengthy jail sentences) to attempt to 'convert' a child or an adolescent, convinced they belong to the opposite sex, 'back' to an identity congruent with chromosomes: in other words, to try to make the young person 'comfortable in the skin in which they were born.' It is, however, not illegal to help the young person to 'affirm' an identity away from chromosomal reality. The ideology of gender fluidity promotes external changes in accordance with inner feelings, not in accordance with the XX or XY chromosomes of birth.

As with most utopian ideologies, force is needed to control unbelievers. Hence, the laws to criminalise any action that omits or obstructs the 'affirmation' of a confused child to a gender incongruent with chromosomes. As most utopian ideologies also enforce censorship of unbelieving ideas, it is not surprising that proponents of gender fluidity have been talking of 'prohibiting public broadcasts' that promote the heinous crime of 'conversion therapy'. While no such laws exist at present, to 'broadcast' ideas contrary to 'affirmation', to question its need (seeing that most minors grow out of it), to emphasise its side-effects (including those on the brain unmentioned by proponents), and to report successes of 'watchful waiting' with attention to co-morbid mental and family disorder (now criminalised), is to be denounced in angry protests to employers and other authorities.

The stages of 'affirmation'.

The programme of 'affirmation' mandated in Queensland and the ACT and, most likely, to be enforced similarly in Victoria and South Australia, begins, classically, with 'social affirmation' to the 'felt' gender, then progresses to administration of hormones to delay (or 'block') puberty, then to 'gender affirming' hormones to evoke external features of the opposite sex, and then to plastic surgery to fashion some of those features, for example, the flat chest of a male by removal of the female breasts.

Social 'affirmation' to the opposite sex involves adoption of new names, pronouns, clothing, toilet facilities, etc. with various attendant stresses, but the major problem must reside in the fact that most children 'affirmed' socially, progress to the next stages of 'treatment'. It is not hard to imagine how difficult it must be for a child to change its mind after becoming the 'poster' exhibit for inclusiveness at school, feted by media, and supported in its new identity by all its authority figures, from parent, to principal, to social media 'friends'.

The next step of 'puberty blocking' is declared to be a therapeutic intervention which grants more time for consideration of gender identity and procreative future, while avoiding undesired manifestations of puberty. Proponents swear in courts of law that 'puberty blockers' are 'safe and entirely reversible' despite the fact that, for years, contrary evidence has been widely published in international literature and, in any case, their use is biologically implausible.

Sex is determined by hormones before birth: From the early weeks of foetal life the brain is organised to await activation in puberty when it initiates a cascade of hormones to bring about physical and mental sexualisation. The apex of this hormonal process is dependent on the hormone that is blocked by 'blockers'. Administration of blockers stops puberty in its tracks.

However, as well as effecting the 'vertical' cascade from brain to gonads and back, the blocked hormone also has 'horizontal' effects on a centre of sexualisation in the midbrain, and on the limbic system which integrates emotions, memory, reward, and cognition, leading to a 'world view', including identity. As well, the limbic system has a special part, the amygdala, that is directly involved in sexualisation as is the aforementioned midbrain centre.

Though much has been revealed about these physiological processes, most remains unknown. Nevertheless, administering blockers to animals is known to block the midbrain centre for sexualisation, and to inflict sustained change in the limbic system. In sheep, the shape of the limbic system is altered and the actions of many of its genes are interrupted. Functionally, performance in mazes is reduced, emotional lability is increased, and preference is given to the familiar rather than the novel. Of course, blockers stop the cascade that stimulates the gonads to produce sex hormones, ova and sperm. Thus, not only do blockers stop the development of external features of sexualisation, such as the development of breasts in females or beards in males, they also stop the development of the sex-specific changes in the structure of the brain that should accelerate with puberty.

It is biologically implausible to claim a 'blocked' child has the capacity for mature consideration of gender identity and procreative future when neutered from the primary and secondary centres of sexualisation, and devoid of the integrating effect of the limbic system. Moreover, already 'affirmed' and thus 'familiar' with an identification to the opposite sex by names, pronouns, clothing, public recognition etc, how much harder will it be to choose the 'novel' identity designed by its chromosomes?

The next problem for blocked children is that almost all progress to receive 'gender affirming' hormones: testosterone for natal females and oestrogen for natal males. Regrettably, there has been even less laboratory investigation of the effect of such hormones, despite the great need for elucidation given the transgender epidemic. (Perhaps the probable results are unwelcome?) However, it has been known for years that the adult male brain will shrink at a rate ten times faster than ageing with administration of oestrogen for only four months. No one knows the effect of cross sex hormones on the developing adolescent brain (a period of great cerebral development). The effect of adolescent exposure followed by decades of exposure following this (as opposed to four months) is also unknown. Like everything else associated with 'affirmative' therapy, administration of sex hormones is experimental.

The high rate of suicide in transgendered adults is claimed to result from society's ostracism. It is just as plausible to consider the role of iatrogenic shrinkage on the function of the psyche. Or that, after all the hormones and surgeries, the psyche found no gold at the end of *The Rainbow*.

Part of that disillusion might have resulted from the limitations and complications of surgery: from wound breakdown, to urinary infections and incontinence, to reduction of sexual competence and, of course, to the inherent surgical castration which would, in any case, have followed the castrating effects of the hormones.

Regarding suicide

Regarding suicide, despite allegations of its prominence in young people confused over gender, there is no proof that, *per se*, gender dysphoria produces a higher rate. It is widely acknowledged that young people with the symptoms of dysphoria are afflicted with a very high rate of co-morbid mental disorder, including autism (up to 30%), depression, anxiety and even frank psychosis. Each of these co-morbidities is known to incline to self-harm and suicide, as is the family disruption which afflicts many dysphoric children. Thus, children and adolescents with gender dysphoria are vulnerable, at particular risk, demanding compassion and care.

Given reports that the rate of suicide in transgendered adults may be more than 20 times higher than the general population, part of the care of confused young people could lie in rendering them 'more comfortable in their natal skin', thus avoiding the side-effects and disillusion of 'affirmation'. But such therapies are now being criminalised.

The spectre of suicide is a powerful tool for manipulation and part of the therapy for gender dysphoria, particularly in adolescents, may lie in resistance to intimidatory scripts learned from the web, and over-emphasis by proponents for hormones.

The rising phenomenon of 'de-transitioners' confirms the difficulty of finding Happiness at the foot of the Rainbow and provides useful testimony on the power of social media in promoting gender confusion in the first place, and provision of scripts in the second.

What therapies have worked for gender dysphoria?

Going back to the eight cases in Western Australia, a quick reversion of identity to chromosomes was effected in boys admitted to a psychiatric unit where they were separated from mother and united with ordinary children. In those days, most gender confused children were male children (as opposed to vulnerable teenage girls) and the story in WA went like this: mother is disaffected by male partner and perceives small boy to be more attractive as a female; small boy, in turn, finds the way to light up mother's face is to pantomime femininity. Disruption of that cycle permitted chromosomal nature to take her course with rapidity.

Other cases reported in the literature since then have been, of course, more involved, but still reveal a consistent trend. Compassionate counselling and treatment of co-morbidities - in other words, 'watchful waiting' - has been associated with reversion to identity with chromosomes. Why ban it?

How did opposition to 'watchful waiting' become so powerful?

Such 'watchful waiting' is now a criminal act and, in the ACT, *anyone* practicing it will be liable to incarceration, including parents, family members, counsellors, paediatricians, psychologists, teachers, and mentors, etc. *Anyone* will be liable, and *anywhere*, including the home, referring, no doubt, to the efforts of parents to dissuade a confused adolescent from entering a life-long commitment to 'affirmation' hormones. Attempts by residents to go *anywhere* to avoid the ACT's criminalisation of non-hormonal 'affirmation' will also be a criminal act, warranting twelve months in jail.

How did this Draconian state of affairs develop? Only its perpetrators within political parties will be able to explain their success but one thing is certain, they have employed masterful use of the term 'conversion therapy', invoking a spectre of medieval torture inflicted on sexual 'deviants', both to punish and to cure: to 'convert' to 'normality'. The extent of such historical torture is, in fact, unknown and may be much more contrived than real. I have found it difficult to identify and quantify but, in any case, it is to be condemned on two accounts, whether it is real, or contrived for political effect.

In the Queensland parliament consideration of the need to criminalise 'conversion therapy', in January earlier this year, proponents for criminalisation were quizzed on the reality of coercive, aversive 'conversion therapy' in that state. None could proffer evidence that it actually existed, only vague accusations of activities somewhere in the past could be produced. One frustrated parliamentarian demanded 'Why should a law be passed to criminalise something that does not exist?'

Nevertheless, though watered down, a law was passed to criminalise 'conversion therapy'. As one wit declared, the Queensland parliament passed a law to criminalise unicorns, though none had been observed for quite a while. The 'anti-conversion' law passed in the ACT in August was to exceed that of Queensland. Not only are mythical unicorns to be put in jail, so are current equines and their riders.

What proponents for 'affirmation' seek to do is to ban all attempts of people to be relieved of unwanted sexual and gender pre-occupations through counselling, psychotherapy and psychiatry. Sufferers are thus to be condemned by the declaration that sexualisation is immutable: no-one can change; no one should try. Benevolently, the 'anti-conversion' laws will protect the confused from ignorant attempts for change. Malevolently, therapists are to be jailed for their heinous intervention. In particular, Christianity will be condemned for its repressive assertion that 'freedom' from unwanted pre-occupation is possible. Such consideration and attendant counselling are claimed to be as torturous as the medieval rack.

What is the evidence for the harm of so-called 'conversion therapy'?

As 'evidence' for the alleged harm inflicted by 'conversion therapy', parliamentary proponents for the 'anti-conversion therapy laws' in Queensland, the ACT and Victoria, refer to a 'study' undertaken by the Victorian Labor government's LGBTI task force, its Commissioners for Gender and Sexuality, Health Complaints and Mental Health, the Victorian Human Rights Law Centre and the Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society at La Trobe University. Released in 2018, the study is entitled 'Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice, Responding to LGBT Conversion Therapy in Australia' and is comprised of 15 (and only 15) replies the 'researchers' recruited from members within the LGBTI community who professed to have suffered under 'conversion therapy'.

The final testimony is of such egregious content it should defy all credulity: a teenage girl had been abducted, confined in an institution, held in ice baths over which a priest read the Bible, and finally, given electric shocks to her genitals, in order to dissuade a same sex crush on a teacher. In these days of whistleblowing and reporting of sexual abuse, absence of any substantiation whatsoever for this testimony precludes belief its veracity.

Conversely, if the accusations are true, the researchers are to be condemned for failure of mandatory duty to report sexual kidnap and torture. They are hiding a crime.

As well as reference to a pontificating priest, the anti-Christian intent of the report is confirmed by the prevalence of pictures of churches and crucifixes throughout the pages of the propaganda. Surely, in the history of legislation in a Western democracy, criminalisation has not been enacted on flimsier evidence?

Fresh air from Finland

In marked contrast to the criminalisation of counselling by Australian politicians, Finland has just released 'Guidelines for Treating Gender Dysphoria'. On June 11, its Council for Choices in Health Care (COHERE) adopted a 'recommendation on medical treatment methods for gender dysphoria i.e. anxiety caused by a transgender identity'.

Confirming the experimental nature of medical intervention for gender dysphoria, COHERE declared 'Only limited research has been conducted on transgender identity ... and comparative studies are very rare ... There is ... a need for more information on the disadvantages of procedures and on people who regret them. Medical intervention should only be instituted when the patient 'can reasonably justify the need for them and is aware of the risks associated with them.'

With regard to minors, COHERE declared 'psychosocial support should be provided in school and student healthcare and in primary healthcare for the treatment of gender dysphoria ... Consultation with a child or youth psychiatrist and the necessary psychiatric and psychotherapy should be arranged ... no conclusions can be drawn on the stability of gender identity during the period of disorder caused by a psychiatric illness...'

COHERE advises great caution in the administration of hormones. It notes the reality of a 'temporary search for identity typical of the developmental state of adolescence' and states hormones may only be given 'if it can be ascertained that their identity as the other sex is of a permanent nature and causes severe dysphoria'. And hormones may only be given 'after the other psychiatric symptoms have ceased and adolescent development is progressing normally'. Furthermore, 'surgical treatments are not part of the treatment methods for dysphoria caused by gender related conflicts in minors'.

Conclusion

It cannot be overemphasised: in Queensland and the ACT such counselling as advocated in Finland is already a criminal act, and is likely to become so in Victoria and South Australia. Further, in Australia while counting was facilitated before December 2017, five girls under the age of 18 had had their breasts removed. Now mastectomies on minors do not need the approval of the Family Court. Their number is unknown but is likely to be much greater, as will be the numbers of young people being administered hormones.

This news from Finland is a breath of fresh air in a debate being strangled by the ideology of gender dysphoria. The report raises hope that a psychological condition in a developing brain, afflicted by co-morbid disease, and strained by family discord, may be approached by psychological and traditional psychiatric means, rather than sex hormones and surgery and that the approach may be considered and patient, rather than a rush into an experimental future. The Finnish reports points to reason, rather than faith in a utopian ideology and to freedom of choice rather than compulsion.

AUTHOR: PROFESSOR JOHN WHITEHALL

Legal Analyses of Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020 (Vic).

AUTHOR: JOHN STEENHOF - PRINCIPAL LAWYER



Legal Analyses of Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020 (Vic).

Memorandum

DATE: 18 December 2020

FROM: The Human Rights Law Alliance

RE: Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020 (Vic)

1. This memorandum analyses the threat to religious freedom posed by the Victorian government's proposed *Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020 (Vic)* (**Conversion Bill**) that aims to ban sexual orientation and gender identity "conversion therapy".

Background

2. The Conversion Bill is a serious threat to religious freedom. If the Bill passes, churches, religious organisations, Christian schools and individuals will face coercion, investigation and hefty jail terms and large fines for teaching and practicing Biblical sexual ethics in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity (**SOGI**) issues as believed, taught and practiced by many Christian churches in Australia (**Christian sexual ethics**).
3. The Bill explicitly targets Christian sexual ethics. It puts in place various social engineering tools and powers of compulsion to facilitate a multi-pronged State attack on Christian sexual ethics which includes:
 - 3.1. a blanket ban on vaguely defined "change or suppression practices" (**COS Practices**) which expressly extends to consensual religious practices, including prayer and Christian teaching on SOGI issues;
 - 3.2. the creation of criminal offences under which any person pastors, leaders, teachers, parents, counsellors could be criminalised if complaints are made about Christian sexual ethics that might be considered COS Practices;
 - 3.3. an extension of the role of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (**Commission**) to grant broad powers to find, investigate, re-educate, censure and punish anyone who holds to and teaches Christian sexual ethics;
 - 3.4. a complaints regime administered by the Commission which will encourage hostile activist harassment of Christians, and secrecy provisions that allow the weaponisation of the system against churches, religious organisations and individual Christians who believe and practice Christian sexual ethics;
 - 3.5. a Commission-run indoctrination programme on COS Practices that will create and distribute propaganda attacking Christian SOGI convictions;
 - 3.6. the replacement of previous definitions for "gender identity" and "sexual orientation" with new definitions that entrench in law contentious and extreme SOGI ideology.

4. The Conversion Bill is a pernicious legal initiative and should be rejected in its entirety. However, there are potential amendments that could mitigate some of the flaws of the Bill, the simplest of which is to limit the prohibition of “change or suppression practices” to cover only coercive therapeutic practices which all parties condemn.

Legal Analysis

Definition of Change of Suppression Practices

5. The Conversion Bill is replete with ideological language that betrays the social engineering and coercive goals of the Bill in its purpose and objects clause:
 - 5.1. to “denounce”, “prohibit” and “eliminate” “change or suppression practices”;
 - 5.2. to ensure all people in Victoria can “live authentically and with pride”;
 - 5.3. to affirm that every SOGI identity is “not broken and in need of fixing”; and
 - 5.4. to affirm that COS Practices are deceptive and harmful.
6. The definition of COS Practices to be banned in the Conversion Bill is broad and imprecise, and specifically targets Christian sexual ethics to expressly include (clause 5(3)(b)):

*“carrying out a **religious based practice**, including but not limited to, a prayer-based practice, a deliverance practice or an exorcism”.*
7. Practices include any “practice or conduct directed towards a person, whether with or without the person’s consent”. On its plain meaning, this could include virtually anything directed towards a person, not just professional or therapeutic services, even if consented to or requested by someone struggling with unwanted desires.
8. The COS Practice must be for the purpose of changing or suppressing a person’s “sexual orientation” or “gender identity”. These terms are so vaguely defined that the prohibition can be applied to almost all Christian teachings on SOGI issues short of complete affirmation of all sexual behaviours and anything related to gender identity and expression.
9. For example, “gender identity” may include a person’s “personal sense” of their body and other expressions, and “sexual orientation” can relate to a person’s “emotional, affectional and sexual attraction”. The potential for pastors, parents and teachers who assist people with unwanted feelings of sexual attraction or encourage people to love the body they were born with to be criminally punished for so doing is clear.
10. Clause 5(2) of the Conversion Bill extends one-sided ideological protection. Practices that “affirm” an individual’s sexual interests, impulses and behaviours and/or encourage the expression and development of a gender identity incongruent with biological sex are protected. There is no equivalent protection for body-affirming counsel. The encouragement of celibacy is equally prohibited. Loving, non-coercive spiritual and wellbeing guidance and advice to those who struggle with unwanted desires will also be criminally punishable in fact, this is expressly included as a COS Practice in the Bill and mischaracterised as inherently deceptive and harmful.
11. This definition of COS Practices directly attacks religious freedoms and will prohibit non-coercive practices. The Explanatory Notes to the Conversion Bill state that the examples are “intended to capture a broad range of conduct” including “informal practices” such as “conversations with a community leader that encourage change or suppression” and “more formal practices” such as “behaviour change programs and residential camps”.

Online Practices

12. COS Practices also include, by virtue of clause 5(4), practices or conduct “directed towards a person remotely (including online)”, not just those conducted in person.
13. This also further broadens the potential application of the provisions. For example, online activity (such as on social media, websites or blogs) by parents, teachers, counsellors, pastors and religious leaders may also be captured.

Application outside Victoria

14. Clause 8 of the Conversion Bill allows Victorian police and the Commission to pursue anyone in Australia for Practices if there is a “real and substantial” link between the conduct and Victoria.
15. This will allow activists to target non-Victorians using these extreme Victorian laws and subject them to draconian powers and the risk of severe sanction for conduct which is not prohibited in their own State.

Criminal Provisions

16. Part 2 of the Conversion Bill creates criminal offenses for COS Practices which will impose significant jail time and/or fines for both “injury” and “serious injury” which will have the same meanings as in section 15 of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) and will extend to temporary mental harms. For example, “injury” may mean both physical injury or “harm to mental health” (which is further defined) “whether temporary or permanent”.
17. For a person, the penalties could be as much as 10 years’ imprisonment and a \$500,000 fine. These are potentially very serious penalties for something that could be as benign as the teaching of traditional Christian sexual ethics.

Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission

18. Part 3 of the Bill establishes a “civil response scheme” (Scheme) within the Commission. The new functions and powers given to the Commission under the Scheme will enable it to pursue, investigate, sanction, re-educate, punish and suppress churches, organisations and individuals who teach and practice Christian sexual ethics.
19. The Commission will also receive and investigate complaints about COS Practices. Concerningly, the Conversion Bill has a very low bar for allowing the Commission to receive and investigate reports. For example, sections 17(1)(b), 21 and 24 make it clear that the Commission may receive reports “from any person”, even those who are not affected by the relevant COS Practices. These complainants can make anonymous reports and there are very strict secrecy provisions in the Conversion Bill that can be used to obscure these investigations from public scrutiny.
20. As has occurred in other commissions and tribunals around Australia, this flawed design will only encourage anti-religious activists to weaponise the complaints regime to harass and seek to silence churches, organisations and individuals with religious convictions on SOGI issues they do not agree with.
21. A targeted person may then be subject to long, stressful and costly processes, including potential referral to the Health Complaints Commissioner, the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, the Ombudsman and Victoria Police, being compelled to provide information or documents or appear before the Commission, remedies (such as enforceable undertakings and compliance notices), associated applications to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, and proceedings for any offences.

22. Such provisions pose significant additional risks to ordinary Victorian residents, including:
 - 22.1. **Pastors.** A pastor who counsels a member of their congregation over unwanted same-sex attraction is at risk of a complaint even if the person asked for help.
 - 22.2. **Teachers.** A teacher at a Christian school who promotes the Biblical teaching of celibacy and abstention from sexual conduct except in marriage between a man and a woman may be guilty of COS Practices and face Police investigation or being dragged before the Commission.
 - 22.3. **Counsellors.** A Christian counsellor who counsels fellow Christians in accordance with orthodox Biblical teaching on sexuality is at risk of a complaint.
 - 22.4. **Parents.** A parent who struggles with their 13-year old daughter's sudden presentation of gender confusion and who oppose chemical and surgical practices to transition appearance to that of a male, could be made criminals and face jail time.

Inconsistency with fundamental rights

23. The Victorian Attorney General has produced a disingenuous “statement of compatibility” that considers how the Conversion Bill will interact with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic) (Charter). This statement is sheer ideological advocacy and obscures the Bill's threats to fundamental rights and freedoms that are supposedly protected by the Charter.
24. The Conversion Bill is inconsistent with the following fundamental freedoms under the Charter:
 - 24.1. **Section 8 – Recognition and equality before the law:** The Conversion Bill gives unequal protection to persons promoting a single controversial practice in relation to issues of sexual orientation and gender identity and discriminate in favour of gender transition treatments that involve experimental chemical and hormone treatments and invasive surgical practices.
 - 24.2. **Section 10 – Protection from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment:** The disproportionate protection of gender transition treatments in the Conversion Bill fails to protect children from being exposed to the dangerous effects of these procedures at a time when they are incapable of giving informed consent.
 - 24.3. **Section 12 – Freedom of movement:** Parents and others may be criminalised where a journey outside of Victoria is considered to be intended for change or suppression practices to be directed towards a person. This is a limitation on freedom of movement.
 - 24.4. **Section 13 – Privacy and reputation:** The family has the right not to be interfered with arbitrarily. The Conversion Bill will allow unjustifiable interference with this right to privacy, enabling the State to police communications between a parent and their child.
 - 24.5. **Section 14 – Freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief and Section 19 – Cultural Rights:** Any teaching by parents to children of body affirmation beliefs or the teaching of orthodox religious beliefs on sexual orientation or gender identity could be criminal “change or suppression practices”.
 - 24.6. **Section 15 – Freedom of Expression:** Parents and teachers may be restricted from sharing and imparting information and ideas about sexual orientation and gender identity.
 - 24.7. **Section 17 – Protection of families and children:** The potential criminalisation of parents and guardians for providing moral and ethical teaching and formation of a child on sexual orientation and gender identity issues may breach of the fundamental rights of the family.

25. The far-reaching effects of the Conversion Bill are disproportionate to the harms that it seeks to prevent. Thus, the requirements of section 7 of the Charter (which sets out the reasonable limits that can be imposed on rights) are not satisfied. The Conversion Bill places unjustifiable limits on fundamental rights and freedoms that are completely unnecessary to achieve legitimate aims.
26. The above rights are central to a healthy and functioning free society. Any law that violates them would need to have a compelling rationale.
27. However, no actual need for a Conversion Bill has been established by reliable evidence. The Conversion Bill is also exceptionally vague and broad, and imposes extensive limitations on the rights of individuals, families, parents, teachers, counsellors, health professionals and clergy that have no connection with the purpose of preventing serious harm. There are clearly less restrictive means available to effect that purpose.

Ancillary amendments to other Acts

28. The Conversion Bill also makes other concerning amendments to the EOA, including replacing the definitions of “gender identity” and “sexual orientation” with broader definitions. Section 6O also inserts “sex characteristics” (with a corresponding definition) as a new protected attribute on the basis of which discrimination is prohibited in section 6(o) of the EOA.
29. It also amends the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic) and *Personal Safety Intervention Orders Act 2010* (Vic), inserting examples relating to SOGI in the meanings of “emotional or psychological abuse” and “harassment” thus widening the web of legislative bludgeons that can be used to attack Christian sexual ethics.

Potential amendments to somewhat lessen the above risks

30. In our view, the Conversion Bill should be rejected in its entirety. However, if it were to be passed, then some key amendments could be made to somewhat lessen the above risks, including to:
 - 30.1. Limit the application of the provisions to coercive and aversive clinical therapies (carried out in clinical settings for profit) only, including by extensively amending the definition of “change or suppression practice” and the included/excluded practices and conduct to ensure that everyday people and activities, including religious practices, are not caught.
 - 30.2. The criminal sanctions should also be amended to narrow the category of potential offenders, and to remove clauses regarding extra-territorial, advertising and travel offences.
 - 30.3. Remove provisions creating the civil response scheme within the Commission, or at the very least create a much higher threshold for complaints and limit the functions and powers of the Scheme to those relating to coercive and aversive clinical therapies only.
 - 30.4. Remove the ancillary changes to the EOA and other Acts.

Conclusion

31. For the reasons set out in this memorandum, we consider that the proposed Conversion Bill is fundamentally flawed and completely inconsistent with the Charter. It exposes people such as parents, teachers, counsellors, pastors and religious leaders to risk and should not be passed.
32. Please contact us if you would like us to expand on any of the advice above.

AUTHOR: JOHN STEENHOF - PRINCIPAL LAWYER

Therapeutic Evidence of Change in Those Whose Feelings Are Not Genetically Fixed

AUTHOR: DAVID PICKUP
LICENSED MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY-SUPERVISOR



Therapeutic Evidence of Change in Those Whose Feelings Are Not Genetically Fixed

A SOCE Clinician's Experiences with Those with Unwanted SSA & GD

None of the major psychological associations in the world has ever proven a genetic causation of either homosexual feelings or gender dysphoria. Since inborn causation has failed to be proven, then professionals are duty-bound to consider the evidence of trauma causing homosexual feelings and that change is therefore possible. The American Psychological Association's Handbook on Sexuality reports that it is possible (but not certain) that these sexual feelings are influenced by genetic factors and emotional environment. The Handbook recognises that sometimes sexual feelings change.

Many individuals feel that they were "born gay" because they can trace homosexual inclinations or feelings of "being different" to their earliest memories. [1] Others, however, know they were not born gay and associate their feelings with childhood trauma. It is not necessary to insist on "trauma causation" in every case to nevertheless recognise that this is the experience of a great many individuals. In the course of resolving trauma through counselling, some individuals find that their homosexual impulses also resolve, subside or disappear.

Individuals who experience homosexual feelings may not necessarily associate these explicitly with severe abuse in early childhood. [2] Further, abused children are often not aware that aspects of their upbringing were damaging; they simply assume their "normal" is normal. There are three most prevalent forms of this abuse. Two are easy to realise, and one is not. Emotional abuse and sexual abuse, unless repressed, are obvious traumas. However, their effects can easily go unnoticed since children who are unable to emotionally navigate this trauma tend to repress their abuse using denial as a defence mechanism, especially if there was no one to help them. For instance, a boy who is sexually abused, whether violently or by a "comforting" adult, will tend to repress the trauma and take on a false self in which everything is "wonderful" in life; he'll deny there are any problems. Some clients have to be informed in therapy that forced sexual manipulation, sexual organ stimulation (even including rape!) are acts of sexual abuse. Their denial and selective memories of sexual pleasure become coping mechanisms. [3]

The third form of abuse is difficult to see at first – it is neglect. Men who have unwanted same-sex attraction for whom neglect was an issue often fail to spot the problem themselves – they assume that everything in their upbringing was fine because there was no overt trauma coming from their parents. However, what if a father never touches his boy with affection? What if a father only gives his son punishment in childhood, without developing an emotionally connected relationship? What if father and son have very different personalities and so the father simply lets Mom emotionally enmesh with the boy while the father connects with the other children with whom he has more in common? What if a father displays only a disconnected relationship with his son and labels this the "manly" or "righteous" thing to do? What if this boy is detached and scared of his father and, seeking out his mother, comes to identify with the "comfort" of feminine identity? All of these easily missed issues are forms of neglect, but nonetheless abusive and traumatic. [4]

Why are they so abusive? Because to neglect a son that results in deep gender insecurity and lack of love, affection and approval will produce a deeply insecure child who is also susceptible to compensatory feelings and actions that can be deleterious to him in later years. To not fulfill a son's masculine identity robs him of the need to grow from boyhood to manhood, and this can easily result in a rising erotic version of masculinity since this becomes the only other way for this insecure, shame-based and unfulfilled boy to experience his own subjective masculinity. This boy will tend to view manhood only through the lens of a sexual object, but never know how wonderful it feels to be his own secure man in his own body. [5] Neglect is indeed abuse. Gay men who claim their relationships with their fathers were fine will often be unable to remember any significant times in which they experienced close-knit, emotional experiences with their

fathers in which they knew their father loved them and they knew they loved their fathers. They typically will only report father/son experiences in which they simply did things like going places with the family or the other children. Often they will not even know that real closeness was possible. Neglect your son's needs for male affirmation of identity, approval and affection, and he'll be looking for his needs and male identity only in the objectified bodies of other men for the rest of his life.

In terms of therapy, all change therapy clients report their homosexual feelings occurred due to extreme gender inferiority, and severely unmet needs for affirmation, love and approval from same-sex role models. Also, in 50%-75% of cases, sexual abuse has occurred in the childhood of homosexuals, which is consistent with scientific research. These traumas eventually resulted in our clients' sexual feelings for the same sex. Not all of these clients identify as LGBT, especially since they know they were not born LGBT. If you will, imagine clients coming into my office, about half of whom have been sexually abused by an older boy or man. Obviously, their homoerotic feelings occurred because their sexual organs were stimulated. "Conversion therapy" bans will make it illegal for them to decrease or dissipate the homoerotic feelings caused by this abuse via therapeutic trauma resolution.

All these clients receive unconditional positive regard in therapy as they resolve these deep traumas. Shame for having homosexual feelings or dysphoria is actually resolved. Over time, resolution of these traumas results naturally in the significant reduction or dissipation of their homosexual feelings. For years, many clients from around the US and the world have reported this experience. Time-tested psychotherapy, primarily psychodynamic therapies, are used resulting in significant change. These clients report being their most authentic selves with professional therapy. To prohibit or limit therapy for this population would be a denial of their right to self-determination and result in great harm, up to and including suicide ideation. This would render the state directly responsible for compounding the effects of abuse. Rather, it should be criminal to force a client to remain in trauma by banning therapy in which change is authentically experienced. True diversity and sexual fluidity have no meaning if successful therapy desired by this population is banned.

Let me tell you about Stan. This 16-year old boy walked into my office two years ago with his father. He and his family were from Mississippi, and they had a long family history of men who were football champions. GrandDad played professional football. Dad was a university first-string player and Most Valuable Player (MVP). And Stan, who had a great talent for football, was expected to be the best champion of them all. Stan was a Phenom. Stan's Dad had made the therapy appointment only a few days before when his son had told his parents he was sure he was gay. Dad was clearly panicked. The anxiety about his son indicated he was profoundly worried. Being frightened and confused, he said this problem was the very thing he had tried to prevent during Stan's entire upbringing.

Since my first concern is whether a minor really wants to be in therapy or not, instead of being forced into it by his parents, I asked Stan why he wanted to be in therapy. I asked him what he believed about gender and sexuality. This talented, handsome but distressed boy looked at me through anxious eyes saying he wasn't sure, and he didn't know what to do. The anxiety and heartbreak coming from this kid was palpable.

I looked straight at him and told him that he didn't have to be there, and that real therapy is not about forcing anything on anyone. I told him I wasn't about to judge him, and that if he felt he was gay then he had the right to discover that for himself and to decide if this was innate, God-given, or if underlying issues were causing his attractions. And for what was probably the first time in his life, his anxiety began to settle down because another man was telling him he wouldn't condemn him. (One of the best ways to mishandle a child's upbringing is to completely freak out when they reveal a serious issue while you carry out dramatic, angrily expressed consequences.)

I asked Stan's permission to tell me about his feelings and how long he had been dealing with sexuality issues. He began to tell me about how he felt all his life. He told me about his self-esteem since grade school, about what happened between him and his parents and about his peer relationships. And finally, he told me about his sexual attractions for other guys.

Then, it all began to tumble out. This boy had been terrified, closed off emotionally and learned to put on a “good-boy” face since he was five. He was very talented at sports, but nothing was ever good enough for his father. Dad would brook no nonsense if Stan made even simple errors in practices and games. If Stan looked discouraged, Dad would rip him apart with shame to ensure he would be successful the next time. This occurred for years to toughen him up, which was designed to force him into always being at the top of his game, always ensuring his manhood, and always preventing any homosexual leanings. Without realizing it, and thinking he was loving his son, Dad tried to toughen and shame Stan into manhood and into a successful football player. It didn't work. It never does.

Over the years, the shaming at home would continue with a constant barrage of emotional traps that involved putting Stan in double-binds, (cognitive/emotional traps) in which he couldn't win or get approval no matter what choices he made. If Stan did not accept the discipline, he was shamed. If he did accept the discipline, he felt bad about himself and shut down into shame anyway. Stan described the last ten years of an impossibly negative father/son relationship. It appeared to have begun during the period from 2 to 5 years of age (when gender identity and self-esteem are first developed) and it continued into puberty.

However, in later sessions I learned that the emotional reaction of Stan's Dad was so explosive upon his son's revelation of homosexual feelings, that he tackled his son to the floor and insisted he could not be gay. Stan was so frightened that he ran out of the house and into the night without shoes, running far away on one of the roads in town. Incredibly, at various times Dad would forcibly insist that Stan hug him and talk with him about his feelings. Later, I learned other details of Dad's behaviour that required me to contact Child Protective Services since I had reason to suspect that physical abuse had occurred.

Stan's father would constantly, albeit unconsciously, put Stan in shame-based disciplinary situations “for his own good,” while wanting Stan to be affectionate at the same time. Can you imagine demanding emotional and physical affection while putting your son in the grip of shame to force him to be a secure man and football player? After years of this treatment, (much more left untold here), Stan began to make cuts on his body, which was an unconscious way to express his inexpressible anguish.

The key to Stan's growth into manhood was to experience unconditional love without judgement, to not be put in stifling traps from which there was no escape, to have his feelings about other boys heard, and to express the authentic anger and sadness he felt about Dad, his mother, his peers, his sexuality ... anything. It was this kind of authenticity that he received in therapy, and this allowed Stan to finally speak from his core emotions. [6]

Stan began to experience the freeing of his authentic self. He began to talk openly of how it felt to be attracted to other guys, how it felt to relate to other guys with whom he could be authentic, get approval from, and experience the affection for which he ached. In childhood, Stan dealt with a chronic sense of inferiority as a boy, which surfaced in the form of his homosexual feelings. After months of therapy, Stan realised that he experienced spontaneous homosexual feelings because of his deeply rooted sense of inferiority, and the men he was erotically attracted to were a projection of what he could not realise within himself subjectively. Essentially, because of the trauma of unresolved inferiority, masculinity became an object felt only about other men.

This profound revelation, which came via the emotional confirmation of his own feelings and cognition, sent him into a healing kind of grief that led to what happens to all those who go through a healthy grief process ... the rise of the authentic and mature self. This experience is common to all human beings if it is accompanied by compassion and personal truth. Stan was encouraged to make up his own mind about sexuality. He came to the conclusion that he was not born gay, and that he could see how trauma and lack of male need fulfillment directly resulted in his over-idealised objectification of boys and his homosexual feelings. Stan was encouraged to love himself for his homosexual feelings since he knew it was compassion for underlying trauma that he needed. [7]

Does Stan's therapeutic experience sound like therapeutic abuse that should be prohibited by law? Surely LGBT therapists give their clients the same kind of choice in therapy, recognising that minors are much

more likely to be fluid in their sexuality? Don't all minors need supportive choice so they can determine their most authentic selves by their own right? Every major psychological association in the world publishes that sexuality tends to be fluid. So, who gives the government the right to define teenagers' sexual identity, particularly when this involves compounding underlying abuse issues that express themselves as sexual feelings? [8]

No government, with all due respect and honour, has the right to impose or cement the identities of teenagers. Teenagers deserve politicians' thoughtful and fair treatment in terms of their rights and professional ethics in treatment. No credible therapist believes homosexual feelings indicate a homosexual client is mentally ill. But neither can we deny the evidence of our clients' feelings and personal experiences that lead to their beliefs of who they truly are and how they best want to live their lives. With the efforts to ban professional therapy, the governments are evidently trying to protect children from harm. However, you cannot force someone to be gay when their homosexual feelings have arisen via unfulfilled needs and abuse, the healing of which can result in change. In such circumstances, forcing a homosexual identity onto these children would in fact be harming them. You cannot force someone to be gay when their homosexual feelings have arisen via unfulfilled needs and abuse. This would be a betrayal of children for whom sexual identity is fluid, meaning it can and does change over time.

I urge governments not to betray these children by banning therapy to try to keep other children safe. The negative therapy that has been reported to you has hardly been proven and is hardly found in the therapeutic profession. If there is therapeutic abuse occurring, then legal remedies may be needed to address these specifically but should not impinge upon legitimate and necessary professional and compassionate practices that many of your children will need in their lives. The detrimental consequences of ill-considered legislation will be borne by society's most vulnerable and the burden incumbent on government to choose wisely is proportionately grave. If proponents of "conversion therapy bans" cannot or will not adhere to basic ethical principles, this should, in itself, constitute proof that their objective is not really to protect children but to force an undeclared agenda onto society. Surely the government represents people who will react fairly, compassionately and wisely in this essential matter.

**AUTHOR: DAVID PICKUP -
LICENSED MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY-SUPERVISOR**

Ex-LGBT Quotes

[1] (BORN THAT WAY)

Dbarr

"Pastor Scott Hesler said to me, "Why do you put that label [gay] on yourself"? I replied that I was born gay and needed people to know that this was not a choice for me "being gay is who I am."

Mitch

For as young as 5 years of age, I knew I was gay.

James

"I grew up believing I was born gay."

[2] (SEXUAL ABUSE)

Laurie J

"It can be very hard thing to explain who you once were and where you are now. Sexual abuse, neglect, ..."

Billy

"When I was in the 6th grade I was sexually abused by my summer league diving coach."

Rose Writers

"At the age of 13, I was sexually abused over the course of some years, by a male relative."

[3] (PERVERTED LOVE)

Ricky Chelette

"The abuse started when I was young, and at first, I didn't know it was really wrong for it was simply normal for me. It happened almost weekly for over a decade and I adored my abuser. He was deeply invested in me, said he loved me, and knew exactly what buttons to push to manipulate my emotions and garner my cooperation."

"My childhood was fraught with secrets and confusion. Despite my outward success, I was inwardly a frightened boy desperately crying for someone to affirm me. I felt other-than from almost everyone around me, and my years of sexual childhood abuse had produced in me a seemingly uncontrollable desire for the affections of other men."

Philip Latislaw

"Not long after that, my best friend, who was the same age as me, sexually molested me. I was starving for male attention from my Dad, so my molester was able to sexualise my unmet emotional needs. I was confused, yet I wanted more."

James

"This included facing the painful, wholly repressed memories of my having been consistently sexually abused as a child for years by a number of men, and raped while a teenager several years before I'd even reached the age of gay consent."

[4] (PARENTAL INFLUENCE)

Philip Latislaw

"Mom and Dad divorced, leaving me, an awkward adolescent, feeling totally abandoned."

Laurie J

"... a lack of bonding with parents whether intentional or not, may play a role in forming those of us who struggle with same sex attraction."

Jules

"My parents divorced when I was 11 and my mother always chose men over her relationship with her children."

Alessio

"It was because of some problems I had growing up, my relationship with my parents and friends."

Claire

"My mother suffered an addiction which deeply affected my father who became very distant and angry. There was a lot of shouting and tension in our home as my parents slowly separated, then divorced. As my mother became less stable and began spending weeks away from home and a deeply broken father."

[5] (BODY IMAGE)

Wboy123

"I discovered internet pornography at age 11 and was immediately drawn to it, wanting to look more and more at the bodies of naked men. I would compare myself constantly to the men on the screen and never felt good enough in my masculine identity compared to the images now imprinted on my mind."

Alan G

"Body image wounds." "... helped me to accept myself as a man among men, to lose my body shame. To feel okay as a man and with my masculinity."

Erin

"I hated my female body."

[6] (THOSE WHO CARED)

Laurie J

"One of the turning points in my life was when I was a leader at a camp. The director knew of my living situation and asked to have a chat with me one night. She explained that she would always care for me and accept me no matter what decision I made about my life. It was this show of acceptance."

James

"They gave me permission to think in a different way... and to do things differently. Gradually, my fears and anxieties subsided. I began to feel more accepted around both men – and then women."

Philip Latislaw

"..... knowing that I am loved. Accepted."

WBoy123

"At age 18, I chose to return to the support group, while still intermittently visiting a different psychiatrist. The group became the first place and the first time that I felt I could truly open up and talk about everything same-sex attracted. I felt listened to at last. Nothing was excluded from our conversations. I was accepted. I belonged. I had people who honoured me as a person, and didn't see as a piece of flesh to be devoured."

[7] (THE AUTHENTIC SELF)

Alan G

"Nevertheless, I experienced helpful therapy through counsellors, friends and life coaches who helped me to discover a more authentic sense of myself and my manhood."

James

"I moved from a deep underlying unease with masculine identity to embracing it."

"The opposite has become true. ... Like hundreds and thousands of others, I wasn't born gay after all."

Erin

"Instead, the evidence suggests that both sexual orientation and gender identity are influenced by environmental factors, including peer and family pressures. Early childhood trauma can also cause children to identify as gay or transgender."

Ian Lind.

"I was convinced more than once that I was born Gay, and I am glad to say what a lie that was!"

[8] (THE FRIENDS, COUNSELLORS AND LEADERS WHO ASSISTED)

Erin

"My first-grade teacher at Howard R. Driggs Elementary School, was concerned about my behaviour and my insistence that I was a boy, so she referred me to the school psychologist. The school psychologist met with my mother, my teacher, and the school principal and made some suggestions for how they could help me feel more comfortable with myself."

James

"I am grateful to the courageous men and women who had a vision for my life way above and beyond the mantras and lies of my fellow LGBTQ activists. Without them, I'd never have uncovered my childhood sex abuse which later led me to be the key witness in a court case that saw a prolific paedophile convicted of his crimes. Banning therapy will mean more childhood sexual abuse going unreported – a perverted and most evil outcome."

Erin

“The talk therapy that helped me and many others is now illegal in many states. Children are being denied appropriate mental health services and therapists are required by law to “affirm” a child’s transgender identity or same sex attraction. Transgender activists have adopted a philosophy regarding children with gender identity issues; children should be transitioned to the gender they identify with, first socially, and as they reach puberty, medically. These activists deny that talk therapy is helpful in managing and resolving gender dysphoria, and assert, without any proof, that it is harmful.”

“In states where conversion therapy is banned, it is illegal for therapists to make the simple recommendations that I had. A man I recently met told me that as a child he was sexually assaulted by an uncle. As he grew up, he struggled to make friendships with other boys. He craved male companionship and started engaging in same-sex relationships. But today, a therapist’s suggestion that the boy is not old enough to decide if he is gay or straight is not permitted in states where conversion therapy is banned. Bans on conversion therapy prevent therapists from telling children that they are too young or too immature to be having gay sex. Both this man and I were sexually assaulted as children. His assault led him to believe he was gay. My assault resulted in my developing a trans identity with the belief that if I wasn’t a girl, I wouldn’t be sexually assaulted again. If he were a child today, conversion therapy bans would require therapists to tell him that he was born a homosexual and that being a homosexual is normal and natural. His therapist would never address the underlying cause of his same-sex attraction, and he would be denied therapy that would help him understand the impact the sexual assault had on him.”

Bilal Ali

“And the fact that for many people, therapy has helped them to significantly manage and reduce their same-sex feelings, so much so that they have become more comfortable with the idea of having relationships with members of the opposite sex.”

Wboy123

“I have a right to get well. It is also my basic human right to seek out therapy, group support, resources and prayer if I want to which aid me in my journey to true manhood.”

Alan G

“I have never paid for therapy with a psychotherapist or psychologist to resolve my issues with my unwanted SSA. Nevertheless, I experienced helpful therapy through counsellors, friends and life coaches who helped me to discover a more authentic sense of myself and my manhood.”

These quotes were taken from the written “Ex-LGBT Stories” which participants in the Free To Change survey uploaded to the web portal. There are many additional quotes to be found in the video and audio stories also uploaded: <https://www.freetochange.org>

The Unintended Consequences of “Anti-Conversion Therapy” legislation, and the Impact Such Laws Have on a Client’s Freedom, Healing, and Welfare.

AUTHOR: JON UHLER, PSYCHOLOGIST.



The Unintended Consequences of “Anti-Conversion Therapy” legislation, and the Impact Such Laws Have on a Client’s Freedom, Healing, and Welfare.

Jon Uhler is a qualified therapist with extensive professional experience working with children in state care, survivors of sexual abuse and violent sex offenders in the prison system. This variety of experience gives him a unique perspective from which to comment on both the techniques used by predators (of which he has made an extensive and intensive study) and the effects of these on their victims.

1. The purpose of therapy is to help a client re-evaluate life circumstances or work through issues. Therapy is client-led.

Therapists who are properly trained in counselling principles understand that the purpose of therapy is neither to persuade nor dissuade a client toward or away from anything (except in matters of personal safety). Therapy is client-centred, honours a client’s autonomy and merely assists a client with reaching their stated goals. Clients, whether from alternative lifestyles or not, might want to explore issues such as:

- a sense of personal dissatisfaction with their current life situation;
- confusion or dissatisfaction with their interpersonal relationships;
- a desire to examine their own personal boundaries;
- their current life choices in light of their own core values;
- unsettled existential issues in their life.

Properly executed, therapy should:

- assist the client with gaining clarity regarding their own core values
- help the client examine the nature of their personal boundaries with a view to ensuring their relationships are empowering, healthy, beneficial;
- assist the client with the process of maturity with respect to values clarification, emotional differentiation, and character development (which is key to inner peace, emotional stability, and contentment);
- facilitate the client’s journey toward emotional wholeness (which is key in developing healthy personal boundaries);
- facilitate the client’s healing for losses they have experienced, yet never previously processed, and;
- help work through the process of any unaddressed trauma.

Through the process of meaningful self-exploration facilitated by therapy, clients gain important insights into what caused them to make certain life choices. Perhaps they have “settled for less”, allowed others to hold them back or limit their options. Such reflection can provoke a client to make substantial personal changes, including midcourse corrections to their life trajectory. Such changes come from insight, inner clarity with respect to their core values, and from taking pro-active steps. This is an indication of inner growth.

2. Very often, therapy uncovers manipulation and abuse or unresolved trauma.

It is not uncommon for a client during therapy to reconsider particular lifestyle or relationship choices. Clients may realise, perhaps for the first time, that their youth and immaturity made them unduly susceptible to the formative influence of family members, friends or partners. Perhaps, they chose a particular direction or relationship in response to previous trauma, unresolved issues with parents, etc. Abuse survivors are easy targets for manipulators and sexual predators, and it is not uncommon for such survivors to be drawn into sexually promiscuous lifestyles, alternative sexual subcultures and/or the sex industry.

Gender-confused young people who enter alternative lifestyles have very often been influenced and groomed through extensive exposure to pornography. They are disproportionately drawn from the foster care system, and many suffer from the effects of untreated trauma or undiagnosed mental comorbidities. This makes them ripe for predation and manipulation. They are more easily targeted by older opportunistic or predatory individuals who challenge and compromise their sexual boundaries by pressing particular activities and/or relationships. Predators will always embed themselves wherever vulnerable young people can be accessed and “communities” that celebrate and encourage exotic sexual interests form the perfect camouflage for such individuals.

Once young people are immersed in these communities, activities and lifestyles, even if they move on to new relationships with others within the community, it is not uncommon at some point for individuals to find themselves questioning whether their initial decision to enter into an alternative lifestyle or relationship was made with complete knowledge and awareness. They might reflect that they were immature, wounded, vulnerable. Perhaps they acted impulsively or realise, with the benefit of hindsight and experience, that they were unduly influenced or groomed. They might, considering their core values and life goals, wish to change direction, end particular relationships, begin others or simply make different lifestyle choices.

3. “Anti-conversion therapy or suppression” laws uniquely weaponise same-sex partners or manipulators to shut down therapists who help their clients assert boundaries

It is not uncommon to find that, as a client becomes emotionally healthy, their assertion of personal boundaries is resented by selfish family members, manipulative associates, or emotionally toxic or personality disordered partners. Such individuals are frequently resentful of the therapist who helped “rock the boat,” “stir the pot,” and “ruin a good thing”. Of course, these dynamics feature within alternative lifestyle relationships as they do for any other relationships, but “anti-conversion therapy and suppression” (ACTS) laws would uniquely disadvantage clients involved in toxic same-sex relationships, providing the “jilted partner” with the means to prosecute a complaint against the therapist and thus to sabotage the client’s move toward self-actualisation.

4. “Born that way” leaves no way out for people who might want to re-evaluate their involvement in same-sex relationships or reconsider a “transitioning” decision

The justification presented for enacting anti-conversion therapy laws is to protect vulnerable individuals within alternative lifestyle communities from the “bigoted quackery” of nefarious, religiously-inclined therapists. Multiple accounts of mental, emotional and physical coercion, brainwashing, even medieval-type tortures, have been marshalled in support of the view that new laws are needed as a matter of urgency. Each

personal story serves to reinforce the same narrative in which victims of religious zealots were encouraged to reject their “true” identities. They aver to permanent emotional scarring caused by these experiences.¹

This leverages the popular belief that homosexuality or transgenderism is hard-wired and immutable. If some people are just “born that way” then any attempt to “change” a sexual orientation or transgender identity is a) futile and b) harmful. This narrative, although ultimately inconsistent with the “sexual freedom for all” touted by sexual radicals within the movement, serves their purposes:

1. It operates as a tool of recruitment. Individuals who experience same-sex attraction or gender incongruence and believe this represents a fixed identity, are easily persuaded to seek out their inevitable destiny in alternative lifestyles and less likely to question these decisions or seek to leave.
2. It obscures manipulation or predation and enables such individuals to reframe their activity as benevolent, selfless “mentoring”.

How can the activists who lobby to ban “conversion therapy” be so certain that everyone within an alternative lifestyle naturally belongs there; that everyone chose this lifestyle from a position of psychological maturity and emotional wholeness? Perhaps there are individuals within these community (as in every other community) who were making decisions out of their emotional woundedness, and subsequently discovered that such relationships and activities were not what they were expecting? Perhaps they might want to talk about these with a counsellor?

Whether “born that way” is true or not (and the *scientific support* for such a proposition is sorely lacking), individuals who entered alternative lifestyles thinking they were “born this way” should surely have the personal option of re-considering whether a self-assessment made at one stage in their life, still holds? The fact that such an apparently uncontroversial proposition is so controversial, ought to be a red flag. Could it be that the whole truth is not being put on the table? Is an undeclared agenda operating in the background? **Could it be that there are predators (who sexually exploit the vulnerable for either personal or commercial self-interest) within alternative lifestyles who would be strongly interested in cutting off the exit routes for those they have groomed and manipulated? Ensuring such individuals have fewer choices available to them in terms of therapists would certainly represent a significant step toward achieving such an objective.**

The rhetoric so often used by activists about the need for tolerance and empowerment, is inconsistent with their current endeavour to insert the authority of the State between a client and their counsellor. Activists claim to represent a community of tolerance and acceptance. (Many may be sincere in this belief). They energetically claim to be concerned about ensuring the good mental health of individuals in alternative lifestyles. But this is inconsistent with the strange intensity of their efforts to ensure members of their community are deprived of the freedom to access objective, impartial therapists. Instead of truly celebrating “choice” and “diversity,” “anti-conversion therapy laws” will ensure that a client’s overall choice of therapist is restricted, with the result that no serious self-reflection by those in alternative lifestyles can occur. Thus, the legislation being pushed would more appropriately be called the “Suppression of Client Choice” Act.

¹Beyond these personal testimonies, there is little in the way of verifiable forensic evidence to suggest that unethical practices have been used by any responsible clinician in the field of professional mental health treatment. For every such testimony, there are multiple others of people who say they were helped by therapy.

5. Could it be that there are allied interest groups and industries who don't want people reconsidering their choices, or transitioning out of alternative lifestyles, or "de-transitioning" from a transgender identity?

The reality is that legitimate treatment providers are not in the business of "converting" or "suppressing" anyone, and professional licensing boards and civil courts exist to address issues of malpractice. The picture of widespread therapeutic abuse is intentionally contrived and manufactured to present a distorted picture, which is simply untrue. Responsible professionals are not interested in directing their client's thinking or actions. However, the same cannot be said for abusive or toxic partners or industrial interests that prey upon the vulnerable. Playing upon the normal mental, emotional, physical, and cognitive developmental characteristics of the adolescent brain, sophisticated predators strategically employ well-established principles and techniques of manipulation, to encourage their victims to over-ride their intuition and cooperate with an imposed agenda. In extreme form, techniques of control and manipulation can be seen in the modus operandi of sophisticated cults, such as the now-infamous New York-based sex-cult, NXIVM. Even on an individual level, however, substantially the same techniques may be deployed to control vulnerable individuals.

An essential part of the grooming process is to convince the intended victim to trust their "benevolent" leader, and to mistrust those who might exert a countervailing influence. Anti-conversion therapy laws work to hamstring therapists and family members even as they reinforce the narrative that individuals who may be cult leaders and/or predators are actually only "benevolent mentors" helping to shield the client from a harsh, unaccepting world. Clearly, legislation that serves to restrict what the client can or cannot explore in his/her own confidential therapy session is a dream come true for such people. It becomes the predator's or trafficker's ultimate means of ensuring the implementation of a "Don't ask/Don't tell" policy in counselling, as Mandated Reporting will only happen in the rarest of circumstances, since a therapist is unlikely to risk closely investigating the possibility of sexual grooming, manipulation, abuse or exploitation of a teen or young adult.

If those lobbying so energetically for such legislation were truly motivated by client welfare, the last thing they would want would be to erect artificial legislative barriers that might inhibit a client from finding the help he/she deemed to be the best fit for them, or to discourage therapists from agreeing to work with such a person as a client. Further, we would expect to see not only support for therapeutic choice but also continued support for those individuals who choose to leave the alternative lifestyle. While some non-abusive friendships survive such a transition, the general experience of those who leave - those can no longer be manipulated, who are no longer happy to serve their former purposes or play their former role - is one of rejection. Such individuals are routinely silenced, dismissed, demeaned and rejected by the very community who previously claimed to love and cherish them.

Experiences of rejection have been commonplace among those who leave the gay lifestyle for a long time but the same phenomenon is playing out for those who de-transition out of the trans movement. Homosexuals who sound the alarm about the dangers posed by the trans movement can be also targeted. As many find after the event, the impression of unity within alternative lifestyle communities is largely illusory.

The stories of de-transitioners reveal consistent themes: their distress arose from underlying mental and emotional dynamics which were not explored or diagnosed; they were not fully informed of the consequences of transitioning and too young/immature/traumatized to fully consent; they now regret having harmed their bodies, and assign fault to various professionals along the way who should have done a better job with screening and assessment. Should these individuals dare to speak out on such issues, activists will dismiss them as "never truly trans", demean their experiences and ultimately seek to silence them. So much for compassion, empowerment and free choice.

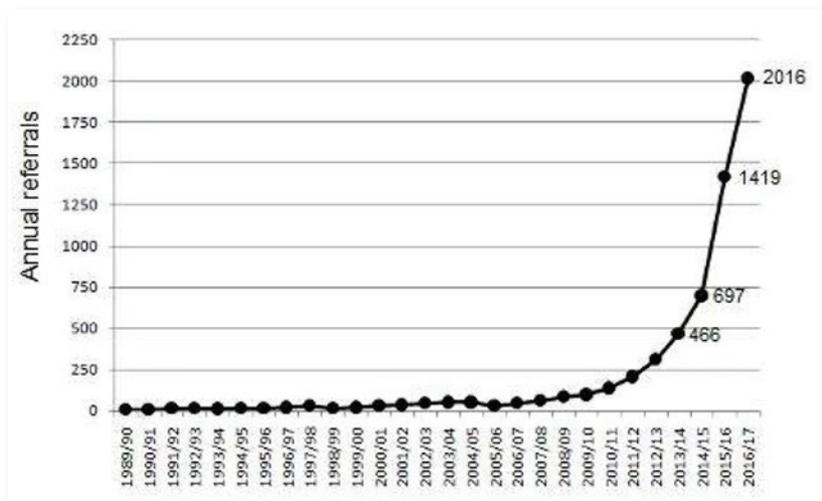
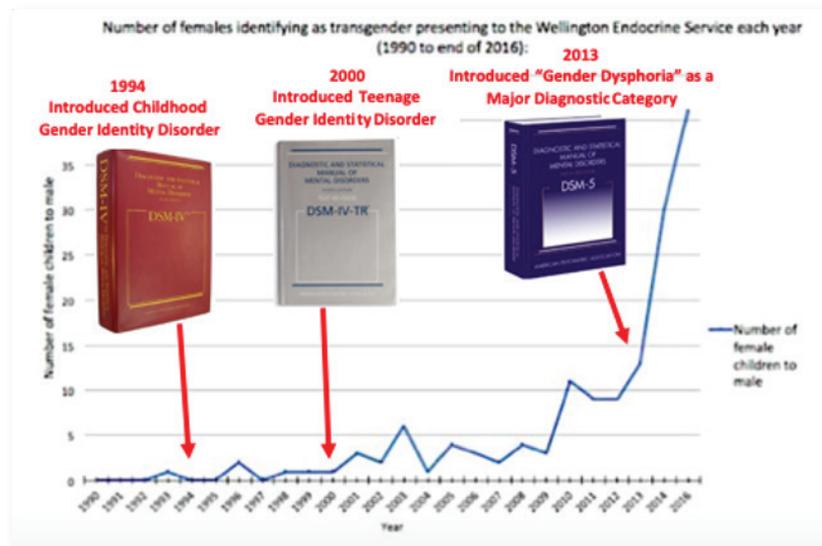
6. The trans movement is a man-made cult

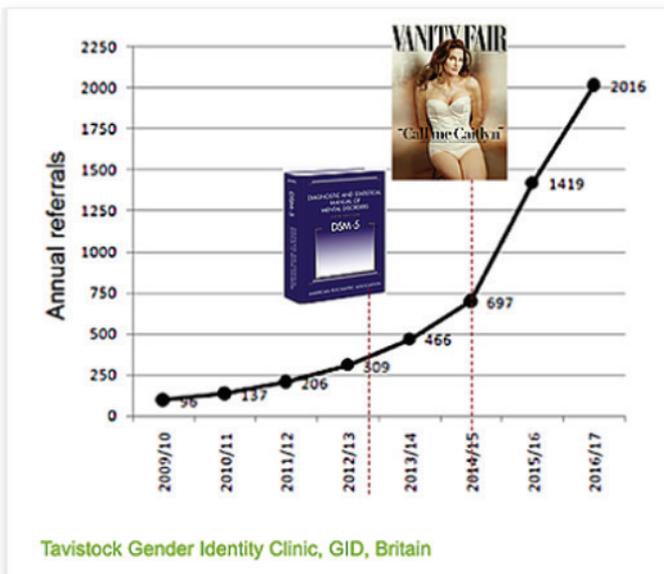
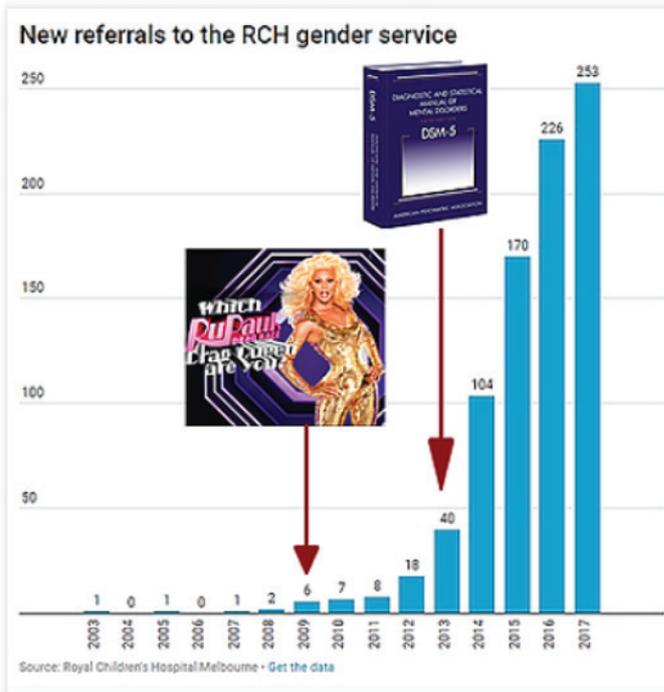
In the trans movement, tried and true techniques to recruit and grow the power of alternative communities have been rolled out on an industrial level. Again, a ready narrative is provided to explain the explosion of “transitioning”, particularly for young people. We are to believe that “transgenders” (a term capable of almost infinite interpretation) were always with us but, given a non-affirming culture were not comfortable making themselves visible.

From many years of working with troubled youth, I can assert that this was not a latent issue lurking in the backgrounds of troubled youth since ... forever. Very far from a cultural moment of organic, spontaneous self-discovery, the trans movement is an entirely man-made psychological fabrication that is being actively propagated by those in

positions of strategic influence. When the rates of increase of “gender identity disorder” (GID) more recently reframed as “gender dysphoria” are overlaid with the dates of publication of the last three versions of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-4, DSM-IVR, and the DSM-5) the correlation becomes clear: gender identity disorder appeared as a significant issue in youth just when the DSM-IV, by recognising it as an official mental health diagnosis, made it possible for mental health providers to bill for treatment.

This tidal wave of the youth transitioning makes sense if you only follow the money. These changes to the DSM laid the foundation for an entire niche industry, and quite a lucrative one. Proclaiming “compassion” as their motivation, a coterie of allied interest groups - including mental health professionals, plastic surgeons, endocrinologists and Big Pharma - stand to make a lot of money from encouraging new patients into life-long treatments and expensive surgeries.





Just as vulnerable individuals are more easily groomed into exploitative sexual relationships or “sex work”, so too those who have either been previously sexually manipulated and/or abused, or fall on the autism spectrum (and therefore have difficulty trusting their intuition) are more easily persuaded to believe their troubles will be alleviated by “transitioning”. Sadly, there are enough health professionals prepared to profit at the expense of such trusting young people.

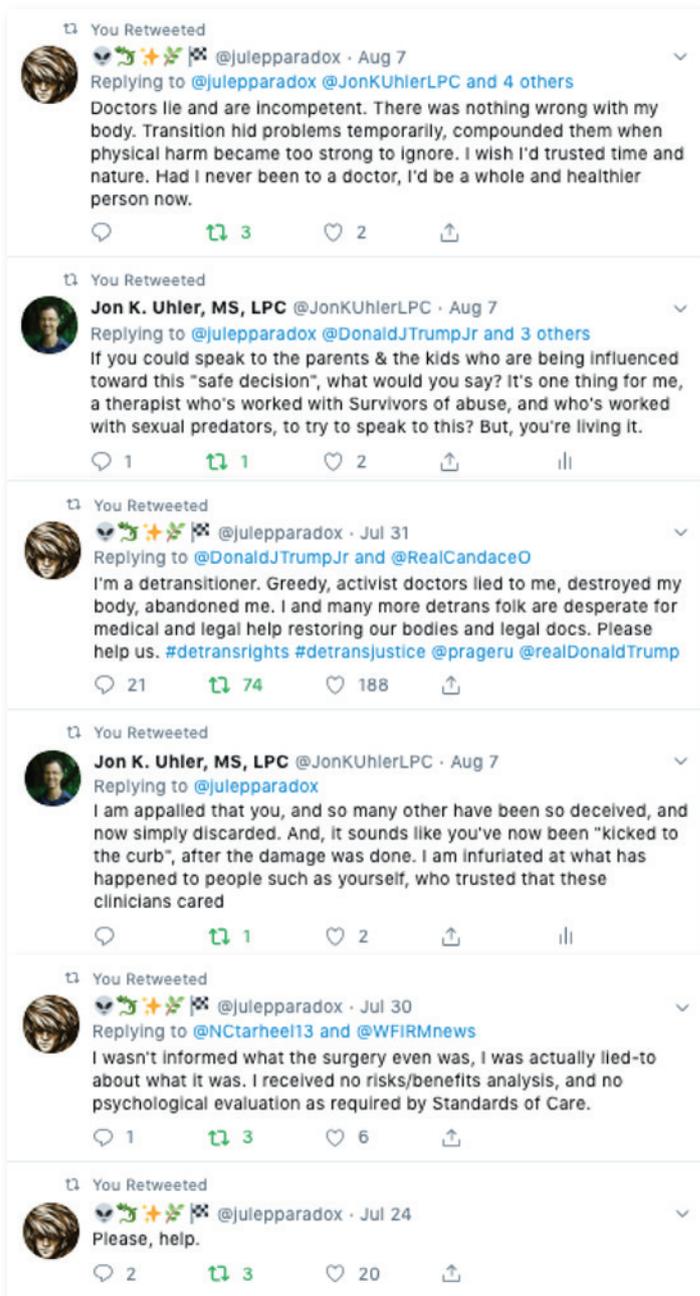
The strategy transcends the pharmaceutical-medical-psychological complex and uses media and social media to spread its message. The growing numbers of youth presenting to gender clinics is proof of its efficacy. Authorities that ought to safeguard the vulnerable appear to have been infiltrated by activists or momentarily paralysed by their forcefully delivered, hyper-emotive assertions and demand for “affirmation only” treatments. Gender uncertainty needs to be explored by unbiased, capable, and mindful professionals who are able to assess for any potential sexual abuse, manipulation, or exploitation without fear of professional consequences or reprisal. Instead, parliaments are encouraged to contemplate “conversion therapy laws”, which would confound this process.

7. Why the sudden push for such laws, and why now?

This movement is nothing more than a brilliantly designed and orchestrated scheme

by a wide array of stake holders and special interests, each of which stand to benefit from the success of this Trojan Horse. The trans activists, their apologists and these special interests know they need to take advantage of a narrow window of opportunity, before parents and the public awaken to the grand scheme that has been foisted upon them. They understand that therapists are the crucial lynch pin in this entire scheme because therapists who can assess for abuse or manipulation are a) likely to diagnose and help address the underlying issues causing the distress and b) unlikely to refer their clients to gender clinics.

The money machine that depends on a steady flow of new transitioners to create demand for monthly appointments with “gender therapists”, facial reconstructions, mastectomies, hysterectomies, castrations, phalloplasties, vaginoplasties, puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones, grinds to a halt if this flow peters out. It is imperative for this industry to ensure that the only therapists on the field are the ones playing their game.



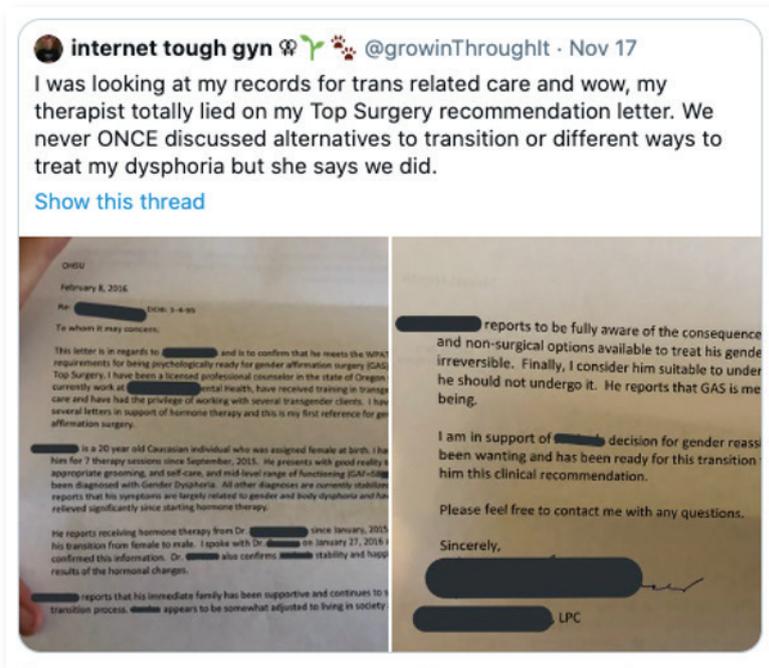
The value of “anti-conversion therapy” legislation in providing the mechanism for removing recalcitrant clinicians is clear. Mischaracterising them first as detestable “transphobes” and “bigoted quacks” who hesitate to “positively affirm” a child’s self-declared identity is just another aspect of the grand-scale manipulation of public opinion that is everywhere evident. Governments tempted to go along with this nefarious agenda – perhaps in the mistaken belief that this is consistent with compassion for the vulnerable – should first read the personal accounts of a growing number of “detransitioners”. These often harrowing, accounts of irreversible mutilation, sterility, life-long physical scarring which overlay and compound unaddressed mental health issues, trauma and abuse, serve to put the feeble complaints about the supposed harms of “conversion therapy” in perspective. These individuals who detransition are the real victims of “conversion therapy”.

8. These laws work to help predators/manipulators, limit therapy and ultimately hurt clients

Whereas a truly loving “community” would want to empower its members to access whatever kind of therapy they thought best, this legislation has the effect of reducing therapeutic choice for particular individuals. It is telling that activists and their apologists would seek

to limit such inner exploration. In much the same way, sophisticated cult leaders actively discourage and work to thwart cult members from leaving by creating and maintaining dependence. Laws to criminalise “conversion therapy will mean that the child who declares a cross-sex identity this week has no trouble obtaining all the help they need to transition; but, should the same child realise their mistake next week, they will find themselves with nowhere to turn.





“Anti-conversion therapy” laws mean that the very accusation of “bigotry” or “phobic” beliefs might follow anything other than fervent affirmation of a transgender identity or same-sex relationship. Defending a professional reputation against such accusations is costly in terms of time, effort, energy, emotional duress, legal fees and fines – not to mention the possibility of prison time. The process requires nothing more than subjective impressions in order to be viewed as carrying weight and multiple accusations can be simultaneously filed by anonymous sources who suffer no adverse consequences

in the unlikely event that the allegations are dismissed. It is not hard to see that any therapist, recognising the potential for “lawfare” from disaffected former partners, for example, will be unwilling to risk his license (and, thus, his livelihood) by even taking on as a client someone who declares a same-sex orientation or cross-sex gender identity.



Generally, it is only unhappy people who seek help from a professional counsellor. Often, they are not aware beforehand what the root cause of their distress might be. For a client to achieve genuine resolution and lasting change they must be free to disclose and evaluate anything they deem personally important or relevant within the safety of the therapy office. If this process is frustrated, they may walk out no different than when they arrived - only more discouraged, confused, anxious, or depressed than before they sought treatment.

Effectively, “anti-conversion therapy” laws assert, before the client has even entered the counselling office, that, whatever the cause of their distress, it is certainly nothing to with their sexuality or gender identity. If there are aspects of their lives that touch on these issues and they feel unhappy about these aspects of their lives, then their feelings of distress are wrong. Parliament has decided that it must be so. Surely the cruelty of such an approach is obvious.

It is predictable that, under threat of the criminal penalties introduced by “anti-conversion therapy laws” that therapists will be reluctant to venture upon any issues that impact a client’s gender identity, sexuality,

or choice of lifestyle. Although therapists are mandatory reporters of child sexual abuse, “anti-conversion therapy laws” will have the effect of stifling the conversations that might cause such abuse to be disclosed. Fewer objective clinicians will be inclined to assess for the possibility that their client is or was being manipulated or exploited by a sophisticated manipulator or predator. Indeed, instead of recognising the key

Ex-Tavistock doctor Marcus Evans' letter to The Times (26 Posts)

BitOfFun Sun 17-Nov-19 10:39:30

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Letters to the Editor: Trans clinic is failing vulnerable children

letters@sunday-times.co.uk November 17 2019, 12:01 am,
The Sunday Times

Your article “Sex-change sorrow” (News Review, last week) highlighted the Tavistock Centre, England’s only clinic devoted to treating transgender children. I am the governor who resigned from the Tavistock board after Dr David Bell wrote a report containing staff concerns about the rush to medical intervention, which bypassed thorough psychological evaluation.

I did so because I believed the trust tried to bury these important concerns about an experimental treatment of vulnerable children. It also displayed its prejudice by trying to discredit Dr Bell, a respected clinician, and the staff he spoke to.

The treatment of gender-dysphoric children has become highly politicised and, in many ways, operates outside good medical practice. There is pressure to view patients as consumers who have a choice over their gender, rather than people with underlying conflicts about themselves and their relationship with society.

The Tavistock Centre is England’s only clinic devoted to treating transgender children
The Tavistock Centre is England’s only clinic devoted to treating transgender children
ALAMY
In the absence of long-term outcome studies, services often quote Dutch research that found positive results for transition, ignoring the small size of the cohort. Ten other studies show that 80%-90% of gender-dysphoric children desist in their wish for social or medical transition if given psychological support.

We do not know why there has been such a rapid rise in late-onset gender dysphoria in girls in the past five years, and we show little interest in the damage done by treatment. When I was governor, the Tavistock was not following up children it had seen, and yet we are carrying on as if we know what we are doing.

The mental health services will look back at this episode as another dark chapter in the treatment of people with psychological difficulties.

Marcus Evans, psychoanalyst, former deputy clinical director in adolescent and adult clinical services at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust

red flag Indicators of sexual abuse, grooming and exploitation, the only clinicians left in the field will be those who reframe these as indicators of transgender struggles. Instead of properly assessing and exploring for issues of harm, clinicians will simply refer the client to transgender treatment. Instead of finding help with serious underlying concerns, the client is left with the pain, and then influenced to start life-altering medical treatments, which can result in sterilisation and amputation, and setting the client up for further sexual exploitation.

The implications of such limitations and restriction placed upon the client, by virtue of a therapist’s avoidance of certain core issues of sex and sexuality, and their interpersonal relationships, are serious and, in some cases, life threatening. What is certain is that more *clients will leave the therapy office without having been able to fully explore the most important conscious and unconscious key issues that brought them into treatment, such as their love life, sexuality, and past*

sexual abuse... thus increasing the possibility of suicide. Thus, a client’s ability to find a therapist who best meets his needs, and a client’s ability to direct his own treatment are detrimentally impacted.

9. Conclusion

As the fallout of the trans movement and early sexualisation of kids comes to light, and the detrimental effects such laws and policies are having when it comes to undermining parental rights, an increasing number of countries are seeing through the activists’ agenda, and the harm being caused by sophisticated manipulators recruiting vulnerable young people into alternative lifestyles. As such, we are seeing such laws being repealed, and policies being changed to ensure that the safety and welfare of vulnerable minors and the rights of parents are adequately protected... which is exactly why you are seeing such lobbying efforts to pass anti-conversion therapy legislation, before the truth surfaces about who is really behind this push, and the ultimate goal they are looking to achieve from the enactment of such legislation.

AUTHOR: JON UHLER, PSYCHOLOGIST.

Matthew's Story

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Matthew shares his personal journey of childhood hurts and sexual abuse into adult gay relationships and ultimately his journey out of that lifestyle with the help of a pastor, ex-LGBT support groups, peers and camps. It is a raw and cutting story that echoes the experiences that Psychologist Joh Uhler, experienced with his clients and writes about in this article.

00:00:00

Host: Leah

So, we are really privileged to be joined here by Matthew and I just want to thank you Matthew for coming on and being so willing and courageous to share your story. Matthew prepared a condensed version of his story. We just want to encourage you to share that as comfortably as you can, so, just start off by telling us who you are and maybe a bit of background about yourself.

Matthew:

Yeah cool. So, I'm Australian and live in a major capital city. My father didn't seem to take an interest in me as a boy. I don't actually remember him hugging me or touching me except to smack me. I have verified that my sister also felt the same. She didn't ever feel touched or hugged by him so it's not just my memory. I checked that out as well. I really did crave touch and affection and affirmation from Dad, but I don't ever feel he delighted in who I was. He was around physically, but wasn't actually there for me. He was distant emotionally. He was an alcoholic so I don't know what issues [were] going on in his life. My only memory of him in my childhood was that he was shouting at Mum. He would always shout after dinner. He would drink and he would shout and he would smack me for the kind of the smallest offence and I remember vowing to not be like my father.

He was a perfectionist as well. So, whenever he would get me to do a task, after I would complete it he would come and check it and he would fix it. So, nothing I did was right to him. So, I just felt he didn't ever trust me and I couldn't ever please him. So, I basically hid in my room and I did my homework. I was the good little boy. I got good grades and that seemed to kind of please him. But really, I wanted much more.

My father was not Australian. He didn't ever play with me. He didn't know any Australian sports. I don't remember him playing with me out in the backyard. I would go up the street and play backyard cricket with other boys, but I'd hit out in the first or second ball. And so I never learned how to play cricket. And then at school in PE class, when teams were chosen, I was invariably chosen last because they knew I was no good at cricket, or soccer, or rugby or anything athletic.

00:03:07

So, I was always chosen last. I came to believe the story that nobody wants to be my friend. I really was the ultra-sensitive kid. I think probably from stuff that happened with Dad at home. I really did feel criticisms deeply and personally.

I was groomed and seduced and molested by a paedophile when I was about 7 and 8. He gave me the

attention that Dad didn't give me. He gave me affection and attention but he manipulated that affection with touch, inappropriate touch. And he seduced me to allow him to masturbate me while he masturbated himself. He told me it was our special secret and he made me promise not to tell my parents.

00:04:13

Months later, when I was 8, my parents gave me into his care for a week and each night he would masturbate me every night. And I kind of thought that was normal, but after a few nights he brought another boy into the bed and he masturbated him as well. And I realised that when he was doing that, when he had said it was our special secret, that was a lie, that it wasn't our special secret. He's doing with another boy and so I asked him to stop and thankfully he did.

00:04:56

My parents ultimately found out and they did say that what he did was wrong, but I actually understood what he had done that was wrong was that he lied about it being our special secret not that sexual relations between a man and a boy were wrong. So, I actually grew quite confused with that. I thought that male to male sexual relations were normal. You just had to keep it a secret. Society couldn't accept that but I felt pleasure with that and that I just had to be secretive about that pleasure. So, I basically felt trapped. I was very confused as a boy.

00:05:40

I did keep my same sex attractions hidden from my parents. I did discover that other boys and later teenagers and later men were interested in interacting with me sexually. The first was when aged seven, shortly after I was first molested by this man.

00:06:07

Many years later when I was about 27, I persuaded a Christian man to sleep over and he slept in my bed. The next day he disclosed to our pastor and our pastor said, 'Well actually there is a ministry that helps people like you with unwanted same-sex attraction.' And I was like, 'Wow, I'm not the only one. I'm not alone.' The pastor took me to a conference where there were other Christian men who also had an unwanted same-sex attraction, and there were books that shared other people's experiences of healing from this. Working out why they were same-sex attracted, addressing those issues and having experienced reduction and sometimes elimination of their sexual attraction to other men. That gave me hope. I think almost overnight that hope, just the relief, just changed me. It's like, I don't have to give in to this stuff anymore. There's hope there's other people who have been through this. I also discovered that one of the things that was very helpful was to have just healthy non-sexual relationships with other men.

And so I really invested in that and [my same-sex attractions] started to diminish. I used to have lots of female friends and then I started having lots of male friends and I really did see a lot of diminishing in my same-sex attractions. That was just amazing to see that really did start happening almost overnight. I found Christian psychologists who were willing to help me with my addictive behaviour and dealing with my hypersensitivity - my overly sensitive nature.

00:08:23

I moved to a city where the Christian [ex-LGBT] ministry was bigger. So, the Christian ministry for men with unwanted same-sex attractions was larger. I attended counselling by a man whose attractions had also largely diminished and he invited me and other men, also with unwanted same-sex attraction, to dinners and we would share our stories and learn from each other and discover that we weren't so isolated and it was really healing. I admit I was very scared about attending a meeting like that. But yeah, it was really healing to realise that you weren't alone. Many of us had worked out different things that had helped. We shared those and so we all grew. I really started discovering that I did belong in the world of men. I felt up until then that I wasn't accepted by men. My Dad hadn't kind of initiated me or welcomed me into the world of men. Nobody else had kind of basically said, "Matt, you're a man." You're in the world of men, you belong. I felt like I was some kind of other. I wasn't a man, I wasn't a woman, I was something else. I didn't know what. I was confused.

00:09:54

Other things that were helpful. I came across an online support group and programs and I joined a weekly meeting for that, and there would be a dozen men who would join the call and we would share our fears and our experiences and how we were dealing with emotions and how we coped with stresses. For me the usual way of coping with stresses was looking at pornography. I had learned that really was that I couldn't deal with my emotions properly and so I would look at pornography to kind of numb my feelings.

00:10:35

In these online meetings we would all check in, share how we had been going for the last week and then the leader would pick a theme and one man would share a story or talk about some issue in his life. But invariably the issue that he was dealing with a lot of us were dealing with the same issues as well. So even if we didn't actually get to talk a particular week there was something in whoever was talking's story that related to the rest of us and that was helpful. Often, if not immediately helpful, [it was] helpful down track.

There was one man who actually shared the story. "Nobody wants to be my friend." And when he said that I thought, "Oh, that's really weird." And I actually thought, "You know, Matt, that's what you think. You've been thinking that all your life." And it wasn't until that other man had verbalised that fear that I realised that's actually what I had been thinking as well.

00:11:45

What is strange is that I have heaps of friends, but my internal story says, "No, nobody wants to be your friend." And so, my brain would think up excuses why they didn't really want to be my friend, when actually they were my friends but I couldn't see it. Because of that, well, thankfully being able to realise that I was thinking, not consciously but subconsciously, that nobody wants to be my friend, I realise as a result of that thinking what I really needed to do was actually to interact with men in healthy ways but I wouldn't because I was thinking this man that I've just met doesn't want to be my friend. I don't want to get to that awkward point in the conversation where he's like, "Mate this is pretty awkward, I'd rather go and talk to somebody else." So, I would cut the conversation short. I was effectively sabotaging the solution to what I needed, which is dreadful.

It's been amazing to realise that's what I do, but actually that's what I need and so I don't do that anymore and my feeling [of acceptance by men] is really taking leaps and bounds forward.

There's a lot of things like that, where I have this inner story that's false and through counselling that I'm able to share those thoughts and the counsellors always just have to repeat them back to me and I just realised how ridiculous is that. How ridiculous that I'm believing these things, but until I actually verbalise them I don't realise I'm thinking them all the time. The counselling which might be called conversion therapy has been incredibly helpful.

One thing that's been incredibly helpful is that I realised that the pornography that I found most gratifying was actually very similar to my childhood sexual abuse. Now I brought this to the attention of my counsellor and he could see that there was a connection there and that was worth investigating. So, he got me to briefly imagine the scene of my abuse and then enter that scene as my adult self. And of course, I got angry at the abuser. I shouted at him to get his hands off and to get out and then I comforted the little me and gave him a hug. I told him what was right and what was wrong and that I would help him and I would take an interest in him. I would delight in him and I gave him a big hug and basically said I would help him and give him the attention and affirmation that he was a little man. And I have got to say that almost overnight, it was overnight, that I stopped having an interest in that pornography. I found that what I was really looking for, attempting to find in that pornography, was rescue. And so through going through that, especially with my counsellor, that I was able to rescue myself and so that desire for that pornography just evaporated, which is just amazing. So that counselling is just invaluable.

00:15:40

Host: Leah

That's, that's really powerful. That's not the end of the story.

00:15:46

Matthew

Some stuff that's been really helpful is I went on a weekend camp. It was peer led. It was an experiential weekend. There were 23 other men there similar to myself. I grew a huge amount on that weekend. I learned how to relate to men as brothers. I healed a lot of childhood traumas with these peers. I healed issues with my father, my mother and kids at school. I also developed a stronger sense of who I am. Not essentially stuck at age 7 or 8. I was able to realise that I can actually hug other men and not withdraw straight away because of fear that they really did not want me there. Also, the fear that they would have some homophobic reaction to me. That actually hugs can show affirmation to me that I'm accepted as a man for who I am and it's not a sexual thing. So, the weekend was extremely beneficial. I received the delight that I never received from my Dad. I now know that men accept me as a man and I belong in the world of men. Since then my sexual attraction to other men has greatly diminished. So, I totally will be against any kind of legislation that would suppress the hope that I received.

00:17:43

I would hate to see that counselling in this area would be banned because I've seen in my own life and in other people's lives that the reduction and elimination of same-sex attraction is possible. It's not by dealing with the same-sex attractions directly. They are a symptom, I've discovered, of other needs that have been unmet in my childhood. If I'm able to address those then I find that my same-sex attraction goes away. I have experienced that and I have seen that and so I would hate to see counsellors being scared of offering that kind of counselling and hope to other men because it's been so helpful, extremely helpful to me. I would be dead without [it]. I would not be here speaking to you without that hope so don't take that away from other men. Don't take that hope away.

The other thing that I want to say is there's a lot of support out there for people to come into the gay lifestyle, the gay community, and counselling to help them to do that and if that's what they want they should be allowed to do that. So why can there not be help the other way if somebody wants to embrace the heterosexual lifestyle and the heterosexual community? Why is there not help to do that? If those are my requests to my psychologists, my counsellor, why are they not allowed to help me to do that if they're my client wishes?

00:19:39

What would I be like if my pastor hadn't introduced me to this ministry for men with unwanted same-sex attraction? If I hadn't gone to counselling, if I hadn't gone to these experiential weekends, I think I would still be incredibly confused and I suspect through that confusion I would have committed suicide. I just think confusion is just, it boggles my mind now to kind of think how on earth did I have these thoughts with paradoxes in my mind. I've been able to sort them out. And so, I don't think I would be here today without all the support and counselling and what people would say is conversion therapy. So, I have relief now. I feel comfortable in myself as a man. My self-image is drastically improved so I see myself as a masculine man. I think I mentioned that I previously didn't see myself as a man, I didn't see myself as a woman, but I was kind of some other thing.

00:21:01

Or, more than that I was a man, I was an imposter and if somebody would kind of call me out, I'd be like, "No, I'm gay, I don't belong." So, I also [now] see myself as assertive. Previously my internal story was that I'm passive. I'm now confident. I previously was quite shy and scared. I'm confident, I'm competitive. Previously, well you can imagine not being good in sports, I just thought I'm no good at anything, so I wouldn't even try. But now I exercise and I compete with other men. I race and I train. I'm now fitter physically than I've ever been. I'm also a leader. I do like to help other men in similar situations to where I am. And even by helping and talking through it with them it actually helps me as well. I'm also strong in character and integrity. Previously I was really a people pleaser so I didn't have any Integrity. I would just do whatever would help me to have friends.

00:22:20

I said before that I have a huge hope now. Suicide is just not even an option now. There's no way I would dream of that. I'm not promiscuous anymore. Previously I was constantly searching for a man to give me some of his masculinity, his attention. Someone who could have delight in me. Something my father didn't give me. But I now realise that I am a man. I've been a man all along. Just that my internal stories didn't allow me to see that. Of course, I have healthy relationships with men now. I'm not secretly searching to have sex with them now, I just belong in the world men. And of course, my mental health is the biggest area of improvement. I'm secure in who I am. I'm comfortable in myself. I actually smile at myself in the mirror now, and I know that I belong in the men's toilets. I'm not some imposter.

00:23:30

Host: Leah

I just really thank you for sharing. You have a wonderful story and you've shared it so well and so bravely. I just really thank you Matthew for everything that you shared and I know that it would be of help other people and an encouragement to other people. I can't thank you enough.

Matthew's story was taken from one of the videos of "ex-LGBT stories" which participants in the Free To Change survey uploaded to the web portal. There are many additional stories to be found in the written and audio forms also uploaded: <https://www.freetochange.org>

Literature Review of Reports of SOCE Practices: Are Therapies To Assist with Unwanted SSA “Discredited and Dangerous?”

AUTHOR: DR CON KAFATARIS, MD.



Literature Review of Reports of SOCE Practices: Are Therapies To Assist with Unwanted SSA “Discredited and Dangerous?”

Introduction

- “Sexual orientation” is an umbrella term which may refer to sexual attractions or sexual self-identification or other things. Gender dysphoria is a term used where a person’s perceived gender is at odds with their natal sex.
- “Sexual orientation change efforts” (or SOCE) is an umbrella term for a variety of techniques that seek to help people who experience unwanted same-sex sexual attractions or gender dysphoria to overcome those attractions and/or abstain from homosexual behaviour or to revert back to their natal sex. SOCE may include professional therapy by licensed mental health providers, as well as less formal (often religiously-based) services provided by unlicensed counsellors.
- Critics of SOCE and the media usually employ a term, “conversion therapy”. This term more properly describes older practices based on “aversion” that were used when homosexuality was considered a disorder that needed treatment. This changed when the American Psychiatric Association (APA) de-classified homosexuality as a mental disorder. Since then, aversive practices designed to “convert” people have largely ceased to be used in professional settings. Accordingly, the term “conversion therapy” is no longer used by practitioners of SOCE.
- Critics of SOCE make two claims—that it is ineffective, and that it is harmful. “Effective” SOCE is therapy or counselling that results in any significant shift away from homosexuality and/ or toward heterosexuality in any of these components. SOCE can only be judged generally “harmful” if the harms exceed the benefits, and exceed the harms experienced by comparable populations.
- To scientifically prove that SOCE is generally “harmful”, one would have to prove that all of the following are true:
 - A. The number of clients who report harm from SOCE exceeds those who report benefits.
 - B. Negative mental and physical health indicators among those who have undergone SOCE exceed those among persons who have undergone alternative “gay-affirming” therapy.
 - C. Negative mental and physical health indicators among those who have undergone SOCE exceed those among persons with same-sex attractions who have had no therapy at all.
 - D. Negative mental and physical health indicators among those who have undergone SOCE exceed those among persons who have had therapy or counselling for other conditions. There currently is no scientific evidence to prove any of these points.

In order to better portray this, a review of the available literature is conducted in the following section. In the conclusion, we will examine whether or not the literature actually does prove the points alleged by critics of SOCE.

Studies and Surveys that Show that SOCE Can be beneficial

Older reports of successful SOCE

- In a thorough review of the literature in 2009, the National Association for the Truth about Homosexuality (NARTH) published a thorough review of the literature in the Journal of Human Sexuality.
- The review reported on “600 reports of clinicians, researchers, and former clients primarily from professional and peer-reviewed scientific journals”, published over 125 years, documenting “that professionally-assisted and other attempts at volitional change from homosexuality toward heterosexuality have been successful for many and that such change continues to be possible for those who wish to try”.
- The journal also reported on five “meta-analyses” (studies of the studies) conducted between 1974 and 2002, all of which showed change was possible.
- There were three meta-analyses that reported “success rates” in making some shift toward heterosexuality in percentage terms. They ranged from 33-40%.

JOSEPH NICOLOSI, A. DEAN BYRD, AND RICHARD W. POTTS

“Retrospective Self-Reports of Changes in Homosexual Orientation: A Consumer Survey of Conversion Therapy Clients,” *Psychological Reports* 86 (2000): 1071-1088.

Abstract online at: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.2466/prO.2000.86.3c.1071>.

This study surveyed 882 “dissatisfied homosexually oriented people” asking them 75 questions about their experiences with SOCE. Of these 689 (or 78%) were men and 193 (or 24%) were women. Some key findings were:

- “Over 67% of the participants indicated they were exclusively homosexual or almost entirely homosexual at one time in their lives, whereas only 12.8% of them indicated that they now perceived themselves in this manner.”
- “Before treatment or change, only 2.2% of the participants perceived themselves as exclusively or almost entirely heterosexual, whereas after treatment or change 34.3%” did so.

But is change only possible for those who already have some measure of heterosexual or bisexual attraction? What about people who viewed themselves as “exclusively homosexual orientation”? In the sample there were 318 participants who viewed themselves this way. Of these:

- 56 (17.6%) reported that they now view themselves as exclusively heterosexual after treatment
- 53 (16.7%) now view themselves as almost entirely heterosexual
- 35 (11.1%) now view themselves as more heterosexual than homosexual.

The authors comment on this stating that “that, 45.4% of the exclusively homosexual participants retrospectively reported having made major shifts in their sexual orientation.”

As for harm, only 7.1% participants “reported that they were doing worse on three or more [out of 17] of the psychological, interpersonal, and spiritual well-being items after treatment.”

ROBERT L. SPITZER, M.D.,

“Can Some Gay Men and Lesbians Change Their Sexual Orientation? 200 Participants Reporting a Change from Homosexual to Heterosexual Orientation,” *Archives of Sexual Behaviour* 32:5 (2003): 403-417

Abstract online at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/14567650>;

Full text available online at: <http://www.jpsych.com/pdfs/Spitzer,%202003.pdf>.

This study is significant in that Robert L. Spitzer is a psychiatrist who was instrumental in pushing for the controversial 1973 decision of the APA to remove homosexuality from its list of mental disorders.

In the early 2000s, Dr. Spitzer was challenged to study whether or not sexual orientation could change so he did a structured interview with 200 individuals to study the effectiveness of SOCE, which he termed “reparative therapy”.

There were 143 males and 57 females “who reported at least some minimal change from homosexual to heterosexual orientation that lasted at least 5 years.” As with most studies of this subject, most participants reported some significant but not complete change.

Spitzer concluded:

This study indicates that some gay men and lesbians, following reparative therapy, report that they have made major changes from a predominantly homosexual orientation to a predominantly heterosexual orientation. The changes following reparative therapy were not limited to sexual behaviour and sexual orientation self-identity. The changes encompassed sexual attraction, arousal, fantasy, yearning, and being bothered by homosexual feelings. The changes encompassed the core aspects of sexual orientation. Even participants who only made a limited change nevertheless regarded the therapy as extremely beneficial.

Comments on this study:

- Spitzer noted that the clients were self-selected which means that this study does not allow any generalisation regarding how likely change is for any given SOCE client—it merely suggests that change is possible for at least some.
- In addition, Spitzer acknowledged from the outset that relying exclusively on self-reporting leaves open a theoretical possibility that the reports could be biased or inaccurate. However, he enumerated six patterns of response that might be expected if this had occurred, and said that none of them were present in his data. He concluded by stating his opinion that “the participants’ self-reports in this study are by- and-large credible and that probably few, if any, elaborated self-deceptive narratives or lied”.
- Scott L. Hershberger, an LGBT-affirming researcher who analysed Spitzer’s study, agreed with this conclusion, saying, “The orderly, law-like pattern of changes in homosexual behaviour, homosexual self-identification and fantasy observed in Spitzer’s study is strong evidence that reparative therapy can assist individuals in changing their homosexual orientation to a heterosexual orientation”.
- After publication of this study in 2003, “[t]here was an outpouring of hatred” toward Spitzer from LGBT activists who had once viewed him as a hero. Dutch psychologist Gerard van den Aardweg said that he spoke to Spitzer, who “had nearly broken down emotionally after terrible personal attacks from militant gays and their supporters”.
- In 2012, after nearly a decade of such abuse, at the age of 80 and suffering from Parkinson’s Disease, Spitzer caved in to the pressure and publicly apologised “for making unproven claims of the efficacy of reparative therapy”. He now declared that “there was no way to determine if the participants’ accounts of change were valid”.
- This led some writers to claim that Spitzer had “retracted” his study, but that is not accurate.

Both Spitzer's original article and his "apology" appeared in the journal Archives of Sexual Behaviour. The editor of this journal specifically refused to retract the article, saying that a mere change in how the author interprets his own data is not grounds for doing so.

- Notwithstanding Spitzer's 2012 "apology," his 2003 study continues to provide what it always provided—evidence (not "proof") that some (not all) people with a predominantly homosexual orientation can change to having a predominantly heterosexual orientation after seeking and receiving therapy or counselling directed to that end.

ELAN Y. KARTEN AND JAY C. WADE

"Sexual Orientation Change Efforts in Men: A Client Perspective," *The Journal of Men's Studies* 18:1 (2010): 84-102

Abstract online at: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3149/jms.1801.84>.

This study in a peer-reviewed journal examined "117 men dissatisfied with their same-sex attraction who had pursued sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE)". The authors also noted that "this sample consisted of a highly intrinsically religious cohort of men". Karten and Wade found that there were statistically significant changes in behaviour after SOCE and that these changes had occurred with a "large effect size". They reported these changes as follows:

- "There was a statistically significant increase in heterosexual self-identity,"
- "There was a statistically significant decrease in reported homosexual feelings and behaviour,"
- "There was a statistically significant increase in reported heterosexual feelings and behaviour,"
- "With respect to psychological well-being, on average men reported there was a positive change in their psychological functioning," with the greatest positive changes coming in "self-esteem", "social functioning", "depression", "self-harmful behaviour", and "thoughts and attempts of suicide."

STANTON L. JONES AND MARK A. YARHOUSE

"A Longitudinal Study of Attempted Religiously Mediated Sexual Orientation Change," *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 37:5 (2011)

Abstract online at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0092623X.2011.607052>.

- The research by Jones and Yarhouse is significant because it involved "a quasi-experimental longitudinal study spanning 6½ years," rather than just retrospective reports.
- This 2011 article was published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal; earlier detailed reports on the study had been published in a 414-page book in 2007, and reported to the convention of the American Psychological Association in 2009.
- They began with a sample of 98 subjects (72 men and 26 women) engaged in "religiously mediated" change efforts. After a rate of attrition that "compares favourably to that of respected longitudinal studies", they were able to track 61 subjects through to the end of the study.
- Jones and Yarhouse found that "53% of the T6 [final] sample that self-categorised did so as some version of success, either as Success: Conversion (23%) or Success: Chastity (30%)." That was more than twice the number (25%) who "self- categorised as a failure . . . (Confused or Gay Identity).
- Jones and Yarhouse also used a standardised checklist of symptoms to measure any "harm" or "psychological distress" from therapy. There was no statistically significant link between the therapy and any "harm". Accordingly, they make it clear that "*the only statistically significant trends indicated improving psychological symptoms*".

NICHOLAS A. CUMMINGS

‘Sexual reorientation therapy not unethical’ USA today, July 30, 2013.

- While this is not a scholarly article of study, it provides helpful insights into this analysis because Professor Cummings is, a former president of the American Psychological Association, the same association that published the detailed report 2009 that supposedly discredits SOCE.
- He was also former chief psychologist for Kaiser Permanente and he wrote that *“of the patients I oversaw who sought to change their orientation, hundreds were successful.”*

STEPHEN H. BLACK

The Complete First Stone Ministries Effectiveness Survey Report (Enumclaw, Wash.: Redemption Press, 2017)

Available for order online at: <https://www.freedomrealised.org/first-stone-ministries-effectiveness-survey-report>.

- First Stone Ministries is a Christian ministry based in Oklahoma City that focuses on “overcoming all forms of unwanted sexual behaviours”. They surveyed clients who had participated in their programs over 25 years (1990–2015) with 185 former clients completing the survey.
- While not strictly scientific, this survey provides useful and detailed information on the experiences of many people who have undergone Christian-based counselling.
- There were 61% of respondents who reported that they had a “sexual addiction” before coming to First Stone. Of these, 93% no longer considered themselves “addicted” at the time of the survey.
- As for harm, Black has been very transparent in publishing all submitted comments, both positive and negative. However, of 98 respondents who wrote concluding comments, 85 were positive in tone, only 7 negative, and 6 mixed.

PAUL L. SANTERO, PHD, NEIL E. WHITEHEAD, PHD, DOLORES BALLESTEROS, PHD

“Effects of Therapy on Religious Men Who Have Unwanted Same-Sex Attraction,” The Linacre Quarterly, July 23, 2018

Abstract online at: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0024363918788559>.

- This study, in a peer-reviewed medical journal, surveyed “125 men with active lay religious belief” who had completed or were in the process of SOCE.
- 97% of the sample had undergone professional therapy, but 86% had also participated in less formal types of SOCE.
- They note that *sexual orientation exists along a continuum and even incremental change may be considered a success.*
- According to the authors, “68 percent self-reported ‘some-to-much’ reduction in their same-sex attraction and behaviour and also an increase in their opposite-sex attraction and behaviour.” They also noted that there were 22 men (18% of sample) who *“reported feeling heterosexual attractions for the first time”*.
- In addition of those who rated themselves as having **exclusively** same-sex attractions initially, 14% said that they had a complete change to **exclusive** opposite sex attractions (emphasis

added).

- The authors also discuss the effectiveness rate of psychotherapy in general for any unwanted issue stating that *“the average person who received counselling for whatever problem was better off than 70 percent to 75 percent of the persons who did not receive counselling”*.
- They concluded that SOCE for unwanted same sex attraction was *“comparable to the effectiveness rates of psychotherapy in general for any unwanted issue”*.
- With respect to harm, respondents appear to have experienced overwhelmingly positive impacts, which were *“marked”* in the areas of self-esteem, social functioning, self-harm, and suicidality, and *“extreme”* with respect to substance abuse.
- The authors then state that based on their data, *“[t]he hypothesis of ineffectiveness of SOCE is rejected... the hypothesis that harm predominates is rejected strongly.”*

Studies that report of harm from SOCE

ARIEL SHIDLO AND MICHAEL SCHROEDER

‘Changing Sexual Orientation: A Consumer’s Report’ Professional Psychology: Research and Practice 33:3 (2002) 249-259

- In this study, the self-identified gay researchers published the results of their interviews with “202 consumers of sexual orientation conversion interventions”.
- It should be noted that the research was sponsored by the political activist group the “National Lesbian and Gay Health Association and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force”.
- It should also be noted that the sample is not a random or representative sample of SOCE customers. Their initial recruitment message was labelled *“Homophobic Therapies: Documenting the Damage.”* They asked respondents if they felt that *“this counselling harmed you or had a negative effect”*, but used a *“qualitative interview”* rather than reporting the frequency i.e. the number of responses.
- Ironically, the one number reported—suicide attempts—showed that 25 participants had attempted suicide before *“conversion therapy,”* but only 11 had done so after such therapy. This would seem to suggest that SOCE is less likely to provoke suicide attempts than living a “gay” lifestyle is.
- Despite its scholarly veneer, this report consists primarily of anecdotal reports of harm, failing to give statistics on specific harms even among this (unrepresentative) sample.

Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation 2009

(This report is widely cited by those opposing SOCE and therefore it is analysed in some detail)

OVERVIEW

- The findings of the review are presented in sections that help to clarify HOW the authors handled the data, their assumptions and the validity of their conclusions.
- In the interest of brevity, the material is presented in form of bullet points with some supporting quotes. Sections with more detailed and lengthy quotes are provided in footnotes/links.
- Following the bullet points are criticisms of the conclusions reached by the authors.

ASSUMPTIONS

- There is a difference between “sexual orientation” which is tied to physiological drives and biological systems beyond conscious choice and “sexual orientation identity”: the way one acknowledges, identifies with sexual orientation, which does involve a conscious choice (P30).
- Research that suggests that change is possible is likely to be reflecting change in sexual orientation IDENTITY rather than SEXUAL ORIENTATION ITSELF (P31).
- Same sex attraction is a normal and positive variant of human sexuality and not a disorder.
- There is no research linking SSA with family trauma or abuse (P64).

It should be clear that these are all ASSUMPTIONS and not provable. In particular, whether there is any practical application for differentiating between sexual orientation and “identity” is debatable. In addition, Mayer and McHugh did a comprehensive literature review on gender and sexuality in 2016 and they found that there ACTUALLY WAS some evidence linking SSA and abuse. This fits with the testimonies of many homosexuals.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

- *The vast majority of research on SOCE was conducted prior to 1981. This early research predominantly focused on evaluating behavioural interventions, including those using aversive methods.*
- *Following the declassification of homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1973 (APA, 1973), research on SOCE declined dramatically.*
- *There is a small, more recent group of studies conducted since 1999 that assess perceived effects of SOCE among individuals who have participated in psychotherapy as well as efforts based in religious beliefs or practices, including support groups, faith healing, and prayer.(P27).*

ALLEGED SHORTCOMINGS OF RESEARCH

- The studies that do show that change is possible are based on small samples, convenience samples, samples from a religious population and rely heavily on self-report (P33).
- *These studies all use designs that do not permit cause-and-effect attributions to be made. We conclude that although these studies may be useful in describing people who pursue SOCE and their experiences of SOCE, none of the recent studies can address the efficacy of SOCE or its promise as an intervention (P37).*

The authors make a value judgement and voluntarily choose to ignore any of the more recent studies as “valid” research because samples are small and they use self-report to measure behaviour change. But the APA endorses same sex parenting based on small size convenience sample studies of largely white lesbian women. This is a clear case of double standard.

Sexual orientation is heavily influenced by how one feels, and how precisely does one measure changes in “feelings” without using self-report? How does one measure “gender dysphoria” if self-report is ignored? Provided the limitations of self-report is recognised, it is not appropriate to throw out all findings that are based on self-report. Indeed, without self-report, a large amount of psychological research would have to be thrown out.

THEREFORE, THE ALLEGED SHORTCOMINGS ARE NOT VALID.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH ACTUALLY SHOW?

- Some studies show that some individuals have reported that SOCE provided benefits (P50).
- Some studies show that some individuals reported that SOCE caused harms (P50).
- APA cannot draw a conclusion regarding whether SOCE are effective or not (P43).
- Long term research published AFTER the task force but presented to the APA confirmed that in a small sample of men followed over seven years LASTING CHANGE in sexual orientation occurred WITHOUT HARM.

HOW HAS THE APA'S HANDLING OF THE RESEARCH BEEN “SELECTIVE”?

- They allege that the “recent” studies provide *“no sound basis for attributing individual reports of their current other-sex sexual attraction to SOCE”*.
- They allege that because some are “religious” they are *“not based on theories that can be scientifically evaluated and do not constitute evidence that SOCE can be effective”*.
- They allege that SOCE resemble other kinds of “support group” therapy and the benefit lie in the support group rather than the therapy itself (P85).
- Although they reject “recent studies” as showing the efficacy of SOCE, they accept the “recent studies” that document people who PERCEIVE they have been harmed by SOCE.
- Therefore, they conclude that the *“early evidence, though extremely limited is the best basis for predicting what would be the outcome of psychological interventions”* (P85).

So, in effect the APA has:

- A. basically IGNORED all recent data that shows any effectiveness for SOCE. They have based their “conclusions” only on the “early evidence” that used aversion therapies e.g. electric shock, NONE OF WHICH ARE USED BY ANY SOCE PRACTITIONER TODAY.
- B. attributed any effectiveness to the “support group” element as if to say that this makes it

ineffective. Psychologists rely heavily on the benefits gained from therapy within support groups in the treatment of their patients. What evidence is there that SOCE is any different?

- C. discarded self-report data showing SOCE benefits but accepted self-reports of “perceived harm” from SOCE.

THIS LEADS TO FLAWED CONCLUSIONS:

- *The results of scientifically valid research indicate that it is unlikely that individuals will be able to reduce same-sex sexual attractions or increase other- sex attractions through SOCE.*
- *The few early research investigations that were conducted with scientific rigor raise concerns about the safety of SOCE, as some participants suffered unintended harmful side effects from the interventions.*
- ***There are no scientifically rigorous studies of recent SOCE that would enable us to make a definitive statement about whether recent SOCE is safe or harmful and for whom. (P83)***
- *Recent studies of SOCE participants frequently do not distinguish between sexual orientation and sexual orientation identity. . The available evidence, from both early and recent studies, suggests that although sexual orientation is unlikely to change, some individuals modified their sexual orientation identity (P84-5).*

SO, THE UPSHOT OF THE WHOLE REPORT IS:

- A. The APA just doesn't know whether SOCE works or whether it doesn't
- B. The APA attributes any behavioural change to a change in an attribute that they have selectively defined i.e. “sexual orientation” vs “sexual orientation identity”
- C. The APA certainly doesn't use terms like “discredited” and “dangerous”.

DID THE TASKFORCE FIND THAT SOCE WAS “DISCREDITED” OR “DANGEROUS”?

- *Recent research indicates that former participants in SOCE report diverse evaluations of their experiences. Some individuals perceive that they have benefited from SOCE, while other individuals perceive that they have been harmed by SOCE (P85)*
- *Some individuals who participated in the early research reported negative side effects such as loss of sexual arousal, impotence, depression, anxiety, and relationship dysfunction.*
- *Individuals who participated in recent research and who failed to change sexual orientation, while believing they should have changed with such efforts, described their experiences as a significant cause of emotional distress and negative self-image (P85)*
- *Other individuals reported that they perceived SOCE to be helpful by providing a place to discuss their conflicts, reduce isolation, and receive support ...Some reported that SOCE helped them view their sexual orientation in a different light that permitted them to live in a manner consistent with their faith, which they perceived as positive... Some individuals described finding a sense of support and community through SOCE and valued having others with whom they could identify.*
- *These effects mirror those provided by mutual support groups for a range of problems. (P85).*

Therefore, despite what the media would have us believe, the APA taskforce did not find SOCE “discredited” or “dangerous”.

WHAT DID APA RECOMMEND?

On page 63–64 APA provides a framework for “*appropriate application of affirmative therapeutic interventions for adults*” by Licensed Mental Health Practitioners (LMHPs) based on:

- *Acceptance and support including: (a) unconditional positive regard for and empathy with the client; (b) openness to the client’s perspective as a means of understanding their concerns, and; (c) encouragement of the client’s positive self-concept.*
- *Comprehensive assessment includes an awareness of the complete person, including mental health concerns that could impact distress about sexual orientation.*
- *Active coping strategies are efforts that include cognitive, behavioural or emotional responses designed to change the nature of the stressor itself or how an individual perceives it, and includes both cognitive and emotional strategies.*
- *Psychotherapy, self-help groups, or welcoming communities (ethnic communities, social groups, religious denominations) provide social support that can mitigate distress caused by isolation, rejection, and lack of role models. Conflicts among disparate elements of identity play a major role in the conflicts and mental health concerns of those seeking SOCE.*
- *Identity exploration is an active process of exploring and assessing one’s identity and establishing a commitment to an integrated identity that addresses the identity conflicts without an a priori treatment goal for how clients identify or live out their sexual orientation. The process may include a developmental process that includes periods of crisis, mourning, re-evaluation, identity deconstruction, and growth.*
- *LMHPs address specific issues for religious clients by integrating aspects of the psychology of religion into their work, including obtaining a thorough assessment of clients’ spiritual and religious beliefs, religious identity and motivations, and spiritual functioning; improving positive religious coping; and exploring the intersection of religious and sexual orientation identities. This framework is consistent with modern, multiculturally competent approaches and evidence-based psychotherapy practices, and can be integrated into a variety of theoretical systems.*

WHAT WE CAN SAY IN CONCLUSION:

- A. This framework is standard good mental practice and covers all the things that good practitioners do.**
- B. Experienced therapists who offer SOCE therefore do nothing different from other experienced LMHPs. They comprehensively assess their patients, develop a specific plan that meets their goals, and support their clients through this process.**
- C. SOCE offered by qualified and experienced practitioners is a valid therapeutic option and is NEITHER discredited nor dangerous.**

Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice: A Critique (Dr Con Kafataris, April 2019)

While the document (PHPJ) purports to be paint an accurate picture of LGBT “conversion therapy” it is a deeply flawed document at many levels. It is flawed in its basic design; it is flawed in methodology and therefore its conclusions cannot help but be flawed. Unfortunately, it is being marketed as a detailed, in-depth and accurate study of conversion therapy in Australia. While it may be somewhat detailed at more than 80 pages in length, it anecdotally and uncritically explores the stories of its participants. It is NOT an accurate representation of “conversion therapy” in Australia. There are a number of problems, presented below.

FLAWED DESIGN FOR COMPREHENSIVE INQUIRY INTO THE ISSUE.

The report is not a detailed analysis of the efficacy or lack thereof of conversion therapy. It is more of an historical overview, both of the development of the therapy over time and of its effects on a few selected individuals.

FLAWED METHODOLOGY

The authors interviewed 15 people who had negative experiences with conversion therapy. They found these 15 from LGBT media and claimed that they were “broadly representative of religious and LGBT demographics in Australia”. They started with a sample of 50 but excluded 35 of them for various reasons.

The experiences of these 15 people are discussed in some detail in two chapters of the report. Only one of the interviewees graphically described an experience with “aversion therapy” that allegedly occurred in the “late 1980s”. Despite her detailed descriptions of being admitted to a psychiatric hospital and “being restrained [and] having an electrode attached to my labia”, neither the hospital, the dates nor the attending physician are specified. This makes it impossible to verify whether or not this actually happened in the manner she describes. If this had actually happened, it would have been a CRIMINAL offence and should have been reported to the authorities.

The authors DID NOT interview anyone who claimed to have experienced lasting change from “conversion therapy”. The fact is that THERE ARE such people in Australia and there are more than 15 of them. Some have actually entered into long-term heterosexual marriages and others have left the homosexual lifestyle long term. Despite this being a well-known fact to anyone who is abreast of this issue, the authors of PHPJ completely ignored them.

FLAWED EVIDENCE

The very first sentence in section 1.1 states:

*“Psychological research has produced **overwhelming clinical evidence** that practices aimed at the reorientation of LGBT people do not work and are both harmful and unethical”.*(emphasis added)

Now this is a very strong statement. It is basically saying that it is beyond doubt that “conversion therapy” does not work. Given the comprehensive nature of the claim, it would be reasonable to expect that it was backed up by equally comprehensive evidence and references. In fact, the only reference given by the authors is a position statement from the Australian Psychological Society in 2015, “APS Position Statement on the use of psychological practices that attempt to change sexual orientation”. It makes the following strong and clear statements:

“The APS strongly opposes any approach to psychological practice or research that treats lesbians, gay men and bisexual people as disordered. The APS also strongly opposes any approach to psychological practice or research that attempts to change an individual’s sexual orientation. There is no peer-reviewed empirical psychological research objectively documenting the ability to ‘change’ an individual’s sexual orientation”.

Again, you would expect strong, comprehensive claims to be backed up by strong comprehensive evidence. When you examine the references provided, there is only one study by Shidio & Schroeder from 2002 which itself is a “consumer report”.

What neither the APS nor the authors of PHPJ mention is that there ARE some research studies that document the success of attempts to change sexual orientation that have been published both in book form and presented to psychological conferences in the US.

Furthermore, the authors cite a source from Cornell University titled “whatweknow” (December 2017), which they claim suggests that conversion therapy doesn’t work. When one carefully examines the source however, one finds that more than 70% of the studies examined made NO EMPIRICAL DETERMINATION about whether conversion therapy can alter sexual orientation. This same 70% were described as offering “useful observations” to help practitioners. This is tantamount to saying that “we just don’t know”.

The fact that many individuals who have had UNWANTED same sex attractions have found benefit from “conversion therapy” is also very well documented in a 2017 report to the US Federal Trade Commission titled *In their Own Words: Lies Deception and Fraud*” by the National Task Force for Therapy Equality. This organization is described as

“a coalition of licensed psychotherapists, psychiatrists, physicians, public policy organisations and psychotherapy clients/patients from across the United States of America. Their purpose is to secure therapy equality for clients that experience distress over unwanted same sex attractions and gender identity conflicts”.

It would therefore appear that there are a number of highly qualified and licensed health professionals in the U.S. who DO BELIEVE that unwanted same sex attraction can be treated. Not only does such a coalition exist but – as a careful review of their documents show – they have ample evidence for their claims. Both this report and the 2009 APA report were published **before** PHPJ yet they are completely unmentioned. There are only two possible explanations for this omission:

1. The authors of PHPJ were unaware of their existence, in which case their report should not be viewed as a comprehensive review of the history and evidence for or against conversion therapy. It should not be used as a basis for public policy.
2. The authors of PHPJ, were aware of their existence and yet chose not to mention them. This can only be due to bias on the part of these authors and therefore the report cannot be viewed as objective and impartial.

FLAWED CONCLUSIONS

When one considers the fact that PHPJ has flawed design, flawed methodology and flaws in its evidence, it should not be surprising to see that the conclusions are flawed. (Indeed, there is no way they could not be flawed, given the fact that they are based on a flawed foundation.) So, in summing up, the authors have engaged in a process of circular reasoning:

1. They have assumed from the beginning that conversion therapy does not work.
2. They have only cited evidence that supports this assumption.
3. Therefore, it should be no surprise that the rest of the report goes on to show that - “lo and behold” - conversion therapy does not work.

A recent literature review

In July 2020 Amy Przeworski, Emily Peterson, and Alexandra Piedra from the Department of Psychological Services, Case Western Reserve University published a “Systematic Review of the Efficacy, Harmful Effects and Ethical Issues Related to Sexual Orientation Change Efforts” in the journal *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*. In their final analysis, they examined 35 articles and presented critiques and limitations of them. They included most of the studies listed above but, for reasons that are not altogether clear, omitted that of Whitehead and Santoro. Therefore, while the review has some merits, it cannot be listed as comprehensive. In addition, the authors are guilty of some errors of logic and invalid assumptions as they seek to prove that SOCE is ineffective, harmful and unethical. Some of the more obvious ones are listed below.

First, the authors criticise SOCE because it is “based on the inaccurate belief that sexual attraction and homosexuality are not inborn, but rather develop in response to pathological, relational, or environmental experiences and therefore can, or should be, altered”.

It has long been recognised that no one really knows the exact cause of homosexual behaviour and it is probable that both biological and social/ environmental factors have a part to play. Recently, research has confirmed that there is no “gay gene”.

They then go on to say that the “idea that same-sex attraction results from familial dysfunction over childhood trauma has been discredited, as there is a lack of evidence supporting this theory”.

They cite the APA report of 2009 as well as other studies from 1981, 1983, 1987 and 1991 but they fail to mention the 2016 comprehensive review conducted by Meyer and McHugh which did indeed raise the question of the role of abuse. While Meyer and McHugh were careful not to draw any definite conclusion, they highlight the fact that this question is by no means settled.

Further evidence of assumptions and assertions made without convincing evidence can be seen in the statement “the mere existence of SOCE reinforces existing societal prejudices with the implication that sexual orientation should be altered ... As such, even if one were to claim the efficacy of SOCE, the ethical costs and potential for harm outweigh any perceived benefits”. They then cite research from more than 40 years ago to support this claim.

The authors then criticise studies that purport to show that SOCE has at least some benefits by “straw man” type arguments and claims that are not supported by data. Examples of these include:

- “The authors determined that there was insufficient evidence to conclude that therapeutic SOCE are effective in altering sexual orientation” and that sexual abstinence “does not capture the nuance of same-sex attraction or LGBQ identity and it does not equate to a change in sexual orientation”.

Just because the authors of one study claim that there is “insufficient evidence” does not make this an undisputed fact. In addition, the term “change” is a relative term and it is reasonable to classify ANY difference in behaviour as “change”. In addition, any definition of “sexual orientation” has at least some component that relates to behaviour and sexual practice. If someone with same sex attractions has a reduction in acting on these attractions, then have they not at least had a partial change in their sexual orientation?

- “The majority of SOCE research contains methodological limitations that prevent causal attribution of perceived sexual orientation change. For instance, almost all of the aforementioned studies seeking to establish a relationship between SOCE and a change in sexual orientation lack a non-experimental control group”.

The authors then go on claim that SOCE was rated as harmful and that therapies that affirmed LGBQ identity were helpful, citing research that is based on a non-probability sample without a control group. Indeed, most of the research in this area, including that which purports to show the harms of SOCE, is done on samples with no control groups.

- *“The majority of research relied on a retrospective design in which individuals who have undergone SOCE were asked to recall their prior experiences...As time elapses, people have a tendency to incorrectly recall the frequency or intensity of past experiences and beliefs, due to response-shift biases”.*

Putting aside the fact that many people are able to accurately recall traumatic events in the past in great detail, this statement also applies to ALL the research that purports to show the “harms” of SOCE that requires people to recall their past experiences. One cannot have it both ways. In addition, the study by Jones and Yarhouse was NOT based on retrospective data but was a longitudinal study spanning more than six years.

- The authors then cite the fact that many people who sought SOCE were motivated by their religious beliefs and reflect a lack of ethnic and gender diversity.

“For this reason, many studies that tout the efficacy of SOCE are not entirely generalisable, in that they exclusively recruit highly religious samples. An additional flaw in much of the research on SOCE is the lack of ethnic and gender diversity. Throughout the history of SOCE research, the participants in the majority of studies were exclusively or predominantly white men”.

This is another “straw man argument”. The data remains the same, regardless of whether the participants were religiously motivated or atheists and regardless of their nationality. The data does not support the conclusion that SOCE is INEFFECTIVE as a therapy. You may not be able to claim that it works for EVERYONE, but you cannot claim that it does not work for ANYONE. Please note, the lack of ethnic and gender diversity was one of the reasons that the “Free to Change” study strove to include people of all ethnic and gender backgrounds.

The authors then draw several conclusions that in our view are based on speculation and not conclusive evidence:

- A. Any positive outcomes achieved by SOCE could have been achieved by *“other methods, such as affirming therapies, that are not associated with the negative outcomes of SOCE”.*
- B. The fact that many participants who reported benefit from SOCE were recruited through ex-gay ministry groups means that *“sampling bias may have led to recruitment of those who were more likely to report benefits of SOCE”.*
- C. Affirming therapies are better because they emphasise that the problem is the *“discriminatory culture”* rather than the homosexual orientation. This is speculation. One only has to look at the data to see that despite MASSIVE improvements in the legal rights of homosexuals over the last few decades, suicide rates remain high. While culture has become less *“discriminatory”*, health outcomes have not improved.
- D. People who want to alter their sexual orientation because of their religious beliefs should seek *“other means of increasing one’s sense of spirituality ... Such means may include forming a relationship with a congregation that is LGBTQ affirming”.* However, society also must consider those people whose religion does NOT affirm homosexuality and want to stay true to the teachings of that religion.
- E. *“Several studies have reported that SOCE consumers experience treatment that violates therapists’ ethical values”.* Even if these findings are correct, NO ONE is advocating support for UNETHICAL SOCE practitioners. There are ethical and unethical practitioners in every discipline and one does not dispense with ALL practitioners because of the malpractices of only SOME of them.

In conclusion, although this literature review appears at first glance to show clearly that SOCE is ineffective and unethical, a closer examination shows that it fails to do this.

Conclusion

- Critics of SOCE make two claims—that it is ineffective, and that it is harmful. “Effective” SOCE is therapy or counselling that results in any significant shift away from homosexuality and/or toward heterosexuality in any of these components.
- SOCE can only be judged generally “harmful” if the harms exceed the benefits, and exceed the harms experienced by comparable populations.
- To scientifically prove that SOCE is generally “harmful,” one would have to prove that all of the following are true:
 - A. The number of clients who report harm from SOCE exceeds those who report benefits.
 - B. Negative mental and physical health indicators among those who have undergone SOCE exceed those among persons who have undergone alternative “gay-affirming” therapy.
 - C. Negative mental and physical health indicators among those who have undergone SOCE exceed those among persons with same-sex attractions who have had no therapy at all.
 - D. Negative mental and physical health indicators among those who have undergone SOCE exceed those among persons who have had therapy or counselling for other conditions.

Let’s examine whether the research to date has proven any of these claims:

- A. While not every client of SOCE reported benefits, many did—a majority in some studies. With respect to harm, some clients reported “harms”, but these were the minority. There is therefore no evidence of a great number of clients who report harm from SOCE.
- B. Negative mental and health indicators among those who have undergone SOCE have not been proven to exceed those who have undergone alternative “gay -affirming” therapy. Even in a study that purports to report harms from SOCE, suicide risk was actually lower AFTER SOCE than before.
- C. Negative mental and health indicators among those who have undergone SOCE have not been proven to exceed those who have undergone no therapy.
- D. Negative mental and physical health indicators among those who have undergone SOCE DO NOT exceed those among persons who have had therapy or counselling for other conditions. The success rate of SOCE for unwanted SSA is comparable to the success rates of psychotherapies in general for other unwanted mental preoccupations.

Therefore, a clear review of the available evidence allows the following conclusions:

- SOCE therapies are often BENEFICIAL for those with unwanted same sex attractions and who are provided by qualified and licensed mental health practitioners.
- While not EVERYONE benefits from SOCE, a substantial proportion do and the success rate is comparable to success rates of other psychotherapies.
- The rates of significant harms for people undergoing SOCE on a voluntary basis with qualified personnel are low, with the potential benefits far outweighing any harms.

AUTHOR: DR CON KAFATARIS, MD.

**Former LGBT People Share
Their Stories of Change.**



Former LGBT People Share Their Stories of Change.

Laurie J. – former lesbian

It can be a very hard thing to explain who you once were and where you are now. Sexual abuse, neglect, harassment, a lack of bonding with parents whether intentional or not, may play a role in forming those of us who struggle with same sex attraction.

Our perception of our environment shapes us. Sometimes our perception may be wrong, but it is ours and we need to deal with the consequences of what we perceive.

About the age of sixteen I became aware of an attraction to the same sex. I had no way of dealing with this at the time and no one to talk to. My friends and I did play a dating game with boys and held hands with them at the monthly coffee shop at church. We swapped boys each month doing nothing more than holding hands. I was not attracted to them. To me it was just a game and nice to be accepted by them. My friends did not believe me when I told them I was a lesbian. Feelings continued to grow but I still had no one to help.

However, I became a committed Christian at the age of 17, and in the excitement of my new faith those feelings of same sex attractiveness faded for a time. I was even attracted towards a couple of young men. But during the following years, while in college and the beginning of full time work, these lesbian tendencies returned. After much struggling, I succumbed and entered into a lesbian relationship.

I had been introduced to a young lesbian who was living in a back room, sleeping on a stretcher in a house with a man who often propositioned her. It was not a good environment and I wanted to rescue her. We became lovers and moved in together for six months. During this time my faith remained, but I was stranded between two worlds. My friends at church who knew of my plight offered me love, acceptance and much prayer.

One of the turning points in my life was when I was a leader at a camp. The director knew of my living situation and asked to have a chat with me one night. She explained that she would always care for me and accept me no matter what decision I made about my life. It was this show of acceptance that I was really longing for and she was reflecting Christ's love in her statement. I know it was her prayers and that of my Christian friends that were soon answered.

In the beginning of 1976 I was offered a job at the Uniting Church office in Brisbane as an offset printer. The director of the camp had recommended me for the position. As I had wanted to serve God full time for quite a long time, I grabbed the opportunity, left my partner and moved back with my parents. I understood that I could not serve my God fully if my primary focus was elsewhere. In only a few short weeks at a youth conference I met John, my future husband.

He talked with me for three hours while we set up the stage for a musical production. I only very faintly remember the day and do not remember him, but later that week I remember him taking my photo. I did not find him attractive at the time. A couple of months later at a party we talked again, and we were soon seeing each other regularly. He was kind, easy to talk to and accepting of my past. He became my closest friend and within six months we were married!

The issues that caused me to have a lesbian orientation had not been addressed and so our marriage was "interesting" at times. But John's love was deep and he gave me the space I needed to work through things. One of the most important things at this time was my determination to be free from all the hurts and wrong perceptions that had caused me to look towards another person fulfilling needs only God my Father could.

It has taken many years of allowing God to bring healing to past hurts and misperceptions. Ministries like

Living Waters and Exodus, and a very patient counsellor, in addition to much prayer, have been essential ingredients for healing.

Today, 44 years on I head up the Sanctuary International ministry on the Sunshine Coast (a member ministry of EXODUS) in Queensland. I have two sons but sadly my husband passed away 2011. We had worked through much together, and God has been faithful and enabled us to have a “lifelong” commitment and to honour each other.

This journey is not over. God continues to enable me to face fears I may have, but knowing I am a “child of God” and that my God will never let me go, keeps me in His care. Even though I may still struggle occasionally, I am still His and this is where my identity now is, not focusing on the past but focusing on my future with Him.

Alan G – former gay man

“Alan’s Journey ~ a Description of My Therapy Experience” by Alan G.

How can therapy benefit a person - a person who is sexually attracted to their own sex? This answer is based upon my life and experiences. I had unwanted same-sex attraction (SSA) most of my adult life.

Though I had sexual and emotional attractions to my own biological sex, I never identified as gay or homosexual. That identity did feel authentic to me as person and it was not compatible with my faith in God.

Here is a short list of 10 possible variables that are typical causes of people who have same-sex attraction (SSA)

1. 1. Unresolved family (generational) issues.
2. Temperament (most SSA men are highly sensitive)
3. Opposite-sex parent wounds.
4. Same-sex parent wounds.
5. Sibling wounds.
6. Sexual abuse.
7. Peer wounds (bullying)
8. Cultural wounds.
9. Body image wounds.
10. Other factors (divorce, death, adoption, religion, etc)

I had eight out of 10 of these potential variables. I was asked about my therapy. Did you find a psychotherapist whom you worked with? My answer is “sort of”. That answer needs explanation. I have never paid for therapy with a psychotherapist or psychologist to resolve my issues with my unwanted SSA. Nevertheless, I experienced helpful therapy through counsellors, friends and life coaches who helped me to discover a more authentic sense of myself and my manhood.

For example, I met an ex-gay man who had been a psychologist (not in the field of SSA or sexuality) and he was extremely helpful for my therapy. He recommended dozens of resources for my journey into my authentic manhood and my mature self. I began “Book Therapy.” I read books by the well-known authors writing about unwanted SSA and how to resolve those traumas from the past that contributed to my unwanted SSA. I read books on SSA from Medinger, Nicolosi, Bergner, Geoffrey, Cohen, Payne, Mattheson,

Van Der Aardveg and others. I read books on co-dependency.

With all of these books, I had my “life coaches” whom I chose from family and friends to read my written responses for each book and to help me process my experiences. I do not believe that a person with SSA can grow and mature without the help of supportive community and affirming relationships. My self-directed “book therapy” with trusted readers (life coaches) helped me to accept myself as a man among men, to lose my body shame. To feel okay as a man and with my masculinity. As these things took place, I found my sexual attraction to men faded. My sexual attraction to my wife began growing once I found my homo-emotional needs were being met in healthy platonic male relationships.

In addition to my self-guided therapy, I joined support groups for men with unwanted SSA (That is where I met the ex-gay psychologist) and others who encouraged my journey of self-growth and self-acceptance. I also attended Journey Into Manhood experiential weekend (through Brothers Road) two IFTCC (International Fellowship for Therapeutic & Counselling Choice) conferences and the Richard Cohen training for therapists, counsellors and religious leaders to help people with SSA.

None of these events are classic therapy, but each has helped me. As my self-acceptance as a masculine man in the world of men grew, I felt accepted in the world of men and I became part of my male community in a new way. My same-sex attractions decreased and my opposite sex attractions increased. Today I feel totally heterosexual. I am married for more than 40 years to one woman whom I love. I have two adult children. I believe I am living the life I chose and the life that is compatible with my values, beliefs and faith in God.

I believe in therapeutic and counselling choice. No client should be denied or restricted in their choice for their therapeutic goals. Bans on therapies, counselling or other practices take away individual freedom to decide. In addition bans may criminalize therapy by trained therapists who can otherwise help people who voluntarily seek their professional help. All professional therapists are already governed by ethical guidelines set in place by their professional licensing organisations to protect their clients from harmful practices in therapy. I believe we need help and we benefit from therapies, counsellors, religious experiences and many support groups that help us to heal our difficult pasts. We need freedom to choose a support community that is in agreement with our life goals and to find help for our healing and wholeness.

Thank you for listening to my story. Alan G.

By Ali Jaffery – former gay man

I remember being as young as five when I realised I was different; I wasn't one of the boys. This lack of belonging, feeling of 'otherness' and isolation formed most of my childhood.

I was raised up mostly by my dear mother and sisters in a matriarchal family, my Dad worked two jobs and was not as involved with our upbringing and I had a considerable age gap between me and my eldest brother. During my school years, I was bullied for being girly.

It wasn't until Year 5 in school when I realised I could use academia as a defence. Therefore, I focused on my studies and education, to build my self-esteem in my peer group. I was around 12 years of age that my feeling of otherness (and conversely feeling so at home with the feminine) with the masculinity was sexualised, I discovered I had same sex attraction. I didn't tell a soul for 11 years. In those years of silence, I had shame and self-hate that knew no bounds. I questioned everything. I questioned my faith. I questioned my (Kazmi i.e. Prophetic) lineage. I wondered every day why God had challenged me with this – above of other challenges in life. It was easier hiding the reality than facing it.

In this period, we moved as a family from Pakistan to England. I remember seeing this as an opportunity to start anew, a clean slate. However, this move also furthered the feeling of lack of belonging and otherness. I

was exposed to pornography online aged 12, which fermented the same sex attraction.

Growing up in a religious household, I had shame of opening up to family and feared the impact it would have on my family's reputation. There wasn't any support available. As a community we are good in pointing out what's halaal (lawful) and haram (unlawful), but there aren't much practical solutions available – at least for people like me. It wasn't until I was 23, when I was approaching depression that I then started speaking and getting help. I could only find a Muslim yahoo group and nothing else. The Christian community was miles ahead with many support organisations for people with same sex attraction. It was in 2013 when I attended Journey into Manhood experiential weekend by Brothers Road that my life changed and I was able to see a way out.

I worked every week for a couple of years after the weekend with Rich Wyler on myself and the false stories and beliefs I had. Alhamdulillah, fast forward to events in 2019, I found someone unique, Zoya, who accepted me with all this and decided to marry me and broke down my fear of my never finding a woman I would love. The silence in the Muslim community is deafening on a lot of topics. I believe in the concept of “wajib al kifayi” – if no one is doing it in the community, then it becomes wajib (obligatory) on the person that is able to do something. It is for this reason and from my own personal struggle, that I am delighted to start Strong Support, which is a peer support organization for Muslims with unwanted same sex lust.

Bilal Ali – former gay man

In the Name of God the Most Gracious the Ever Merciful,

My pseudonym is Bilal Ali. I am from the UK and I am a practising Muslim with a South-Asian background. Thank you so much for stopping by to read about my SSA experience. It really means a lot to me and I hope you will find it insightful and beneficial.

When I was a young child, I felt quite different from other guys. I remember being more interested in things associated with femininity, such as girly toys, the color pink, fashion related things, etc. I did not go out of my way to spend time with other guys, although I did have some close male friends I would hang around with. However, that did not stop other children from calling me 'gay' or 'faggot'. And sometimes I would suffer abuse from other classmates because I was perceived as the weak one. At the same time, although I felt more comfortable around girls, I was not entirely welcomed in their circles. So, I spent most my time by myself.

When I hit puberty in high-school, I became increasingly interested in other men. It's hard to pinpoint when exactly this happened. However, when it did, it really distressed me. I knew that these feelings were not supposed to be there. So, the first person I told was my Dad. He was very understanding, as long as I made a commitment to try my best not to act upon these feelings and agreed with the Islamic boundaries of sexuality. So, whenever I would have feelings for other men, I would turn to my Dad who would tell me not to worry or think too much about these feelings. And to let them run their course. Later, I told my mother, then my siblings. They were all understanding.

In high school, the bullying which I experienced due to my queerness was a lot more intense and sometimes took on a sexualised nature. Of course, my classmates didn't know how much harm they were doing to me psychologically because of this bullying, so I don't hold it against them. I won't go into too much detail about it. But I will say that this bullying made me lose a lot of self-esteem and confidence in myself. At one point, I came back home crying after which my parents decided to take actions and talk to the school management about it. In any case, the bullying stopped when I went into A-Level studies. Everyone just became more mature and I was sometimes admired for my studiousness.

When I moved away from home to study at university, life was challenging for me, not least because I felt lonely. I had the habit of not making many friends and receding into myself which I carried forward from

primary school. However, I also felt too different from other people to make any meaningful relationship with them, in terms of my beliefs, my hobby preferences and my self-conception of gender and sexuality. Again, as in high school, I retreated into myself.

This was also a time when I became more familiar and interested in the feminist and LGBT movements, since these voices were very loud on university campus, and they spoke to my sense of difference in terms of my gender identity and sexuality. As I internalized their ideas, I became more averse to the male Muslim friends whom I had initially got to know. I began to increasingly view them as more bigoted and frustratingly more conservative than before. This increased my frustration and fear towards men more generally and caused me to become more isolated from them. During this time of loneliness, my SSA increased, and I was beginning to view sexually arousing images of men for the first time. This made my feelings of shame and low self-esteem more potent.

It was at this time that one day a friend sent me an article. It was entitled: From a Same-Sex-Attracted Person: Between Denial of Reality and Distortion of Religion. [1] The man who wrote it was a Muslim who had SSA but was able to resolve them and get married to a woman and have children. I was very thrilled to know that I was not the only one going through this situation. And to know that it was possible to resolve these feelings in a way that enables you to get married to a member of the opposite sex. After reading the article, I felt a sense of relief. Through this article, I found out about the StraightStruggle.com Muslim support group, which I joined without hesitation. [2]

This support group provides support and advice for Muslims who have SSA. I was so happy to finally be interacting with people whom I could relate to regarding these feelings. I finally felt understood.

The more I interacted with the group, the more I became acquainted with theories and ideas about gender and sexuality which were previously unavailable to me in the university establishment: The idea that social factors such as childhood experiences and sexual abuse could contribute to the development of SSA. And the fact that for many people, therapy has helped them to significantly manage and reduce their same-sex feelings, so much so that they have become more comfortable with the idea of having relationships with members of the opposite sex. Whenever I read the works of Nicolosi, Cohen and others about the causal factors contributing to the development of SSA, I felt they were narrating my story, from childhood up until now. It was as if they knew what I had gone through and the confusion I had experienced.

The StraightStruggle support group was inspired by the Ex Gay movement, which originated from Christian and Jewish communities in the West. Although I was happy to have found this group, unfortunately the Muslim community still lags in providing support networks for Muslims who have SSA. For one thing, Muslim communities in the West are still grappling with other internal difficulties, such as their status as minority citizens, socio-economic deprivation, as well as the (although not entirely) negative reception they receive from wider society, which can at times be discriminatory, particularly through the media and political discourse. Furthermore, homosexuality is still a taboo topic in the Muslim community, which is difficult to deal with in a nuanced and sensitive manner. Fortunately, there have recently been several initiatives which have sprung up to fill this lacuna and provide much needed help and support.

I pray that these initiatives are successful in helping SSA Muslims achieve peace and serenity within themselves so they can live lives which are meaningful and pleasing to God.

Billy – former transgender

My name is Billy and I use to be transgender, but I am no longer. My journey to where I am today is long and convoluted, but I'll share highlights of my initial struggles, of the process to change my outward appearance from male to female, and what happened to prompt me to return to presenting myself as my birth gender, male. Let's dive in!

I had many difficulties as a child:

– I was very skinny, nearly like skin stretched on a skeleton – and skeleton was part of the taunting I received from the other kids.

– I had a speech impediment – the other kids would say something like, “What did you say? I can’t understand you.” Whether they understood or not I do not know, so I tried to speak as little as possible.

– I had many learning difficulties; I didn’t learn how to read until about the fifth grade. An angel of a lady pulled me into a reading lab and worked with me and a handful of others on our reading skills. If it were not for this wonderful lady’s help I don’t know what would have happened to me. My mom also found another lady to tutor me after school in English and other subjects. And there again, without this help I don’t know where I would be.

– I was very uncoordinated and lacked athletic skills. I tried playing softball but was pretty bad at it. I tried playing basketball during P E but no one wanted me on their team so I would ask the P E coach if I could just run around the football field, and he would let me.

– And, when I was in the first grade, I remember having this reoccurring thought that God made a mistake, I’m a girl – but I was a boy and not a girl. This was a very confusing thought that continued to stay with me through my early life and into adulthood.

– When I was in the 6th grade, I was sexually abused by my summer league diving coach. When he would touch me and play with my privates, in my mind I would go somewhere else. I was scared and ashamed. I did not tell anyone about this until I was a junior in high school. I told myself that it had no effect on me but it really did.

In addition to thinking that God made a mistake, I was a girl and not a boy, I hated my private part. I so much wished I didn’t have it and wanted it gone. The result of my struggles was that my feelings and emotions were very confusing to me, so I worked hard to disconnect me from them; I guess you can say that I tried to become a robot, but it didn’t work. The result was moodiness with occasional breakdowns I.e. I would cry in my bedroom and wonder why I was the way I was. This went on all thorough my childhood years.

So, let’s fast forward many years – I continued to struggle with my transgendered feelings. Many things were going on but I learned to push those feelings away by moving the pain out of my mind and into my body. I would go running or bicycling or swimming or strength training and pushed and pushed myself. The endorphins from working out helped me tremendously, both for feeling good and for helping re-close that closet I pushed all my feelings into. I didn’t know how to handle my feelings so I moved the pain out of my mind and into my body. Other times I was just numb and moody. No-one really knew me because I wouldn’t let anyone get close – and with my moodiness I don’t think anyone really wanted to get to close. BUT then I got in trouble – in college I fell in love with a young lady and by having that new and very powerful emotion of love, the door that I kept all my feelings behind was blown off the hinges. I couldn’t close it again. Very suddenly I had to deal with Everything! Oh my!

My big sister helped me hugely. She found a therapist for me to see, a sexuality therapist. When I went to talk with the therapist about things, about everything, I often sat on the floor, holding and squeezing a pillow tight to my chest, and I would just cry. I asked many times, ‘What was wrong with me? Why do I believe I’m a girl [when my body is telling me I’m a boy]? How do I become normal and live a normal life?’ I was in college at this time so I started using the university’s resources to do research on transgenderism. In a nutshell I learned that these were deep rooted issues that therapy does not get rid of. The only therapy that showed marginal and short-term benefits was electroshock therapy. I gave consideration to electroshock therapy but, without a long-term solution I dismissed the thought. (I read that electroshock therapy only provided short term improvement but when one’s memory returned, so did the problems)

I also read that there was a hypothesis that my problems were the result of a birth defect, that my mind was washed with the wrong hormone during my development in my mother’s womb. So, with all my research I found to answers to help me. I went to therapy many many years. I fought my thoughts and feelings that

God made a mistake and that I was a girl trapped in a boy's body. I so desired to be a "normal" male but one day I threw in the towel and started the process of changing my gender from male to female. Suicide was not an option but it was becoming an option. I was thinking about killing myself more and more, but I had a desired to live and not die, and had to do whatever it took to live! So, I went from Billy to Billie. I went through the whole process to get to, and to go through, sex reassignment surgery. I remember that the very first thing I said, or rather I asked, right after surgery was, "Is it gone?" I was assured that it was gone.

But Oh, I had a rough time in the hospital; I had a lot of bleeding at the surgical site, units of blood and plasma were given; I had to have a lot of gauze stuffed into my new vagina, and I had to have a sand bag on my lower abdomen for a fairly extensive period of time. But, I made it through. I received the letter from the surgeon that I was now female and had my driver's license and passport changed to female. So, I changed my body to match my mind. The books said this needed to be done To Find PEACE, peace of heart and peace of mind – but I Did Not find that peace.

– I didn't have many friends and I had a lot of trouble making new friends.

– I lost a very good and close friend.

– I lost my job.

– And after many surgeries, I still had trouble seeing myself in the mirror as a woman. Oh, and did I share that I married a lady right before the reassignment surgery? Though we were both heterosexuals (ok, that's confusing so I'll say that she was attracted to men and I was attracted to females), we represented ourselves as a lesbian couple. We had a love for each other; we thought it was a deep love, but it was hard for us to mentally accept that we were a lesbian couple. If all of this sounds confusing, I assure you, it was! And Yep, I changed a whole bag of problems for a whole bag of other problems! Ugg!

About five years after changing to female I started thinking about changing back to male – I wasn't happy, I wasn't at peace, doing what the books and my therapist said to do didn't fix any of my problems. This was also a time that I was trying to, desiring to, rebuild my relationship with God. I did not desire to divorce my wife because I had already been through one divorce and I did not want to go through another. But, my wife of seven years divorced me. I was presenting as a woman, and now a single and even more broken and confused woman – though biologically a man. I moved back to Baton Rouge, Louisiana to gain the support of my family. And, shortly after doing so, I drove to a quiet spot and just broke down in tears and called out to God. I told Him that I tried everything I could think of to fix my problems and to live, but that I had completely failed. I was in a no-win situation and I didn't know what to do. I told Him that I put everything in His hands, all of me and all of my problems. Afterwards, it was as though God said, "Now, I have some clay to work with."

So, with my heart's desire of drawing closer to God, I decided to go back to the church I went to when I was a student at LSU (Oh boy, did God start working) I joined a small group called The Body Builders (I enjoyed working out and thought this would be a great group to join) In joining the group, I saw that it was a group of middle to upper age men and women, and they were building the body of Christ. And, on the first day I joined, the group was starting a new study entitled, "Have you ever done something you regret?" I was like – wow – God, really! Towards the end of my first time attending this small group meeting, the facilitator told of when he stole something from a store when he was a kid. That act had weighed heavy on his mind for many years and, as an adult, he had to go back to the store, find the store manager, confess what he did and pay for it. The facilitator then opened the question to the group and invited anyone to share their regret, if they wanted to. The Holy Spirit was talking to me; He said, "Go on, Billie! Now is the time. Tell them what you have done – what you regret." And my response was, "Are you crazy! I don't know these people. They will throw me out!"

Well, I did not share. And after the small group ended, we walked over to the church building and I was greeted by a church-greeter. She asked me if I was new to the church and I shared with her that I was and wasn't – that I use to go to this church when I was a student at LSU. She then asked if I grew up in Baton Rouge and I told her yes, I did. Then she asked me, "What high school did you go to?" Oh my, I went to an

all-boys high school and I was presenting myself as a lady. So, just like a deer in the headlights I stuttered and told her that I went to a Catholic high school. She then asked if I went to (the all-girls high school that was a block away from the all-boys high school). My response was, "Yes, around there!" and then I very quickly walked into church. Oh boy! Then, The Holy Spirit convicted me – You see, Billie, you are lying! You are lying about who you are and you just had to tell another lie to cover up your lies. The Holy Spirit kept talking to me that week until, in the middle of the week, I called the group facilitator to ask if he would revisit that question he presented to the group – is there something you did that you now regret and would you like to share it with the group? So, the following Sunday I responded to the question and briefly shared my story. I was ready to accept them ushering me out of class, out of the church, and rejecting me. But a marvellous thing happened! They loved me right where I was! And, unknown to me at the time but they were all praying to God for me to know The Truth, and for me to be free. (My good friend shared this with me after I travelled the road back to

seeing a man, both on the outside and in my mind.) In looking back, I now see that they saw that God was working in me and, since they were The Body Builders, they let God work and encouraged me in my journey – and they just Loved ME!

I attended this group regularly, every Sunday for over a year, and I was reading and studying the Bible. At the beginning, when I first attended The Body Builders, the facilitator extended an offer for me to join the small group that meet at his and his wife's house on Wednesday evenings. I didn't want to push my luck so I declined. But the Holy Spirit was still working and, after a few months, put it on my heart to join his Wednesday evening small group. So, I called and asked if the invitation was still good; he told me yes and gave me the meeting time and his address. The day I went to that small group study, they had just finished studying one book and was starting (that night) to study another book. The book was Jim Logan's book, "Reclaiming Surrendered Ground: Protecting Your Family from Spiritual Attacks". I was like, Ok, this is going to be interesting! I didn't know anything about the topic.

At the beginning of the book, Jim Logan gave background information on spiritual warfare and presented three specific cases that would be looked at throughout the book. One of those cases was on a man named Bill who was transgender. (Wow! Really God! – OK!) Now, it was my third time attending this Wednesday small group meeting; I show up and no one else is there except the facilitator and his wife – it was their house we were meeting at so I at least expected them to be there. Well, the facilitator, my friend, shared with me that he and his wife wanted to talk with me in private. They did not call anyone to cancel the meeting but everyone, but me, called and cancelled. This was the first time in all the years he hosted small groups that everyone cancelled out on the meeting. He then shared with me that he did not know I was coming to the group when he and his wife selected the next book they would study. And, he didn't know that the book would talk about a transgender man named Bill – it wasn't their planning. We did, though, agree that it was God's planning and the following week everyone in the group showed up and we dove into the book. (God is awesome in all of His ways!) It was in reading this book that I finally finally FINALLY Learned what was going on! It was a HUGE Light Bulb over my head moment – I'm talking spot light power! Jim Logan shared that not all of our thoughts are our thoughts! YES! Not All of Our Thoughts Are OUR Thoughts!!! Jim said that our thoughts ultimately come from God, our self, and the devil, and he pointed to scripture to illustrate. In Matthew 16:13-17, Jesus says that His Father gave Peter a thought 13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. In Matthew 16:21-23, Jesus conveys to Peter that that-thought was from Satan, for Jesus responded to Peter but directs His rebuke to Satan: 21 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you,

Lord! This shall never happen to you.” 23 But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

In 1 Chronicles 21:1, Satan gave King David the thought to count his fighting men. This would make sense for a king to know how many fighting men he has; in knowing how big his army is and how big his enemy's army is, he gains insight to know if the battle is evenly matched or lopsided. But, if God is fighting Israel's battles ahead of them, does the king need to know how many fighting men he has?

1 Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel. 2 So David said to Joab and the commanders of the army, “Go, number Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, and bring me a report, that I may know their number.” 3 But Joab said, “May the Lord add to his people a hundred times as many as they are! Are they not, my lord the king, all of them my lord's servants? Why then should my lord require this? Why should it be a cause of guilt for Israel?” 4 But the king's word prevailed against Joab.

And let's look at one more, Acts 5:1-3, Satan gives Ananias and Sapphira the thought to keep part of the money back from the land they sold, and to tell Peter that they are giving all the proceeds to the church: 1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 2 and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?”

God makes it clear in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 that our battle is not against flesh and blood and that we are to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ: 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ I couldn't believe what I was learning! I had been looking for this answer all my life! Yes, not all of my thoughts are my thoughts! The thought “God had made a mistake – I'm a girl” Was Not My Thought! I had been deceived! This brought joy to my heart and opened my eyes to the Spiritual Battle we are all in.

I learned more about the spiritual battle with the devil that is taking place, about the armour of God we are to put on to protect us in the battles, and I learned to renew my mind in God's Word. About a year or so after that light-bulb-moment, I started the journey to change my gender back to male. It took about a year to complete the journey and, at the end of this time, I was presenting myself as a male with all of my documentation reflecting “male”. This was good! And, about a year after that, in 2010, I meet a beautiful lady and we became friends. I asked her for a date and after that first date, I briefly shared my journey with her. Her response was – “Let's be friends!” We were friends for a while but, after a while, our love for each other grew and we married. I thought everything was good – I understood more about the spiritual battle I was in with the devil and I was taking my thoughts captive; John 10:10 tells me that the devil comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. I knew his deception and I overcame – I was walking in victory. But, somewhere around 2014, I started to backslide.

Like I said, I knew about the battle with the devil but I was not studying God's Word like I was prior to and through the process of changing back to male. My thoughts were getting to me and instead of taking them captive, I started to act on them, again. I struggled from around 2014 till sometime in 2017. I didn't know what was going on; I was confused again. But, late in 2017, I found and read Dr. Neal T. Anderson's books, “Victory Over The Darkness” and “The Bondage Breaker.” It was through Dr. Anderson's discipleship, via these books, that I learned what I was missing and was then able to completely overcome all my struggles.

This is what I learned:

- I knew that Jesus died on the cross for me and my sins; that through Jesus I will have eternal life. What I learned was that not only was I forgiven, but I am now a child of God. Also, I do not have eternal life when I die but rather, I became spiritually alive the moment I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Saviour and I have eternal life right now. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he [she] is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold,

the new has come.”

- I learned that I have a new identity! No longer was I Billy the misfit, Billy the abomination, but my true identity is now ‘Billy, child of God!’ (Galatians 3:26, 2 Corinthians 6:18) This was HUGE! Instead of being identified (in my mind) as a misfit and abomination, my new and true identity is child of The Most High King! What a paradigm shift!
- I didn’t know but learned that when Jesus died and rose from the dead, Father God sat Jesus down at His right hand and put everything in Earth and in the heavens above the earth, under Jesus’s feet. In other words, the Devil was the god of this world before the cross, but after the cross, when Father God sat Jesus down at His right hand and gave Him authority over all the Earth and the heavens, the Devil was completely defeated. (John 16:11, Hebrews 2:14)
- I also learned that Father God has made us co-heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:17), and as co-heirs, we share in Jesus’ inheritance. In other words, in and through Jesus, we too have power over the devil and demons. Being a child of God, and in and through Jesus, they have to listen to us, to me!
- I also learned that I am in two additional battles, the battle with the world and the battle with the flesh. In other words, the world offers us all this shiny stuff that promises joy, excitement, happiness, contentment, and more; and in the flesh we look at and desire all this stuff; we think and believe it will fill that whole inside of us – that it will satisfy all our wants and needs. But the more stuff from the world we get the more it leaves us empty. It may fill us for a short period of time, but eventually it leaves us empty, and this is the battle. I learned much more through Neal Anderson and the Freedom In Christ Ministry. And through the provisions that God has already given to us, I am walking in the Victory Jesus Christ has won for us, has won for you and has won for me, through the cross and His resurrection. My desire is to share what I have learned with others, and one way my wife and I have done this is by leading Dr. Anderson’s Freedom In Christ small group study at our church.
- I have also finally answered that “Why” question I was asking in therapy many years ago. There is a spiritual battle taking place for our minds. Being unaware of the battle does not take us out of the battle but rather makes us more vulnerable to the battle. In other words, if we are inside a building and we look outside and see the grass and the trees swaying back and forth, we conclude that the wind is blowing. We cannot see the wind with our eyes but we see the effects of the wind, and thus make the conclusion that the wind is blowing. With the exception of those born intersex, we are all born male or female. There is a huge effort by the world, the flesh, and the devil to confuse what is male and what is female. We cannot see the battle itself with our eyes, but we see the effects of the battle all around the world. I fully believe that the only way to be set free and to walk in victory can only be fully achieved in and through Jesus. If you would like to see more of my story, look for the documentary “I Want My Sex Back: Transgender people who regretted changing sex” by RT Documentary.

Where am I today? I am filled with joy and am walking in the freedom that Jesus has won for us. Rachel and I are closer today than we have ever been because there are three of us in this marriage – God first, Rachel second, and me third. My desire is to help others find and walk in the freedom I am now experiencing. For achieving this desire, I am taking classes with Freedom In Christ Ministries and hope to join their ministry team one day; Freedom In Christ Ministries is an international team who disciples others all around the world in the teachings of Lord Jesus and, God willing, I’ll be helping others one day too.

Blessings, my friend, I hope you have a Wonderfully Blessed Day!

“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33b) The devil comes only to steal, kill, and destroy, but I came to give life, and to give it abundantly (John 10:10) “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!” (John 8:36)

Claire's Story – former lesbian

Names have been changed to protect privacy.

SUMMARY: I was involved in same sex relationships for ten years, I was “out” to family and friends, was not attracted to men and even “settled down” with a woman and bought a house with her. Several years later, – following meeting with a psychiatrist, a psychologist and pastoral support, as well as after time getting to know myself, and discovering and accepting God’s plan for gender and sexuality, – I have left that lifestyle, and am married to a man I love deeply, and have no interest in same sex behaviour.

I grew up in a household that was in some ways loving, but also deeply disordered. My mother suffered an addiction which deeply affected my father who became very distant and angry. There was a lot of shouting and tension in our home as my parents slowly separated, then divorced. As my mother became less stable and began spending days then weeks away from home, my mother made it my role to cook and clean the house. I was fully in charge of this by 14, trying my best to support two younger brothers entering puberty and a deeply broken father.

I first felt same-sex attraction at 13, with a crush on a quiet and beautiful classmate. We became friends, then one night she crawled into bed next to me with my arm around her. That began a series of similar relationships – emotionally intense, “joined-at-the-hip” type friendships, combined with increasing physical closeness that became sexualised through my teens. In the following years my mother moved away, and my father became our primary carer and did his best to support my brothers and me as teenagers, but was still emotionally distant (with the exception of uncontrolled anger when he was really struggling). As a result I learned not to express my own negative emotions and to fear strong emotions in others – instead gravitating to the gentleness I felt in other girls. My father was also ill equipped to address the emotional and developmental needs of a teenage girl, and so effectively treated my brothers and I alike. I cannot remember him affirming my attractiveness (which I was deeply uncomfortable with anyway, as I correlated this with weakness) or my femininity, and I believe this is one of the reasons that my appearance and mannerisms became increasingly masculine.

I read books on homosexuality where I could and gleaned information from the Internet. My feelings were intense, deeply personal and elating, so much so that I decided I could no longer hide my ‘real’ self and came out at 15. My school’s welfare officer sent me to a local government program with other same-sex attracted young people (run by a lesbian), and my doctor sent me to a counsellor at the local community health service (also a lesbian). Unsurprisingly, both encouraged and congratulated me that I had found my ‘identity’!

My parents struggled with my same sex attraction for a time, but they rarely talked about it and were frankly preoccupied with their own problems, so my sexual development was low on the list of priorities. They welcomed my friends to the house, even when they knew that we were sleeping in the same bed.

Men occasionally sexually approached me, but all experiments were short-lived, never felt right or good, and I didn’t believe it was possible to have a relationship with them the way I had with women. Not surprisingly, my mental health deteriorated and I was referred to a psychiatrist, all the while still trying to fill the role of “mother” at home, and doing what I now recognise was a desperate sexual playing out of my own unmet needs for love and affection. When I was 15, I was diagnosed with a mental illness and referred to a secular psychiatrist who I would continue to see, and who would later be a factor in my leaving the same-sex lifestyle. Paradoxically, it was also during this time that I started going to church. I was baptized at 16 into a major denomination, at a parish with a female minister. In a way, I thank God that I walked into that church – my reading into radical feminism had given me such a low view of men that I don’t know if I would have stayed with a male priest.

In my late-teens I moved in with a gender-confused male friend, “David” * (who I “officially” dated for a short time – but was really just friends with) and his family. I finished high school and began my first job where I met “Sarah” * with whom I would have my most significant same-sex relationship. She was vibrant and attractive – she had also been my boss and was seven years older than me. The relationship was intoxicating

and hit with a bang & we were effectively living together after three weeks. For the next few years I firmly believed I was a lesbian, I lived with David and Sarah (later we even bought a house together) and my circle of friends was composed almost entirely of people who were same-sex attracted, experiencing gender-confusion, or involved in other sexual issues. I can also see now how I surrounded myself with information that continually affirmed my life-choices, such as having a spiritual director who was herself in a lesbian relationship. Yet by God's grace I still continued to attend church and even began a theology degree (at a liberal theological college). It was through these studies that I worryingly realised that my feminist, liberal-progressive theology required a significant reinterpretation (even rejection) of portions of Scripture and the Christian tradition, and I started to wonder if my beliefs really stood up to careful criticism.

At the same time huge cracks began to show in my "chosen family." David had a same-sex relationship with another house-mate, then Sarah began a sexual relationship with David, then the partner of my friend and lesbian-Christian spiritual director confessed her love and passion for me – She was almost twenty years older than me, someone I looked up to, and while I was certainly attracted to her, I mostly felt powerless to refuse. It was one big, incredibly confused, mess. I was seeing first-hand how unstable the queer lifestyle really was. These people I loved and looked up to were really quite damaged (childhood trauma, family breakdown, infidelity, sex with multiple partners, mental illness, other sexual sin and substance abuse were all very common). And I started to see how much their belief-systems largely acted to justify the unhealthy lifestyles they were living. Worst of all, I had been singing the same tune right along with them. With a lot of soul-searching and tears, I came to a challenging and frightening conclusion: I had built my house on sand, and I wanted Out.

During this time I had continued to see my psychiatrist and had been sharing my journey with him. He always maintained a calm and non-directive approach when listening to me, however I do recall one key conversation where I shared how I was realizing that I had been quite misguided for a long time, and he said to me, "Well Claire, I think you are going through all the normal developmental steps that usually occur, but because of your illness it was delayed by a few years." This was a key insight in helping me to understand that much of my same-sex behaviour was a developmental step, perhaps I should have gone through it at 13, and then transferred my interest to men, except I was now playing 'catch-up'. I realised after that conversation, that sadly, the small missteps that early teens often make, had become magnified as my adult opportunities and lack of parental oversight had allowed a more dangerous outworking of these sexual impulses, that hadn't been directed to grow up in a healthy way. But thankfully it also meant that I was a person in process who could develop with time and care.

As I began to abstain from various types of sin, and began to speak more critically about the lifestyle and life choices I saw my friends making, I lost most my friends, but started getting to know the God that I had, for years, been trying to shape in my own image. I discovered the work of Prof. Mary Kassian (from the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood) whose passion for women's issues mixed with a respectful, academic, critique of feminism spoke volumes to me, as did the complementarian teaching on God's design for gender. I spent the next 18 months or so also seeing a secular psychologist, reading, getting comfortable in my own skin and catching up on development that I'd missed (even basic things like how to have healthy friendships with women). The Psychologist was another step in my healing and development as he helped me realise that some of my sexual behaviour with both men and women had actually been quite traumatizing, and if I wanted to be well and comfortable in myself, I needed to process that trauma.

The psychologist helped me to no longer feel so afraid of men or to feel distaste towards them. He reminded me that while I had had some bad experiences with men, I also knew some decent good men, and it would be a category mistake to consider them all badly. He also helped me to no longer feel helpless in the face of older women, by processing my deep wounds around being wanted or rejected by them (issues largely rooted in my mother having left the family). I learned that much of my attraction to older women had been a gripping, clinging attachment response, and instead I could have my own opinions and preferences, and my desire for them reduced as I worked through these issues. These steps helped me to feel far more comfortable in many situations, yet I still believed that my sexuality was deeply, probably

permanently, damaged. I couldn't consider a relationship with a man, but no longer desired a relationship with a woman. I experienced a shift in my attractions as part of addressing my delayed development. The more I made space

for my own natural femininity, I stopped feeling the need or attraction to finding that femininity in other women. For years I had been grasping for the beauty and softness I saw in other women, while suppressing the beauty and softness within myself.

I was gaining a far more balanced and godly view of sexuality and gender. I explored some traditionally female-dominated interests, while maintaining my traditionally male-dominated interests (mostly science and mathematics), and I happily joined my now confident feminine dress with short purple hair – which I still had when I met the man I would marry. He had just finished his training as a minister and soon after meeting him I thought, “I like this one. I could stand next to him.” – which was a completely new type of attraction for me. I was genuinely attracted to him but not because he was a mirror of me (he certainly wasn't!) and I didn't lose myself in him. I found myself willing to trust that he would lead us aright (and he has). And I wanted to serve God with him – I could now see my relationship as not just about filling my needs – but part of serving the Kingdom of God. I was proud of my progress and honest with him about my past, but I still made a few mistakes and harboured some guilt about my history. How could I have been so confused for so long? Why did I let myself stay in those unhealthy and harmful situations?

It was then I found the Pure Passion series and shortly afterwards Exodus Asia-Pacific, which helped me see how I ended up in the situations I had thrown myself into. I met with a pastor that works in this area, and she helped me to understand and forgive myself for my former actions and impulses. With a little support from the pastor and a Christian counsellor that I saw for a few months afterwards, I made further connections between my same-sex attraction and the deep alienation I felt with my own gender – both from my fear of becoming my mother and from being forced at a young age into a subservient role serving as cook and cleaner for my male family members. I could see more clearly how my sexual development had been stunted, and was still in need of healing. In particular, I reflected that I needed to name the things I had done as sins, as not God's plan for me. In doing this I experienced forgiveness, a sense of freedom and the firm knowledge that God was Never Ever going to let me go.

I don't know that I would call myself “straight”, and “ex-gay” feels awkward (why define yourself by what you're not?) – so I've moved away from labels altogether. Most recently, my husband and I have started speaking up for Christian sexual ethics in our denomination and I pray that I will one day have the courage to tell my story more openly. One small step in this direction has been to release the update of this article under my first name, rather than my middle name which I formerly published it with.

I have, in the past year or so, come to realise that shame about my past serves neither me nor God, and it is time for me to be honest about my story. This is especially so now, given the likely possibility that others may soon be barred from having important and searching conversations like the ones I have outlined above. It deeply troubles me that the kinds of conversations I had with my secular mental health supports, conversations that were key in my healing and development, may soon be illegal.

In conclusion, I was involved in same sex relationships and various sexual sins for ten years – but I came through it and I got out, and today I am happy, deeply in love with my husband, and comfortable in my own skin. My heart goes out to young people experiencing same sex attraction today and I hope that this story encourages them, their families, and those who support them, to take an honest, realistic and long-term view of gender and sexual development – even when that means naming deep wounds.

– Claire.

Dani – former lesbian

I am an Australian woman with same-gender attraction. I was aware of my same-gender attraction from about 15 years of age. At that time I was very young, naive and unsure what to do. But I had a conviction that God made the world in love and order, that Jesus died for my sins and to bring me hope in following him, and that the Bible was God's true word for all people. This 'ideology' saved me from making a lot of bad decisions, and helped me cling mentally to hope even in emotional depression.

I didn't want to be attracted to women, and I didn't want any romantic encounters with women. Although that intimacy was something I desired, I believed it was wrong because that's something the Bible teaches. I avoided close friendships with women, and was often antisocial though at the same time I longed for close friends. I felt deep shame and worthlessness because of my attraction to women and because of masturbating, when I believed I should be attracted to men and have sexual self-control.

I also had nightmares, terrible visions, periods of depression, and a lot of confusion connected to this issue. Around the age of 19 I began seeking assistance from older Christian women I respected, who counseled me, listened to me, corrected me, gave me advice, read the Bible with me, and prayed for me. I also went through two programs 'Freedom in Christ' (Christian cognitive-behavioural therapy and prayer) and a Healing Hearts Ministry program (Bible- and Gospel-based healing from sexual abuse and relational issues) in Canada.

Over the last six years, I have received a lot of assistance in reforming my understanding of sexuality to conform to the Bible and the teachings of the Christian church: seeking to obey God, the source of Christian morality. I have sought out this counselling/mentoring in the Northern Territory where I lived until the start of 2019, and for the last six months from a mentor in Victoria. I have experienced decreased depression, an end to masturbating, greater clarity of thought, more healthy friendships, and better civic contribution through "conversion practices", or Christian lay counselling or mentoring. I have benefited in many ways from Christian mentoring.

Although I am still attracted to women, I hope in God's promise that all who believe in him will be perfected in him, and this means one day I will be free from attraction to women. For now, I know how to manage these attractions, repent when I fail, and receive the grace of God who knows me back to front and loves every part of me.

Daniel Mingo, Ministry Director – former gay man

Testimony Rewrite "2018 Beyond Surviving" 10-minute version.

Abba's Delight.

"You formed my inward parts; you wove me in my mother's womb. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in secret, and skilfully wrought in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance, and in Your book they were all written: the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, You know it all. I thank You that I am fearfully and wonderfully made.—excerpts from Psalm 139.

He loved me even then, before I was born. God knew and foresaw the pain I would experience as a child: lonely, friendless, feeling unloved—even by those in my family. He heard my cries when I would call out to Him to change me miraculously into a girl. I had heard of His miracles from Bible teachings in Church. Why couldn't I be one of His miracles? Why couldn't He change me into something else?

I hated being a boy, being ridiculed, being bullied. I didn't connect with Dad, with my older brother, or with the other boys in the neighbourhood. I wanted to be like them, but they were all about sports and rough/tumble while I was about singing, dancing, acting and just generally being the entertainer. But Father was loving me even then, as He watched my life as it was, His heart grieving for me.

He was also watching and grieving when I was sexually molested by a stranger at 13, the frailness of my personality and identity again being shaken. It is no wonder that, with this trauma and my lack of male bonding in my early years, I grew up to be a man with a confused sexual identity, attracted to my own gender!

John 1:12 says, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become children of God." As a senior in high school at 17, Father revealed the person of Jesus to me for the very first time when I heard that I could ask Jesus into my heart to forgive my sins and become my Saviour and Lord. This was the first time that I ever heard that God loved ME. I JUMPED at the chance to be adopted into His family. I looked for Him to change me, to give me joy for the misery I had grown up with and still experienced as a teen. He did change things in me, but not the things I was expecting, nor in the ways I was expecting.

The Lord didn't change my circumstances, though, as much as He began changing my heart. He showed me that to have friends, I needed to be a friend. He taught me to reach out to other people, to stop isolating myself and feeling sorry for myself. By the end of my senior year, I was voted by my co-graduates the "Friendliest Guy in the Senior Class," this one who felt friendless most of his life.

But everything wasn't perfect. I believed that my same-gender attractions that had bombarded me since the onslaught of puberty would reverse, and I would be attracted to women only. With hormones raging, I sought God every day in prayer and in the Word to change my attractions, and to calm down my urges. My young adult life was a constant, on-going ritual of anonymous sexual encounters followed by sorrowful vows of repentance, promising never to repeat these sins again. I was so desperate I would plead with Him either to castrate me or just take me out, so I didn't have to endure anymore of the pain. I so wanted to live a pure life, yet it just seemed impossible. But then I read where Jesus once said, "With men, this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible."

Even before I was born again, instinctively I knew I was supposed to grow up to be a husband and father. The Lord didn't bring my wife to me until I was 31. Fran and I will celebrate our 35th anniversary this November. She did not know she was marrying a coward. It wasn't until ten years and three sons into our marriage that I finally voluntarily confessed my same-sex attractions to her and my ongoing infidelity under the powerful conviction of the Holy Spirit, when I was feeling the weight of the guilt and shame I was living in, continually turning my back on our vows. In that time of conviction, the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart, saying, "Daniel, it's time to tell Fran."

I didn't understand the significance of James 5:16 at the time, but I began to see God's transforming hand as his words came to life when he wrote, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." Over time after my disclosure to her, I discovered that with my wife's prayers and support, and my subjection to a recovery process realizing that I was feeding a sexual addiction, Father was sealing me in His plan and purposes for my life. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6 took on new significance as well, as I realised I did not to live in homosexuality any longer. "And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God."

Now, 25 years into my recovery and healing process, I am still discovering more and more of God's amazing grace: the power to do His will, and of His overwhelming love for me. I had feared that because of my sin, He would disqualify me from serving Him as a worship leader, something I'd done for about 30 years. There was a period when He had me "on the shelf," so to speak. But when that season changed in 2003, He led me in a new direction when I became the branch director of a post-gay ministry, working with men traveling behind me on the same road I've travelled, and giving them hope: saints who would need to hear for their own encouragement Father's story of overcoming and victory in my life.

So I found myself in the position of bringing comfort to other men in Christ as Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 1:3,4: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, Who comforts us in our affliction so that we may comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Through the support of and accountability with my pastors, church family, and support groups, I continue in that healing process today. Pursuing my passion to know Jesus and to be known by Him, and keeping these other safeguards in place, have enabled me to remain steadfast on the course He has laid out for me in serving Him as He establishes His kingdom here on earth through His people.

Over the years, Father has brought healing in my relationships with my wife and sons. I often joke that the Lord took a man with a messed up sexual identity and gave him three sons to teach how to become men. He also brought healing in my relationships with my Dad, Mom, and other family members from whom I had felt separated.

In His love, the Lord has shown me that He isn't changing me to become more perfectly conformed to His image just so that I can be a swell guy in the end. He is changing me because He has called me to fulfill His destiny in my life on earth and to bring glory to Him through my testimony of His faithfulness, and that His word is true. Revelations 12:21 says, "And they overcame the devil by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives even unto death." As I chose to die to my flesh-feeding life that included homosexual activity, God found a willing son, a useful vessel to further His kingdom on earth. And, in the process, He answered my childhood prayer, to change me from who I was. He performed His miracle!

Erin – former transgender

I never thought I would publicly share such deeply personal things about my past, but I feel like I must, because I was a transgender child. When I could get away with it, I would use the boy's bathroom instead of the girls. I practiced peeing standing up. I thought if I could master this, I could "pass" as a boy. I hated it when I had to dress as a girl. I hated my female body.

Sometimes I would put duct tape over my vagina to hide it. Sometimes I would go into a rage and pound my vagina with a rock until it was swollen with bruises. Sometimes, when I brushed my hair, I would experience such self-loathing that I would beat my head with the brush, sharp bristles tearing into my scalp until my hair was matted with blood.

My first grade teacher, Ms. Hicken at Howard R. Driggs Elementary School, was concerned about my behaviour and my insistence that I was a boy, so she referred me to the school psychologist. The school psychologist met with my mother, my teacher, and the school principal and made some suggestions for how they could help me feel more comfortable with myself. Some of the recommendations from the psychologist included putting me in Bluebirds (Campfire Girls) or Brownies (Girl Scouts) so that I was around other girls, encouraging me to stop wearing my brother's hand-me-downs, and exposing me to strong women who would be good role models.

In states where "conversion therapy" is banned, it is illegal for therapists to make the simple recommendations that I had. A man I recently met told me that as a child he was sexually assaulted by an uncle. As he grew up, he struggled to make friendships with other boys. He craved male companionship and started engaging in same-sex relationships. But today, a therapist's suggestion that the boy is not old enough to decide if he is gay or straight is not permitted in states where "conversion therapy" is banned. Bans on "conversion therapy" prevent therapists from telling children that they are too young or too immature to be having gay sex. Both this man and I were sexually assaulted as children. His assault led him to believe he was gay. My assault resulted in my developing a trans identity with the belief that if I wasn't a girl, I wouldn't be

sexually assaulted again. If he were a child today, “conversion therapy” bans would require therapists to tell him that he was born a homosexual and that being a homosexual is normal and natural. His therapist would never address the underlying cause of his same-sex attraction, and he would be denied therapy that would help him understand the impact the sexual assault had on him.

If I were a child today, “conversion therapy” bans would require my school psychologist to report to my teacher, principal, and mother that I was a “trans” kid. The school would allow me to dress like a boy, be called by the boy’s name [I’d picked out “Timothy”.] and use male pronouns. The school psychologist would likely insist that I be allowed to use the boys’ bathrooms at school and play on the boys’ teams. The school psychologist would “affirm” my belief that I was born in the wrong body and that my self-hatred was valid.

Between kindergarten and first grade my brother and I were abducted by two men and taken to a public restroom. I was brutally sexually assaulted and my brother was not. In my child’s mind, I thought that being a boy would prevent me from ever being hurt the way those men hurt me. Not my mother, not my school teacher, not my school psychologist knew that my trans identity was based upon my desire to keep my body from being sexually violated again. It took years of therapy before I understood the connection. If therapists had not been allowed to question my gender identity, I never would have made the connection. I never would have understood that my hatred of my female body was the result it being violently violated. I never would have realised that my transgender identity was a coping mechanism.

The talk therapy that helped me and many others is now illegal in many states. Children are being denied appropriate mental health services and therapists are required by law to “affirm” a child’s transgender identity or same sex attraction. Transgender activists have adopted a philosophy regarding children with gender identity issues; children should be transitioned to the gender they identify with, first socially, and as they reach puberty, medically. These activists deny that talk therapy is helpful in managing and resolving gender dysphoria, and assert, without any proof, that it is harmful.

No evidence supports transgender advocates’ contention that transitioning children is beneficial in any way, but there is strong evidence proving that transitioning can be harmful. A Swedish study shows that those who transition have a higher suicide rate. Transgender advocates scare parents, telling them that if they do not allow their children to transition, their child is at risk of depression, anxiety, drug use, homelessness, and suicide. This fear-mongering convinces parents to allow children to dictate name changes, preferred pronouns, and medical interventions even though we recognise that children are not capable of making these kinds of life-altering decisions in any other situation.

There is no other situation in which therapists are encouraged, required, or legislated to affirm a child who has inaccurate perceptions about themselves. A child who suffers from anorexia is not “affirmed” in her perception that she is fat. A child who suffers from bi-polar disorder is not “affirmed” in a belief that he will rule the world when he is manic. A child who is crippled by anxiety is not “affirmed” that her anxiety is a healthy coping mechanism. When the general public hears the term “conversion therapy”, they are encouraged to believe that it means electro-shock therapy or other physically and mentally abusive types of intervention designed to turn a gay person straight, otherwise known as reparative therapy.

“Conversion therapy” is an umbrella term that generally refers to any form of therapy that does not affirm sexual orientation or gender identity, including talk therapy. Despite the claims of activists, there is no evidence that failing to “affirm” a child’s sexual orientation or gender identity “undermines” self-worth or increases suicidal ideation and substance abuse or that the therapy exacerbates family conflict. Instead, the evidence suggests that both sexual orientation and gender identity are influenced by environmental factors, including peer and family pressures. Early childhood trauma can also cause children to identify as gay or transgender.

Hemi – former gay man

How my life was while I was practicing a homosexual lifestyle: I was living a life sort of in my own world, my relationships with friends would never last more than a couple months because I didn't feel I belonged anywhere, my relationships with family was temperamental as I would move from home to home (many times because of my behaviour) I was using drugs at the ages of 13-14

(marijuana and experimenting with ice and also drinking alcohol) whenever I could get my hands on it (in most cases almost daily) I had such a poor self-image that I didn't even want to live past 18 years old, in fact I had never imagined it.

I was living a promiscuous lifestyle, sleeping around with guys a lot but after every time I slept with someone I would feel this overwhelming shame and guilt that I actually thought was normal until I spoke to a friend who told me that it wasn't normal to feel that, I would try and stop my lifestyle but I was sort of addicted to these relations with guys.

My cousin told me about Jesus Christ and I found it intriguing however I thought I could never be a 'Christian' because I was gay. I initially actually attended this church with my partner at the time these people never actually condemned me though, they told me about sin and the consequences and also about this forgiving God. I felt I needed God in my life more than anything.

What I did to change: I would be lying if I said I did anything to be honest, personally when I tried to live a heterosexual lifestyle on my own I just ended up burnt out and more depressed. there is a scripture that says "but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Mathew 6:33) this may be in a different context but I found as I sought God I started to worry less about my sexual identity and anything else I just wanted a deeper relationship with Him.

I still remember the day I walked into church and I saw this woman singing on stage and she was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen, I had never looked at a woman like that before so naturally I was shocked and I actually walked out of the church and had to pick myself up. This attraction was indescribable it didn't feel like how I used to be attracted to people.

My life now: I am now dating this woman and have healthy and reconciled relationships with friends and family, I am addiction free and serving as an usher at the Potters House Church Beenleigh. I am able to commit to simple things like study and work. I am happily abstaining from sex until marriage (Which to the old me would of felt depressingly impossible) I have a restored self-image and can joyfully tell you this story today because it's so real to me that it even astounds me how God has changed my life when I think of how my life has radically changed.

P.s I have read pieces of the Latrobe study and I do feel for the people have shared their story on this sensitive topic however I want to encourage anyone who reads this that if they are struggling with the same thing, that it is possible to change and be 'a new creation' just hang in there.

To take away the freedom of pastoral care and prayer and call it harmful would stop people that are living the way I was from ever having the freedom to find options to change, granted some people don't want to change however there are people out there who DO want to change so please don't rob them of these options.

Ian Lind – former gay man

Testimony (Short version)

When I first asked the lord to come into my life I was about 12 years old, it really excited me that I was going to be “Born Again” for 2 reasons.

1. I hated my life as it was, I never felt like I belonged
2. To start over again was too exciting

To cut a long story short my experience was cut short as my mum hated the thought of me being born again and wouldn't let me go to church or fellowship with the next door neighbours who introduced me to the church, they taught me the lord's prayer and gave me a Bible so I could read when mum wasn't around.

As soon as I could I left N.Z. at the age of 17 I got on a boat to Sydney for a little bit I felt free, no one knew me! very quickly realisation hit that I had no where to stay and I had no money, so I needed a job ! I was lost!

I went to the police at central explained my circumstance and they took me to the salvation army to see if they had some temporary accommodation, they asked me what I did for a job and I said I was a chef, they offered me employment straight away.

While working for the salvation army I met this friend who was helping out at a Sea shell shop down at the rocks, he asked me if I wanted to help as well, so I said that's great! so I went with him to meet the owner of the shop, we got on great, the owner took me under his wing like a father would and started to show me the business, he was a very kind and caring man and I really enjoyed his presence.

It wasn't long before he introduced me to one of his friends which took me out for dinner then took me to his place at Hunters Hill, he asked if I wanted to stay the night and he would take me back in the morning.

I said yes that would be great, Talk about naive! he showed me the bed so I got into it and he joined me, I was so shocked and confused, this was my first experience with a man! I had no idea what to expect, I had often had thoughts, dreams of another man holding me, BUT never in a sexual way, I had always thought I was meant to be a woman as I liked the company of men more than the company of woman, I was so confused as I was always quite feminine, the way I dressed, the way I walked and the way I talked.

I might add at this point all this seemed quite natural to me and I was always berated for it, and I was always being told that I was gay BUT I had no idea what that meant.

From this point on my life started taking on a whole new meaning, it seemed I have found myself at last, life was pretty fast at this point I found the work I loved, I fell in and out of gay relationships, I found work at Gay night clubs and restaurants as a chef or a waiter, I was the youngest manager of a night club called the Tivoli in George Street.

I quickly became a workaholic as this was where I was the happiest, BUT I was also tied up with people that enjoyed to party hard.

The bottom started to fall out of my world, my health really started to affect me around the age of 22, I was getting really sick from poor eating habits, smoking way too much, drinking and the occasional drugs. I hated where my life was so much, I decided to end my life and tried to commit suicide.

As this didn't work I desperately tried to get my life on track, my job was secure, I had money I just didn't know happiness, and I desperately prayed for guidance, I felt sure life was meant to be purposeful, I just need to find it!

I had decided that the Gay life was not what I was looking for, I had been through some pretty ugly relationships and they devastated me emotionally which led me to try to end my life, So the only way forward for me was to get my life back into some normality, so I was radical in the direction I thought to go, I started to exercise! I sought help with my diet, I stopped smoking and drinking, I dumped all my friends

except one who worked with me. Richard was someone who I could talk to about anything, he was also my harshest critic!

At 27 living in Redfern by myself I met this woman who was south African quite a stunning looking woman, we started a relationship which was short lived, I was like a fish out of water! it was almost like having a relationship with my mother! talk about control!

It wasn't long after this that I bumped into my next-door neighbour who always seemed happy and very chirpy, I introduced myself to him and I asked why he was so happy, he told me he was a born again Christian and he has the life of Christ in him!

I didn't know what to do whether to run or hide! I was just so shocked I just stood there and he told me all about Jesus.

That night he came to my place with 3 other people and they all told me their testimony, they then asked if I would like Jesus in my life, I said yes. We would all meet most days to read the bible and teach about Jesus, it wasn't long before I was baptized, and recruited into witnessing on the streets of Sydney with this group of people that didn't seem to belong to any church.

One day after about 2 months the leader of this group asked me a little about my past, and I happened to tell him that I lived across the way for 4 years, he knew the guy I was living with, and straight away knew I was Gay, I was told then that there is NO way I can be saved! that I was an abomination, that Homosexuality was the most grievous sin against God! I was excommunicated and told to leave the area.

I was devastated at this, and quoted the Bible that I was born again! I was no longer Gay, that I have been forgiven! that Homosexuality is no more a sin than stealing or lying according to the bible!

I remember this guy telling me never to go to Frank Houstons church, so I started to look for this church as I felt God was leading me there.

It didn't take long to find, BUT because of what had happened to me I didn't want to be known too quickly in case I would be thrown out, I knew all the answers would be in the Church! This situation I found myself in was for me going to be the answer, one way or another I needed to find the truth because the Bible says the truth will set you free!

I started to go to home fellowship about 4 months after joining the church and after long talks with a paster Phil who convinced me this was part of the Christian walk.

So the meeting started and Phil looked at me and asked me what my definition of LOVE was! Everyone was looking at me as I was expected to answer, after what seemed like an eternity I just cried my eyes out! I had no answer, as hard as I tried, I really had no idea about love! My idea about love was a man holding me tight and saying I love you! Not what I could say in this situation!

What this did for me, was to really find out what love is all about, and the only one that could give me the answer was Jesus through community and the word.

It wasn't long after this that I was invited into a group called Exit ministries, participated in the Living Waters program.

After about 2 years of being involved with this group I was so frustrated with not finding the freedom from Homosexual thoughts, I had gotten into a relationship with a girl from work who I started to take to church, at this point in my walk with God, abstaining from any sexual activity was for me a blessing, especially with Marie, I was so scared of messing this up! but I felt this was where God wanted me. I must say at this point Marie had no idea of my past and to be honest I was too scared to say anything.

In my walk with God I didn't identify with being Gay as I was born again even though I still had thoughts about it I never looked back, so for me this wasn't an issue.

I was asked to lead Exit ministries, I asked Frank Houston if I could go to America to attend a Living waters

training, I desperately needed to get some reality to this ministry, and as much as I wanted to be free within myself I wanted everyone that came to Living Waters to know of the reality of Jesus in our lives. I was hearing every Sunday of the love of Jesus BUT I needed to experience this love!

Frank was very happy for me to go, the timing couldn't have been better, Marie and I were married by this stage, Marie also knew my past and understood what I was doing being involved with Exit ministries, primarily I was involved for 2 reasons, one was I wanted to help prevent youth suicide as I believe gender confusion is a major factor to this, and 2, I wanted to experience the freedom of being a Christian, of being Born Again.

CLC Waterloo was a great church and I felt the more I did the more I was appreciated, this theme was a constant in my life, I found that I was doing more and more, almost at burn out! It was almost like swimming against the tide, the over whelming tide of need within the church. I just knew I had to know the reality of God's presence!

At this Living Waters training at San Juan Capistrano in California, I came before the CROSS, a huge cross at the centre of the room, I thought straight away that this must be a Catholic church! what have I done?

This was the first time I had travelled to America; I didn't know what I was in for, BUT I felt a peace at being there, and I felt Gods peace!

So, I relaxed and prayed that this is Gods will to be here then let Gods will be done, He knows my heart, and he knows all of my past NO one else knows.

One of the teachings was "Mother wound" I will never forget it, as the person was teaching this God was ministering to me and showing why my mother was incapable of really loving me and why she was so emotionally absent. Then God started to minister to those deep wounds, all I had to do was to stay present to Him, I cried like never before, I was able to forgive my mother and in so doing I was able to receive the healing, after the session which lasted about 2 hours, I felt like never before, a sense of wellbeing!

This was something I would never have realised was missing until I received it, GOD was mothering me at this point.

The next session was the father wound, again as the person was teaching God showed me why Dad had never connected with me, I was able to forgive him, at this point God ministered to me by actually holding me and hugging me close to his bosom, I felt the affirmation of being a man! again I was a mess! I never thought I was worth it!

At the end of the 7 days I was a completely different man! I understood why we are called to be "born again" because that is exactly what the process is about, for me there is now a reality of being a born-again believer, a Christian, and this was only the beginning!

The first thing I had to do after coming back to Sydney was to ask Marie to forgive me for not seeing her as God saw her! I was seeing her through my brokenness, what a change God made to our relationship!

I started a new ministry called "Living Waters Australia" We re-trained all the leadership and ran it for about 8 years, in that time the ministry was full on, we started 4 ministries outside of our church, we had 200 people in groups for 30 weeks within our church, I realised fast that this ministry is not just for people with same sex attraction we were helping a lot of people that were struggling in their marriages as well, so we renamed what we were doing to relational wholeness.

In effect we were being what the church should be! we were ministering to Christians, equipping them to minister to others, God was raising an army!

Desert Stream ministries is still the most effective ministries in the world for healing Gods people, I had the pleasure of ministering alongside Andy, and I also had the pleasure of attending a Leanne Payne training which was amazing.

I must say here that we were accused of "Conversion Therapy" by some Gays within the church, BUT the

truth was everyone who was involved in Living Waters was being converted to Christians that were healed, That were born again! if that was what conversion therapy meant then yes we were guilty, but then every Church should be guilty!

Everybody that was involved was in a desperate situation that demanded truth and healing in their lives and were happy to receive any and all ministry from God! The ones that were saying this were Gays who refused to change their lifestyle! and one was a pastor/evangelist in the church who was stood down for his lifestyle.

Jesus was changing lives, healing people of their past and freeing them to be present to Jesus, they were experiencing what it is to be a Christian.

I stepped down from the ministry in 1998, Connor my son had just been born, and I felt God saying to me to step down and be a father and husband to my family.

Marie died in 2009 to cancer, we were married 21 years, I thank God every day for what he has done and continuing to do in my life, I have married again to a most amazing woman Toni Roy, Connor is now 22 years old.

None of this could have happened outside the Church, I was convinced more than once that I was born Gay, and I am glad to say what a lie that was!

The thing that convinced me was, GOD being a loving God would not permit me to be born gay then say it's a sin, this never made sense to me as a Christian!

Ian Lind.

Mitch – former lesbian

For as young as 5 years of age, I knew I was gay. My mom, crippled with her own fear had indoctrinated me that all men were the same – that you can't trust them, they will surely end up cheating on you. My Dad was emotionally absent even up till now. I led a double life hiding the truth from them, until I decided to find those like me during university.

I have been seeking the truth about this whole gay Christianity (as I was brought up a Christian) for as long as I can remember.

I endeavoured to change myself by going out with the opposite sex whom I find attractive, but failed. I recognised my family unit was majorly dysfunctional; the obvious factor being an emotionally absent Dad. The other was a mom who was bi-polar, schizophrenia, as well as an older brother who has Triple A Syndrome disability. I was also bulimic from all the added pressure on me being the only normal child. My bulimia was miraculously healed as I have been praying for healing in a church I was in. Since then, I felt God was real, not just a fictitious tale learnt from Sunday school in church. Because of that miraculous healing, I felt loved despite my inherent homosexual nature.

One evening after school, I queried God whether homosexuality was a sin as I had been contemplating about it a while – was fantasizing and entertaining thoughts considered sin? The following night I received a Daily Bread booklet (which I have never subscribed to) in my letterbox. The title of the cover was homosexuality and therein laid my answer to the question I asked God the night before. It was an incredible and surreal experience which I will always remember – that God of the universe exists and bothered to answer me straight away! I was 15 years old at the time.

I had a relationship during University after years of being deprived of affection and being loved and ultimately feeling lonely, believing that God still loved me even if I chose this path. I thought I was in love, however I was in love with the 'idea and superficiality' of my ex-girlfriend, as she was viewed by many as a trophy catch, being in the modelling and celebrity circles. It was an intense and maniacal relationship that

left me clinically depressed when the turbulent relationship ended.

During that time, mom brought me to church where I was supernaturally healed from depression by God. Doctors were baffled as I was completely off meds. It left an indelible mark on me which sparked my journey following Christ. This was under the pastoral leadership of a church I was a part of for around 5 years. I confided in the pastor and a few trusted women in this church. During this time, I experienced the truth of God's unconditional love despite my (thorn in my flesh), but at the same time, I cannot disregard the blatant truth about homosexuality in the bible. Hence, I chose to 'want' to change. I believed God was able to help me because He had done it before healing me miraculously of depression. I didn't know how He was going to change me or when it was going to happen but I just believed in Him to do so in His time.

Through this time, I grew in my walk of faith whilst keeping my sexuality hidden. I served in leadership at church as I kept myself accountable to a pastor and those few whom I trusted. They were my support network from church that kept me on the right track even though I regressed every now and then. I kept declaring verses that were close to heart: Matthew 6:33 – Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will give unto you.

2 Cor 12:9 – My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness. I declared these verses over my life every day for 5 years through years of doubts and trials.

I first met my husband in August 2005 through a mutual friend. During this time, I was unaware of any internal changes within myself. However, I have noticed my growing sexual attraction towards the opposite sex through the years of my Christian walk. Prior to this, I would be extremely put off by the thought of being sexually attracted to males or even entertaining the thought of having intercourse with them. When my husband entered my life, we connected on a deeper level almost instantly, having a clichéd connection of a long lost soul mate. We were later married the following year by a pastor. We have two beautiful boys, now aged 7 and 9 years old. It has been challenging being a mother as I had no prior interest nor experience with kids and was fearful of being a damaging mother like mine. Suffice to say, I love my family – my husband and my kids; even though they aren't perfect, they remind me of God's unconditional love, faithfulness and grace in my life. Looking back at the past, I am so thankful that my life has taken a turn to

where it is now. I cannot imagine what it would be like to continue to be who I was before.

It was a life riddled with extreme complications, inauthenticity, depression and misery.

Rose Writers - former same-sex attracted

At the age of 13, I was sexually abused over the course of some years, by a male relative. This had a huge impact on my life. I spent most of my teenage years engaged in sports, which suited me as I was very much 'a tom boy'. And I certainly didn't fit into girly activities.

In my late teens I developed feelings of same sex attraction. This just developed gradually. They weren't huge or overwhelming, but the thought would cross my mind on occasion. I mentioned this to a female family friend who listened to my concerns. I never acted out on these feelings and over the years my feelings for the opposite gender subsided until they were no longer part of my thinking. Even though I do not have a dramatic experience in either the gay lifestyle, or had any professional counselling or prayer, it is still significant to note that these feelings did not last. It was a phase. Just a phase. However, had that been now, I would dare to say that it would have been encouraged to engage in the gay lifestyle. My life may have moved in a very different direction. Also, in this present day, my Tom boy ways, could have been mistaken as trans. I am grateful that I was not encouraged into either of these directions. I am very happily married to a man and have several children and grandchildren.

It is important to note that phases are a normal part of growing up and often change with time.

James – former gay man

“When a Health Minister tells those who’ve been sexually abused, raped or emotionally neglected that “there is nothing wrong with you... you can’t be fixed because you are not broken”, then you have to start asking who really is sick, who is spreading sick lies – and why?”

I grew up believing I was born gay. I’d only ever been erotically attracted towards men.

As a teen, I often thought of suicide. I self-harmed, had a problem with alcohol and was addicted to hardcore porn.

Coming from a rural community I never believed I’d be accepted as a gay man, especially as I watched a male cousin 10 years my senior struggle to find his place as a gay man in the same locality. He died from a drug overdose in his forties.

I came out at 17. My parents said they’d known I was gay and my mates at school also affirmed me as gay. My fears of rejection subsided and I felt free like never before.

At 18, I moved to my capital city, fully embraced my gay identity, and served the gay community on the frontlines, actively preaching “diversity and inclusion”, the mantra I’d been so quick to learn.

I challenged everyone that might suggest being gay was a choice, was wrong, or changeable. Duuh! I never felt the need to change, or to even try to. Why should I? I was born gay. That was that.

I led a very promiscuous life having hundreds of sexual partners, especially while attending the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement. I then settled down with a long-term boyfriend. We went to church together and soon became the model Christian gay couple.

Months later, I sensed some issues affecting my relationships in general. I’d not noticed them before. In brief, I ended my perfect relationship and chose to enter therapy.

Therapy revealed I had a deep-rooted fear of rejection. I had commitment issues, could easily be riddled with anxiety, that I’d used others for pleasure, and let them use me. Although I yearned for men, I saw that I had an innate fear of them. This is the real homophobia: an intrinsic fear of the average guy.

There was nothing brutal or harrowing about the help I received; the horror stories portrayed in gay-straight ‘conversion’ documentaries don’t apply here. I underwent cognitive therapy, to challenge my core beliefs and root out one-sided thinking; behavioural therapy, to change problematic actions trained through years of reinforcement; and some EMDR, which uses rhythmic eye movements to dampen the power of traumatic memories.

Therapists never focused solely on my being sexually attracted to men, but my “being gay” had to be a part of the dialogues, otherwise I’d have been leaving a part of my life at the therapist’s door. I came to recognise where I’d built numerous walls around my heart towards significant others in my life.

For example, as a boy I’d failed to interact with other males on any significant level. I’d been fostered, orphaned and adopted and saw myself as rejected by men even as a small boy and had made an inner vow never to deeply trust them. Males had reached out to me but I’d spurned them, including my adoptive Dad and older brothers. Men then became a mystery to me, even an obsession, by my teens. I began erotically craving men and feeding this through endless porn.

Disconnected from men, I’d got stuck in a world of the feminine, with no masculine counter-balance. I believed myself to be a woman trapped in a man’s body, and considered hormones and mutilating surgery. And yet I despised women for being able to woo heterosexual men, which I couldn’t do. Clearly, my natural place wasn’t among women.

Through therapy and prayer support, my core behaviours and impressions were challenged – my looks, my body, my walk, my perceptions. Therapists challenged me to look at where I wasn’t like other men, and where I was. We worked together on things like my voice and the effeminate way I walked. They gave me

permission to think in a different way... and to do things differently.

Gradually, my fears and anxieties subsided. I began to feel more accepted around both men – and then women. I moved from a deep underlying unease with masculine identity to embracing it. My posture changed. I began to walk taller. And I lost my mincing walk. My voice became lower and people would regularly comment on it.

I started seeing that maybe, just maybe, I was never truly gay and that the true man I'd worshipped and longed after in other guys was hidden deep within me, waiting to be released. No one was more shocked and excited by this than me.

I also learned through prayer what it was to forgive. And I had many people from my past, especially men, that I needed to forgive. Prayer never focused solely on my sexual attraction to men, but gave me courage to look everything in the eye. This included facing the painful, wholly repressed memories of my having been consistently sexually abused as a child for years by a number of men, and raped whilst a teenager several years before I'd even reached the age of gay consent on 3 occasions by 3 older gay men.

A few years later in my late twenties, now facing the hidden trauma of excessive child sexual abuse, having been fed gay pornography and raped as a teen by 3 gay men, the crippling, insatiable eroticisation and romanticisation of men within me began diminishing.

The more inclusive my friendships became with other chaste men, the more I desired an exclusive connection that contained "mystery". Men had been mystery to me, but now I unexpectedly began to see woman as I'd never seen her before, noticing her curves and her scent. I saw her as wholly different, mysterious, and yet complementary to me. In my late twenties I experienced what most males go through in their teens. I then dated women and eventually married. Today I am a Dad, something I was told I would and could never be.

I thought I'd spend my entire life preaching that people are born gay. The opposite has become true.

I am grateful to the courageous men and women who had a vision for my life way above and beyond the mantras and lies of my fellow LGBTQ activists. Without them, I'd never have uncovered my childhood sex abuse which later led me to be the key witness in a court case that saw a prolific paedophile convicted of his crimes. Banning therapy will mean more childhood sexual abuse going unreported – a perverted and most evil outcome. If I'd been prevented from starting my own recovery journey, which politicians are now trying to vitriolically ban, I'd never have been able to support literally hundreds of men and women with unwanted same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria, most of whom were gravely sexually abused as minors.

We are told by gender-confused ideologues, by ill-informed educators, medics and politicians to see our identity according to sexual attraction. This is a lie from the pit of hell. I know – I've lived and preached it myself.

I was unknowingly given a key to freedom. I took it, and opened the door which let me scratch deep below the surface of mainstream society's toxic, deathly beliefs about sexual attraction. Today, I am galaxies away from where I expected to be half a lifetime ago.

So, what changed for me?

- my sexual compulsivity reduced which means no more three-monthly visits to sexual health clinics to see what STI's I've caught.
- My paralysing anxiety,
- my multiplying addictions,
- my self-harm,
- my subliminal fears of men and women,
- my inability to commit,

- my oscillating hatred of self and blame of others,
- my anti-depressant intake to counteract tension and burnout, and
- my same-sex attraction itself

...all of these decreased or disappeared. (Shouldn't this make a Health Minister happy, rather than contemptuous and condemnatory?)

Like hundreds and thousands of others, I wasn't born gay after all.

Today, I am surrounded by amazing relationships. And yet the peers I knew in my twenties who "stayed gay" now often struggle with profound loneliness, disorders and dependencies, and a higher than average percentage have died early from sickness or suicide. Now that's unjust!

Today, our so-called Health Ministers knowingly lie to young people who are still figuring out who they are, telling them "there is nothing wrong with you," or that "you can't be fixed because you are not broken, and anyone who tells you otherwise is wrong. What bulldust! Their words steal life, destroy and will kill.

Ministers who say this are wolves in sheep's clothing, enemies parading as allies of the people they're elected and paid to serve. They fail to consult widely and to become fully informed about therapy and prayer around human sexuality, leaving thousands of young and old alike trapped as I was in the traumatic aftermath of child sex abuse, rape and exposure to destructive pornography.

When a Health Minister tells those who've been sexually abused, raped or emotionally neglected that "there is nothing wrong with you... you can't be fixed because you are not broken", then you have to start asking who really is sick, who is spreading sick lies – and why?

Jules's story of change

I was born and raised in a church going family but not a Christ centred home. I was exposed to pornography and very curious about sexuality from a young age. My parents divorced when I was 11 and my mother always chose men over her relationship with her children.

I was always attracted to woman and though it was not a sexual attraction as a child, I found myself very infatuated and drawn to other girls and women. I always felt that maybe I should have been a boy. When I entered college, I began to pursue sexual relationships with other women. I was promiscuous and experimented with drugs regularly as well as drinking excessively. When I was 23 I met a woman that changed my life. She became my idol and I worshiped everything about her. We lived together and planned to marry.

We were invited to Church on Mother's Day and heard a message about Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. My friend said she didn't think she was a sinner. I laughed and told her that according to the Bible our relationship was sinful. In my head I knew the truth of the Bible but was willing to risk my eternity for a woman I had let become my god. My friend was upset with me and began to read the Bible on her own. I told her I did not want to lose her and feared I would. She began to try to defend our relationship Biblically and had many so-called Christian friends who told her the lifestyle was not a sin. She would read for hours a day. She asked me to go to church with her again and I did. We heard another message about the saving grace of Jesus and surrendering our lives to Him. We did it together and Jesus changed our hearts instantly. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." II Corinthians 5:17

We began going to old hangouts, gay bars and contacting friends telling them our decision to leave the life and follow Christ. People would come visit us late at night to want to hear more about Jesus. In the beginning we would come to church late, wearing jeans and combat boots and sit in the back missing most

of the music and worship. A few weeks later we began coming early, dressed nicely and sitting on the front row. We went to Church almost every evening and could not keep quiet about what God had done. The drugs and alcohol, smoking and bad language were instantly removed by the Lord. The biggest struggle was the temptation with my girlfriend. We decided we could not live together any longer. We were baptized together in the ocean a few months later and after that the Lord gave me an opportunity to go to Japan to teach English and help a Church. The contract was for one year, but I sensed the Lord wanted me to stay. That was 25 years ago. I never turned back.

Luke 9:62 “But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

I met my husband in Japan and we are serving the Lord full time. The Lord has blessed us with two beautiful children. I did not get counselling or go through any special program. I immersed myself in the Bible and spent time daily reading the scriptures and pouring my heart out to Jesus. He was everything to me, especially my first two years in a Japan when I could not communicate well. I let the Lord heal my heart and His truth truly set me free.

“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

John 14:6 NKJV He continues to be my everything and I continue to pour out my heart to Him and stay centred in the truth of the Bible. Set free, but my mind is still a battle ground and I must continue to keep His truth in my heart and mind.

“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:13-14

DBarr: “From a lesbian relationship to...”

Title: When the Church Does it Right!

There was a longing in the deep part of my soul that I simply could not satisfy. I tried to fill the void with everything I could think of – working more hours, taking more classes, volunteering for new adventures, reading more books, eating more, drinking more, exercising more, getting involved in yet another relationship ... but nothing seemed to help. Something was missing.

We were early stages of dating in 1993 when she asked me to go to church with her. I immediately said no. I hadn't been inside a church for more than sixteen years. Oh, at one time I believed in God, but when I was so deeply hurt as a teenager, I discovered the truth – there was no God! It was all a lie; if God existed, I would have not been betrayed and hurt so deeply. But then she said something strange to me that turned out to be one of those pivotal moments in my life. She looked me straight in the eyes and said, “Deb – Jesus wants you back.” I immediately felt a deep yearning in my soul that I could not explain.

Well I relented and began attending church with her. It was there that I met numerous other gay and lesbian couples just like us. After several years of hearing that my lifestyle was pleasing to God, my relationship with her ended badly and I moved to another part of the country leaving both her and the church behind.

I met another woman named Barb in 2000; we fell in love, entered into a Civil Union and built our dream home together. As time went on, a persistent nagging feeling came over me that I needed to go to church. I told Barb of my desire, and so we decided to visit Covenant Baptist Church in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. I was quite apprehensive as we approached the door that first Sunday, thinking that there was no

way they would welcome a lesbian couple into their midst. When we arrived, it turned out that Barb saw a former co-worker in the lobby and we were welcomed with a warm embrace. That was the beginning of another interesting turn in my life.

It was at that church that I surrendered my life to Christ on November 23, 2003. Barb and I joined the Women Who Worship God Bible study group and began to learn about our new faith in Jesus Christ. Those women never said a word about homosexuality or how we were living our lives; they just loved us and warmly welcomed us into their group.

As Barb and I read the Bible together every day, we began to experiment with applying biblical principles to our lives. We started tithing, and God healed our finances. We fasted and prayed and experienced God answering specific prayers. We memorized Scripture and sought a deeper relationship with the Lord.

At one point in late 2005 I approached Clarise, the women's ministry leader, to ask if Barb and I could take a few moments at the beginning of our next Bible study class to address the group and let them know that we were gay. We thought that we needed to be truthful with them, feeling that we had somehow been deceitful about the true nature of our relationship since nobody had ever said anything to us about being gay. Another life-altering turning point in my life had just begun.

Clarise suggested we discuss this with our Pastor before speaking about it with the women's group. The four of us met a couple of times to talk and listen to one another. At one point Pastor Scott Hesler said to me, "Why do you put that label [gay] on yourself?" I replied that I was born gay and needed people to know that this was not a choice for me – "being gay is who I am." He said that when he looked at me, he saw a child of God. No other label was necessary. They were so loving towards us, really listening to what we had to say and being there for us in a way that I had never experienced before.

Something amazing happened over the course of a couple of weeks' time. One morning as we were reading God's Word together, Barb turned to me and asked, "Do you still believe you were born gay?" I replied, "No." That same day we made a difficult and life-altering decision – to end our homosexual relationship and align our lives with the Word of God.

On January 1, 2006, instead of 'coming out' to our women's Bible study group, we publically declared that we were walking away from the life we had known and embraced for years – for me eighteen years of homosexuality. Over the next two years, we went through the difficult process of unravelling our deeply intertwined lives, dissolving our Civil Union, selling our house, and navigating a new world apart from the gay community that we had been a part of for so long. Clarise and the Women Who Worship God came alongside us as we went through this very public and painful transition in our lives and supported us in so many practical and loving ways.

In the fall of 2008, I moved to Washington D.C. metropolitan area and found a new church where I planned to blend in and put my messy past behind me. Funny thing is, God planted me – a former lesbian white woman – in an all African American Baptist church! I ended up sharing my story with the senior Pastor and was warmly embraced by him and my new church. My spiritual growth skyrocketed there, where I took numerous Christian education classes and became heavily involved in ministry, eventually becoming licensed and then ordained where I now serve as an Associate Pastor

God uses every part of our lives, not wasting a single thing, good or bad, and works it all together for our good in the end! I now lead a Ministry for people with unwanted same-sex attraction and have been serving in this capacity for more than 10 years.

When the church can be a safe place for people to come in with whatever baggage they bring with them, being welcomed with open arms and re-directed to the unconditional love of Jesus Christ – lives are transformed! Our assignment is to extend Christ's love to people and meet them right where they are; it is the Holy Spirit's job to convict of sin. When the church does it right – lives like mine are transformed for all eternity!

“Welcome home” by Philip Latislaw

Rules existed over God’s grace and love. Fortunately, my parents showed grace and love to my siblings and me at home. My father led me to Jesus at age six. I always wanted to be just like my Dad. I was the middle child, and sometimes felt like the odd man out. I never quite understood where I fit in my family. It didn’t help that I was a sensitive kid; general teasing impacted me to the core. I constantly longed for the love and comfort of those I loved, especially my Dad.

It was a legitimate need that was not always fulfilled. My Dad worked long hours, and I didn’t understand why he couldn’t spend more time with me. Then, in 1991, my Dad’s secret struggle with homosexuality was revealed. For a while, my parents tried to salvage their marriage through counselling, but hope of restoration disintegrated when my Dad left us for another man. Mom and Dad divorced, leaving me, an awkward adolescent, feeling totally abandoned. Not long after that, my best friend, who was the same age as me, sexually molested me. I was starving for male attention from my Dad, so my molester was able to sexualise my unmet emotional needs. I was confused, yet I wanted more. A male was willing to give me attention, and even though I knew it was wrong, it satisfied something deep within me.

Those unmet emotional needs of my 11-year-old heart followed me into adulthood. Abandonment plagued my future relationships, and I soon found myself actively engaging in the homosexual lifestyle, just like my father. I played the role of provider and caretaker with my younger partners, trying to meet their needs so they wouldn’t abandon me. With older partners, I searched for protection, guidance, and comfort. I gave to others what I desperately needed myself. In 2000, after years of struggling with my sexuality, I came out. For the next 15 years, I immersed myself in promiscuity in the gay community. I had finally found a place to belong. Being gay was my identity. It influenced where I ate, how I dressed, and the events I attended. It determined my circle of friends and even my choice of doctors.

I was in and out of relationships, always seeking gratification through sexual activities. When sex failed to silence my needs, I turned to drugs and alcohol. Drug-induced comas were not abnormal. Sex and substance abuse were my constant companions, and they led me down dark paths that almost took my life. Each sexual encounter robbed me of self-worth and fed my insecurities. Lust became an insatiable desire that birthed an addiction to pornography and self-gratification. I was lost in a cruel world of sin and imprisoned by bad decisions. I needed to be rescued.

Fortunately for me, Father God had devised a rescue mission I call “Operation Lost Sheep,” long before I ever entered the seductive world of sin. He heard the cries of my soul before I even thought to make a sound. Luke 15:3-10 gives us the parable of the lost sheep. Jesus was sharing it with His disciples, and He said: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent” (NIV). I was a lost sheep who had gone astray and turned to my own way, but Jesus came looking for me. I am so thankful for my mother and her friends, who prayed me back into the arms of the Good Shepherd. I am certain they were instrumental in the successful completion of Operation Lost Sheep. My mother has never stopped praying for me.

I began to sense the Lord’s rescue mission in 2011 when I moved to Orlando, Florida. I had just experienced yet another bad relationship and was on the run. I was an unemployed, extreme alcoholic with no family by my side. Loneliness and depression were my companions.

But during this low point of my life, the Lord began to show me how much I needed Him. Everything I had put my hope in had failed me. People. Relationships. Career. Drugs. Alcohol. Nothing satisfied the ache in my soul. So, God moved me to “the happiest place on earth” to show me that I was the most unhappy person on Earth. There, God began patiently pulling down the walls I had built around my heart. Many of them had

been there since the rejection I had felt as a child. The divorce of my parents and my father's homosexual lifestyle had left so many questions, but rather than ask God for answers, I had self-medicated with relationships, alternative lifestyles, alcohol, and drugs. These things, of course, only brought more pain.

For the next several years, God continued to graciously interject Himself into my life. I could sense His love drawing me, but I resisted Him and continued to participate in my old ways. Satan would not go down without a fight. He sent an evil presence to pursue my soul that tormented my mind with fear. He told me God would never love me, that I was doomed for hell. He gleefully reminded me of 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 that says, "Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (NIV).

I was on this list—surely, I was doomed! But then God showed me verse 11. As I read it, the inexplicable peace of God flooded my spirit. It says: "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (NIV). Paul was talking to Christians in this passage, believers whom God loved. Sheep who, like me, had once been lost but now were found. God had sent His Son, Jesus—the Good Shepherd—to give His life for me, to rescue me, and to bring me back home. This verse was written for me, and it was written for anyone else who will leave their life of sin behind for Jesus. I'm so thankful that I finally responded to the subtle voice of the Holy Spirit that beckoned me to Himself. I can still hear Him gently whispering my name early one morning in the spring of 2015. There was no judgment or condemnation, only grace and mercy. I fell to my knees and surrendered my heart to Jesus. I called out for Him to be my Saviour, and He came to my rescue.

On Easter Sunday that year, I walked through the doors of First Baptist Orlando, a new man in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17). The music pulsated through my heart as the greeters welcomed me with a smile, and right beside them, the Holy Spirit whispered to my heart, "Welcome home, Philip."

I have to admit, surrendering my life to Jesus was scary at first. God was asking me to give up everything, to exchange my broken identity for a new identity in Him. This only made sense when I began mourning the loss of my former life. A part of me had died. I had to surrender over to Jesus 15 years of memories and friends, and as with any loss or death, I grieved. Yet, like any loving father, the Lord was by my side. His promise in Psalm 34:18 carried me through those difficult weeks. "The LORD is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

Being gay was all I knew; it was comfortable. I knew my whole life was about to change. But the Lord gently took me by the hand and walked me through the process. At First Baptist, He gave me a community of believers who loved me to wholeness. Staying connected with other believers has been crucial to my success in living a victorious life in Christ.

I continue to find support through my life group and the creative arts department at church, as well as through Exchange Ministries and Big Fish Ministries. Both organisations provide support for individuals struggling with same-sex attraction, as well as support for their families. I also have a wonderful mentor who personally understands my struggle and constantly points me to Jesus.

This community of believers has helped me realise I'm not the only Christian in the world who struggles with the concept of identity. Some people turn to money, success in athletics or their career, or the praise of man to find their identities. Some turn to drugs and alcohol. Others, like I once did, turn to unhealthy sexual relationships. Unlike many of these things, though, homosexuality is a taboo subject in Christian circles, so many people fail to get the love and support they need to live a victorious life in Christ.

I pray my story will encourage the body of Christ to come alongside those who are seeking relational and sexual wholeness in alignment with God's Word. They need Christ's love, not judgment, so they can find their new life and identity in Christ Jesus.

My story has already affected at least one person in my life—my Dad. As he watched my life change, the Holy Spirit used my story to bring my Dad back to the Lord. Dad rededicated his life to Jesus last year and is

now on the same journey. After 27 years of living as a homosexual, he has surrendered his life to Christ. Now tell me that isn't awesome. Glory to God! The Lord has redeemed our relationship and brought everything back full circle. To think how Dad led me to the Lord when I was six, and now God has used my story to lead him back to the arms of Jesus—it is nothing but a miracle.

People often ask me, "So does this mean you're straight now?" I respond that my true identity is found in God, not my sexuality. I live as a child of God, knowing that I am loved. Accepted. Enough. And chosen by Him to be a witness to this world.

Today, my focus is on holy living and pleasing God, not myself. It's a daily surrender of my will to His, but God gives me His strength to walk in obedience to His will for my life. I've learned to recognise my triggers, and I try to avoid them. And when I am tempted, I look for the "way out" the Lord promises to provide in 1 Corinthians 10:13. Since choosing God, my temptations are less frequent.

Maybe you've wandered from the truth of who you are in Christ. Maybe you've forfeited the identity He gave you. It's not too late to come home to Him. You're not so far that He won't come find you. He loves you. Isaiah 53:6 says, "We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost. We've all done our own thing, gone our own way. And GOD has piled all our sins, everything we've done wrong, on [Jesus]" (MSG).

God knows what you've done. He knows who you are. But still, He reaches out His hand of hope to you. Grab it. Come home today and discover the peace, freedom, and love you've always longed for. It's available to all who believe and call on His name (Romans 10:13).

Alessio, ex-gay through Jesus Christ

I was born in a traditionally catholic family. I came out at the age of 17. Despite acceptance from my peers and family, I was still depressed and wanted to die.

I prayed to God to take my life and even attempted to kill myself. Back then he didn't realise that it was because he was living in sin and the enemy wanted to kill him. I first learned about the Gospel when I attended my friend's funeral. I heard the message of Jesus about eternal life for the very first time and I was intrigued. I began wanting to know more about Jesus. I then became a Christian but retained my homosexual life style.

I read the Bible and prayed regularly but I still haven't completely given my life to Jesus, that is my every part of my entire being and existence. I wanted to go to a church that would tell me that I was born gay and God is pleased with homosexuality. So, I learned pro-gay theology and follow it. I went to pro-gay churches and even advocate pro-gay theology to people. But after the break up with the man whom I thought to be the man of my life, I began to hate him and other people; every day I woke up with the desire to die and I prayed for it. I behaved immorally day watching porns on the internet, all kinds of porn. However, I knew the name of Jesus, but not the power contained in the name, through the Holy Spirit. God's word says (John 4:15-18): "If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

I hadn't made this promise mine yet, I still wanted to be an orphan and it's really difficult to be without a father. I couldn't even understand that it was my own doing, the fact that I identified as gay and not as His son, that brought depression, sadness, and suicidal thoughts to my life. But God is good and through His Son Jesus, who is God Himself, who became flesh to save us from sin and death and to give us an example of a man of God, everything is possible. Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." (Mark 10:27)

God began to convict me about homosexuality until one day I just couldn't deny the reality that homosexuality is definitely a sexual sin that I needed to let go. After four years of being a "gay Christian", I repented and embraced the true teachings of Christ. I have then since been walking faithfully in the identity that God has given me: a child of the Most High. I no longer identify as a gay Christian but simply a Christian. God has used ex-gays and their testimony to bring me to the truth about this particular issue.

Have you ever heard of a transformed life because of science, false religions that teach good deeds and efforts to appease God who is holy and perfect, rituals, violence, and dietary regulation? Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6) and only making Him the centre of our life we can be healed from all addiction. Not only God has lifted homosexual desires from me but He has also made me fall in love with Him and He has shown me why I had these desires. It was because of some problems I had growing up, my relationship with my parents and friends.

Jesus is not just a hobby, or a Monday morning, or just an hour per day. He wants to be the centre, the life, your life, my life, so that we become His children today, so that the Holy Spirit abides in us (1 Corinthians 6:19).

“Transformed” by Ricky Chelette, executive director, Living Hope Ministries

At the age of 18, graduating near the top of my class and giving the commencement address at my graduation, I was more miserable than I had ever been in my life! From all outward appearances I was on top of the world. I was a "good boy," earned great scholarships, didn't cuss, smoke or drink, was student council president and teenager of the year, but internally my world was a nightmare.

My childhood was fraught with secrets and confusion. Despite my outward success, I was inwardly a frightened boy desperately crying for someone to affirm me. I felt other-than from almost everyone around me, and my years of sexual childhood abuse had produced in me a seemingly uncontrollable desire for the affections of other men. The abuse started when I was young, and at first, I didn't know it was really wrong for it was simply "normal" for me. It happened almost weekly for over a decade and I adored my abuser. He was deeply invested in me, said he loved me, and knew exactly what buttons to push to manipulate my emotions and garner my cooperation.

At 18, with an overwhelming sense that what I had been doing was wrong and what I was feeling was not what I wanted to be feeling, I tried to kill myself. I wanted all the pain to end and for someone to finally see that I was hurting beneath the charade of my accomplished life. But no one really noticed, except one.

In my room late one night after a failed attempt at overdosing on drugs several weeks prior, I grabbed a pistol and put in my mouth to blow out the back of my head. I had decided it would be quick, painless, and final. What I didn't expect was that as I was about to pull the trigger the words of a Baptist minister rang in the depths of my heart. It was words about this truth called the Gospel and this man called Jesus who could transform hearts and lives. When I first heard it, I was at my friend's church enduring the preaching so I could practice with him to sing at his piano recital. I had no interest in this Gospel or this Jesus. I was the "good kid." I was already far better behaved than the "Christians" I knew. But in this moment, my behaviour was not what rang true in my heart. As I contemplated the words of the preacher about this Jesus who died on a cross for my sins and who wanted to give me a new heart and a new beginning, it seemed like the only option in the world. I pulled the gun out of my mouth, and cried out into the darkness, "I don't know if you are real, or if you are there, or if you did what they said you did on the cross to take away my sins, but if you are, if you don't do something in me right now, I'm going to pull this trigger and blow my brains out."

In that moment the Jesus I so doubted accomplished the work He had died to show me. In that moment,

something changed in me that completely transformed my life and thinking to this day. In that moment, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, His

death, burial and resurrection on behalf of evil, broken people like me, became a reality. In that moment change happened in ways I could never could have imagined.

When I stood that evening, I still had the same family, the same abuser who would again and again try to do things with me, I had the same strained relationships and feelings of other-thanness, but I knew I had a heavenly Father who would never

leave me or forsake me and someone who promised to be a father to the fatherless.

That event, some 30+ years ago now, began the change process in my life. As I have been serving the Lord now for 30+ years, I have seen that same process, though with different details, people, and circumstances, change the lives of countless people. A

few years after meeting Jesus, I met a woman who has been my wife for 30 years this past December. I now lead Living Hope Ministries (livehope.org), a non-profit that proclaims God's truth as we journey with those seeking sexual and relational

wholeness through a more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. God can do the impossible.

I am convinced, not that change is possible, but that change is required for everyone who truly meets Jesus and understands who He is and what He has done for us.

Now don't get me wrong. I still struggle with sin of all kinds and I still, on occasion, can be haunted by the sins of my childhood and those longings for others that ought not be. But I don't embrace those feelings and I don't allow those feelings to define

my life. I now know that I am a man, a real man, gifted and blessed by God for His service. I may not like all the things that other men do, nor even do the things that other men do, but that has nothing to do with whose I am. I am His. I have been bought with a price.

I now delight in sharing that the message of the Gospel transforms people – all people, every people, any people – who will believe its truth and embrace its progenitor – Jesus Christ. I may not understand the origins of every person's sin or brokenness, but I do know that no matter the malady, the solution is always the same – the Gospel. It is the truth that has changed the world. It is the truth that transformed the life of Paul from a murderer of Christians to a great champion of the

faith and a martyr for Christ. It is the truth that continues to set the sinner free, and it is the thing that has changed the hearts and lives of people for centuries into amazing vessels of love, grace, mercy, compassion and forgiveness.

Honestly, I don't argue about change anymore, I just tell people to look around. Everything is changing and will continue to change. I want you to meet Jesus and encounter the Gospel because when you do, you will change – guaranteed!

Shirlz's story

I grew up going to various churches, so I know what it is to discover I was homosexual in a church environment. The internal conflict about what I believed and how others would judge me was overwhelming. In the end, my desire to be with another woman won and I left the church.

Having tossed my faith in, I now totally embraced life as a lesbian. My first relationship was so compelling and obsessive that I thought I had found my soulmate. Never had I experienced such an all-consuming connection with anyone. It overrode any intent I had to live as person of faith, even though, I had enough

evidence to believe that God existed and that the Bible was his Word. Now I had the confusion of trying to understand what I saw as divine cruelty in creating me lesbian and yet condemning me to rejection.

When my 'soul mate' left me for someone else, I was crushed. However, now I had no doubt that I was homosexual. I had a repulsion toward men and had found where I fit amongst my lesbian friends. I now lived with the hope of finding my 'miss right'. However, after several relationships, some longer term than others, I had come to a point where I didn't dare to love as it led to too much pain. I had lost all illusions that I was going to find life with a woman, but now I believed that I was truly trapped by my orientation.

I felt that there had been some biological mix up and I was really a male soul in a woman's body. I would have certainly had physical reassignment, except that I was far more afraid of my mother's reactions, than I was of God. God did not seem fearsome to me, but rather remote, like my philosophical father. If I had been young today, I would no doubt have been identified at a young age and encouraged into that process. I am so grateful that in my years, this was not even hinted at.

At the age of twenty-eight I had reached a stalemate. I was so ingrained in the belief that I had been 'born that way and couldn't change' that I was contemplating suicide. The future alone and aging as a lesbian and now an alcoholic, looked bleak to me.

During my time living in the hope of finding my female partner, I was using drugs, drinking and this resulted in my having anxiety and physically experiencing shakes. I went to a psychologist who in asking about my origins discovered that I had been Christian in my younger years. She quickly decided that this was my problem. That I needed to embrace my sexual identity as I was 'swimming against the flow.' I was perplexed about this as I had no issue with being lesbian at the time and was out and proud. She never once asked me about my drinking habits!

Because I had been fully indoctrinated by popular cultural messages, I did not believe that I could change. However, a dim flicker of light remained, urging me to consider that perhaps I could find the God I had turned from. I asked him if he could somehow show me if this might be possible. If God really did exist and if he reached out to me, then I was ready to toss all hope for finding any good human love relationship. I hadn't succeeded in this area very well at all. I would be content to be single and sort my life out with God alone.

If God was willing, then I would leave every premise I had and simply follow him, trusting that he is good and that he could redefine me anyway he wanted. If God did not answer, then the only logical action for me was to end it all. If gay rhetoric was absolute, then I was trapped and the belief that I couldn't change held me in despair.

However, God did reach out to me in a rather amazing way, answering my one last desperate prayer by sending someone on that evening to talk with me and help me back to a life of faith. He was a gentle loving Christian that I had known years before. I was able to talk to him about all the underlying pain, as well as admitting my own wrongs and many of these issues were not about my homosexuality but were more about many other underlying issues.

I had no reparative therapy. No one counseled me. I simply walked away from the life I had been leading and sought my help from God. Going back to church became a new magnificently life-breathing and fresh new start. I did not come back to God to become 'straight'. I came back to follow Jesus. I wanted to be directed or changed by the Bible and by what I sensed God wanted from me, rather than any other opinion. I had lost my faith in cultural messages that had led me to the brink of despair.

I began to learn how to be the woman that God had created. He had not made a mistake with my gender, and he could show me how to be the person he had intended me to be. Later, I married, but this certainly was not my aim and I was as astonished as anyone that I could have come to such a decision.

The greatest help for me was reconstructing why I was as I was. There were many factors in my developing childhood. As I looked back, I could see that my affections had been for women from as early as I could remember. This was one of the self-assessments that made me believe that I must surely have been, 'born

that way'. I now do not believe that and can see clearly how my orientation was formed from the earliest years, becoming active in adulthood. If I had been able to go to a counsellor, this would have been an easier journey and it makes me sad to think that others will be denied any hope of help.

I had to come to terms with my mother's damaged personality and as an adult I was able to see her illness for what it had been. Forgiveness for her verbal and emotional abuse came slowly. My father had coped with the family dramas by simply not being around. I had barely any relationship with my remote father and certainly no endorsement from him of who I was as a female.

I am not saying that this is the pattern for everyone, as everyone has a different journey and there is no one pattern. But I could now understand and unravel my own story. At twenty-eight, I finally realised that no human can complete us. Now, I no longer wanted to identify my life around my sexuality. My plan was to live celibate and be a follower of Jesus, doing whatever he gave me to do. However, God's plan for me included marriage and now decades long, faithful, union.

Some of my gay friends led short lives and this is very sad, as I knew those who self-destructed were not ones that felt unaccepted by society, but were those who like me, wanted 'out of out'. Unfortunately, because it is considered bad to let people self-identify, these friends never knew that perhaps there was hope of a different life for them too.

I feel it is harmful and unloving to not give people the right to make their own choices, find help, and hope in a God who is able to change anyone. Forcing people to have only one option, to accept their homosexuality hurts the many that are like me as we are now seen as the enemy, even by some churches. Silencing post gay voices will be a sad day as it denies freedom from what human feelings may dictate and freedom to be who God intended, within his design and will.

Linda: “And so were some of you”.

From my earliest memory I wanted to be a boy instead of a girl. Somehow, I just knew that if I had male genitalia, my life would be complete. I prayed repeatedly for God to make me into a boy and became obsessed with my pursuit. I was a tomboy in every sense of the word and was often mistaken for a boy, which always made my day.

In the fourth grade, I learned about sex reassignment surgeries and vowed I would have the operation as soon as I was old enough and had the money. About the same time, I was exposed to pornography, which developed into sexual addictions that would span the next twenty-plus years.

In junior high, when all the other girls were interested in makeup and boys, I was lamenting that my voice wasn't changing or my body developing into a man. And then, to my surprise, I found myself attracted to women—especially older teachers who were strong yet nurturing. I desperately wanted to be held and comforted by a woman, which then developed into sexual fantasies. I was horrified by my attractions, but I dared not tell anyone.

Around seventh grade, I started to consider the logistical difficulties of having sex reassignment surgery. Where would I get the money? How would I tell my family? You can't just be Linda one day and David the next. I considered running away to have the surgery without ever telling my family, but I loved my family, and I knew that would devastate them. I made a conscious decision at that point to try and conform to society's expectation of me to look more like a girl in order to fit in. But inside, I still longed deeply to be a man, and the attractions to women became increasingly difficult to resist.

I became a Christian during my junior year in high school, but within days, I began doubting my salvation experience because my struggles didn't go away like I thought they would. I tried to conform and even wore dresses on special occasions, but inside it always felt like I was wearing a costume, like dressing in drag.

In college, I got involved with a campus ministry and developed a deeper relationship with God, praying and reading my Bible regularly, even sharing Christ with the lost. I eventually became a student leader despite the fact that I still longed to be a man, was deeply attracted to every woman who mentored me, and was enslaved to sexual addictions behind closed doors. I prayed privately for God to please take my transgender desires and same-sex attractions away, hoping no one would ever know.

My senior year in college, I heard a sermon about overcoming habitual sin. The speaker quoted James 5:16, "Confess your sins one to another and pray for each other so that you may be healed," stressing how important it is to get sin in the light in order to be free. I was deeply convicted and knew I had to confess my secret to my campus pastor if I was ever to experience freedom.

It took all the courage in the world to finally tell my campus pastor my lifelong secret. In fact, I seriously considered suicide as a way out but did not follow through. I expected my pastor to react with shock, horror, or condemnation because I was a leader in the ministry living a double life. But instead, he responded in love, assuring me that he was committed to finding me the help I needed. I walked away from that conversation with a fresh revelation of God's grace. I had always felt God hated me and condemned me for my sin. My campus pastor's reaction was a living illustration of the Father's heart toward me. For the first time, I discovered that being completely transparent with another person was very healing. That day in 1994 was my first step in what would be an eleven-year journey towards freedom.

The next decade was full of ups and downs as I sought freedom. I read every book I could find on homosexuality, listened to tapes, attended conferences, and met with multiple counsellors. It was a slow process, as there were not a multitude of resources at that time to help women struggling with transgender issues. In fact, well-meaning Christian counsellors told me they had seen homosexuals and lesbians set free but never anyone transgender, so I should do my best to cope in this life and know that I will be totally free in heaven. Despite their discouragement, the Lord gave me assurance He would set me free and that the transgender issues would be a thing of the past. Nevertheless, I thirsted so deeply for maternal nurture, I seemed to get worse before I got better, falling into sexual immorality with another woman from my church. I eventually repented and broke off that relationship, realizing my fantasy of being a man who slept with women would never fill the deep void in my soul. By God's grace, I resolved to tug at the hem of His garment and not let go until I experienced the freedom Jesus died to give me.

As I continued to pursue freedom, the Lord put a spiritual mother in my life who was only a few years older than I but spiritually more mature. I was deeply attracted to her, yet she wasn't fazed by my struggles and began to invest in me relationally in a wholesome way. I found myself wanting to be just like her (much like a daughter might want to emulate her mother), so she helped me buy more feminine clothes and gave me advice concerning makeup and mannerisms. My outward appearance began to change, but inwardly, I still believed the lie that it was better to be a man, and I was still battling attractions to women.

In the fall of 2005, the Lord led me to a prayer counsellor experienced in helping those dealing with sexual issues. Over the course of a week, we spent hours praying through a lifetime of deep emotional wounds from my childhood that fuelled the lie that it's better to be a man than a woman. I forgave those who hurt me, let go of bitterness, renounced inner vows, and repented for my wrong responses toward those who had wounded me. I embraced the cross, and we closed every door I had opened to give the enemy legal ground to influence my life. During that week, I saw a tender, compassionate side to the Father that I wasn't aware existed. It's as if I could literally feel His hands holding my heart. My lifelong yearning to be held and comforted by a woman was finally met in the tender arms of my heavenly Father.

After that powerful encounter with God, I had a newfound contentment in being a woman and was set free from my sexual addictions, which were essentially a counterfeit to the comfort I could only find in my Father's arms. I found that I was no longer attracted to women, as the emotional wounds in my heart that drove those attractions were resolved. As I continued to walk out my healing in subsequent years, I eventually started experiencing sexual attractions toward men. It was as if I was going through delayed emotional puberty in my mid-thirties, which was both awkward and thrilling at the same time! God had

transformed me from the inside out and accomplished the impossible. I still feel like I'm living a dream.

Though I wanted to share my testimony in 2005, the Lord had me wait. I see His sovereignty in that now, as I needed time for my healing to be tested and to prepare me for the warfare that lay ahead. I kept silent for eight years until the Lord gave me the green light to go public upon my eighth-year anniversary of freedom, a “new beginning” of sorts. Now, I am finally coming out of the closet in a redemptive way, sharing my story with others to bring hope and restoration during this crucial hour. The eleven-year journey towards freedom was totally worth it. The length of the journey itself has given me empathy for those who are currently struggling to break free from similar issues and sometimes feel hopeless. Healing from sexual brokenness is rarely instantaneous—it's more like peeling back layers of an onion one at a time—but if we will hold fast to the truth of God's Word, lean on His body, and determine never to give up, we will experience the freedom that Jesus died to give us. God promised: such were some of you (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Overthemoon

I remember first appreciating girls when I was 10. I felt like I understood them! Boys were an unknown species and they scared me – my Dad was violent and therefore, I thought, so were all men.

I felt safe with girls and had my first crush on a girl in year 5. I was 10 years old and remember wanting to impress her. But knowing that a same-sex relationship was not okay in God's eyes, I tried to shut it down but the feelings of attraction only grew stronger and I felt darker. I dreamt about being with friends and starting futures with them. When I was 18 I finally told my best friend that I'd been having same-sex attraction for about 10 years. Telling her felt like the biggest relief! I could breath, there was no more weight on my shoulders. Counsellors told me throughout high school that who you are attracted to is in your DNA. This confused me, because if that was the case, why would God create me that way?

I still knew God's plan and desire for me was to not be attracted to females. I received psychological support (who, by the way, tried to convince me I was a lesbian and stay there! But that didn't feel right being pigeonholed), prayer support and pastoral discussions. Over 8 years since telling my best friend I continually wrestled with these feelings, but I was honest and continually brought it to Jesus. He kept shaping and moulding me. I told him over and over I didn't want this!

After secretly identifying as a lesbian for most of my life, I had breakthrough. One day I woke up, attracted to men, and it felt different... good different... I have now been in a relationship with a male and loving it! He understands what felt like a big struggle for a lot of my life. There are odd moments where I do appreciate a female, but there isn't the previous 'attraction'.

It is possible to change!

I fear preventing “changing back” and counselling practices will cause more suicides. Imagine if I had come out publicly, been counselled as a lesbian, then couldn't get help to be “back the way I was”?

Wboy123

I am a 19-year-old male. I first realised that I was sexually attracted to my own sex at age 11. I was uncomfortable with these feelings because deep down I sensed they weren't normal, and weren't really the true “me”.

I discovered internet pornography at age 11 and was immediately drawn to it, wanting to look more and more at the bodies of naked men. I would compare myself constantly to the men on the screen and never felt good enough in my masculine identity compared to the images now imprinted on my mind. This would

lead me further away from reality and deeper and deeper into a world of fantasy.

I was regularly bullied during my years in lower primary school and was called names such as “faggot” and “gay” by other boys who would also say sexual things to me. This led me to isolate myself totally when in upper primary school. I failed to make any significant friendship connections with any of my peers, leaving me to feel left out and different to all of my male peers.

My run-to person at home was my mum. I only shared little bits of information with her because, looking back, I felt such deep shame about what was happening to me and around me. I always perceived my father to be emotionally unavailable, so I never reached out to him as the only older male in my life. I had built up a wall against other men and had learnt to depend on a female’s outlook to help me to deal with situations that would arise. I now see that this was in fact detrimental to my male development.

For a fleeting time around age 14, I felt attracted to a girl in high school. I tried to get her to be interested in me but she rejected me. This hurt me deeply. What little masculinity I felt I had was suddenly crushed, leaving me to begin to wonder whether I would ever be good enough to date girls at all.

At 16, whilst in Year 10, my mental health began to deteriorate. One day, I broke down and told my mum about my same-sex attraction. We later approached my GP and he prescribed anti-depressant medication which had a worsening effect on me.

A year later when aged 17, I began to see a psychiatrist who put me onto different medication. I would barely see him but he regularly wrote out prescriptions for me. I was being heavily medicated, but no one was taking the time or effort to even begin to consider or address any deeper issues relating to my past.

I would continue to go through phases of looking intensely at pornography. I began to educate myself about what happens in the gay community and to engage online in random chats with other gay guys.

Shortly after this, I attended a support group for a few sessions made up of people who had been in long term gay and lesbian relationships and others who had spent years in the LGBTQ+ lifestyle. They all shared numerous regrets and spoke of how they had had years stripped from their lives.

I decided to become further educated about what relationships often look like in the gay community, whether casual, temporary, and even committed ones. I once again knew instinctively that this was not the place for me. I felt more despair than ever.

At age 18, I chose to return to the support group, whilst still intermittently visiting a different psychiatrist. The group became the first place and the first time that I felt I could truly open up and talk about everything same-sex attracted. I felt listened to at last. Nothing was excluded from our conversations. I was accepted. I belonged. I had people who honoured me as a person, and didn’t see as a piece of flesh to be devoured.

Some would say that, in their opinion, I have failed to embrace my true self and that I am being homophobic. I see this as them projecting onto me their discomfort with my informed decisions. I have no problem accepting and facing my same-sex attracted feelings today. Even with this full acceptance, I know deep down that this is not the way I was created to be.

I am now developing the deep and meaningful heart-to-heart same-sex and other-sex friendships that I longed for as a child and teenager. I am also beginning to address and move beyond much of the pain and grief that I have dragged around with me all my life. These are slow, but very real beginnings.

I am in touch with many other young adults who, like me, feel threatened and scared at the thought of possible laws that will stop us from accessing the amazing support that is helping each one of us to healthily rise above the desperation we have felt for years. Some of these other teens are also having to again fight off depression because of the direct threats being made against their personal life decisions by politicians and their damaging legislation.

I have a right to get well. It is also my basic human right to seek out therapy, group support, resources – and prayer if I want to – which aid me in my journey to true manhood.

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