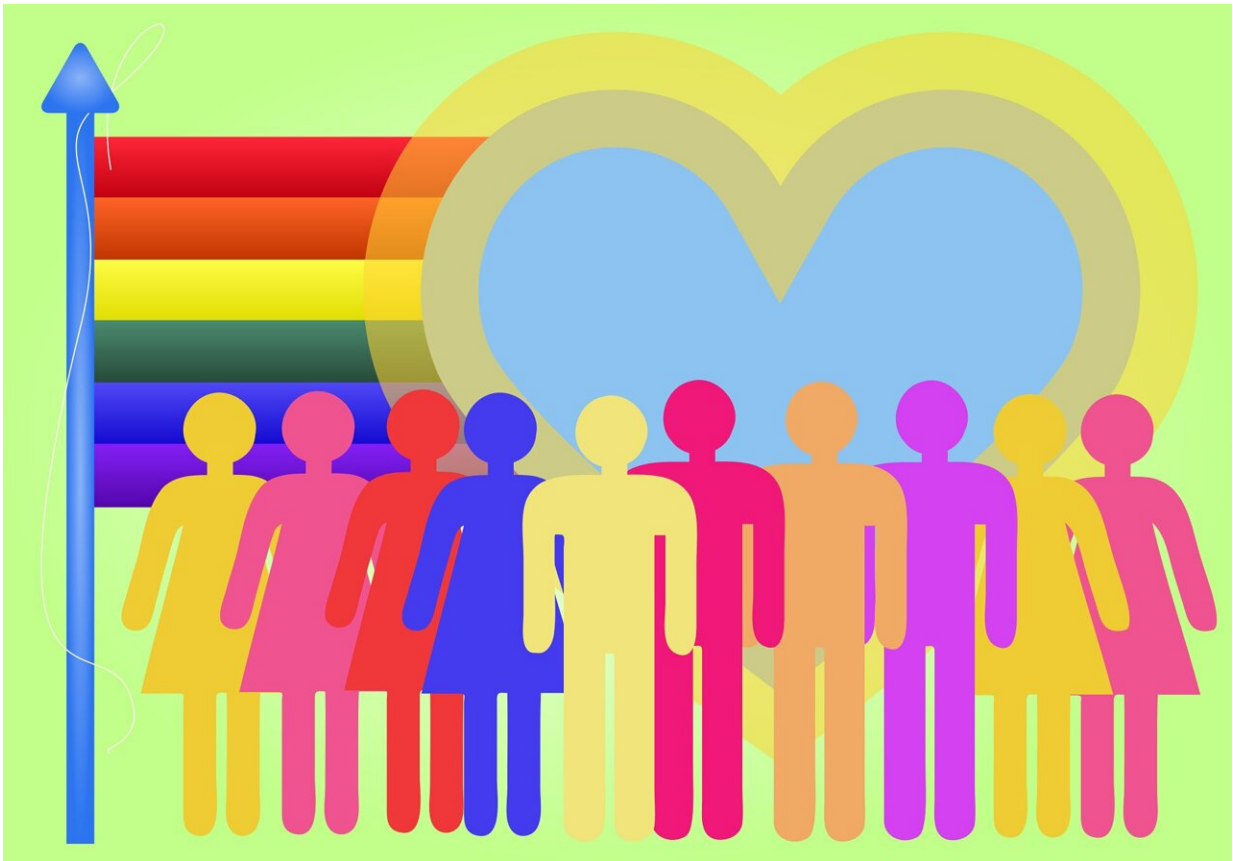


Queer conversion therapy is still practiced in the US: Experts say we need to talk about it

August 16 2022, by Anthony Robledo



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Precious Brady-Davis knew at a young age she was a girl.

"I knew I wasn't like my brother, the football player. I wasn't like my

sister, the cheerleader, and I remember telling my grandmother, I am a little girl and I want to be a girl," Brady-Davis, who is transgender, says. "And my grandmother said to me, 'don't ever say that again.'"

From the age of 8 to 17, Brady-Davis endured what's commonly known as conversion therapy, defined by GLAAD as "any attempt to change a person's sexual orientation, [gender identity](#) or gender expression."

Even though bans on queer conversion therapy exist, experts say the pseudoscientific practice lurks and needs to be addressed by lawmakers.

Conversion therapy still legal in most US states

Talk therapy is a common technique but more extreme practices exist including eversion treatments that induce vomiting or paralysis and snapping an elastic band around the wrist when someone is aroused by same-sex erotic images or thoughts, according to a 2009 American Psychiatric Association study.

Brady-Davis vividly recalls a preacher pointing at her—yelling at her—saying that she was a man as people prayed for two hours in a "sort of exorcism."

Statewide bans on conversion therapy have been implemented in only 20 states, according to anti-conversion therapy organization Born Perfect.

If officials fail to act, an estimated 20,000 LGBTQ minors in states without protections against the practice will endure it, according to a 2019 report by the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law.

"Mean Girls" actor Daniel Franzese, 44, recently told Page Six that he decided to try conversion therapy when he was 21 because of his own internalized homophobia. His conversion therapist, recommended to him

by his grandmother's pastor, urged him to cut ties with his mother who had been accepting of his queerness.

"I went to one-on-one therapy sessions with a person who was trying to make me pray the gay away and alienate all my allies," Franzese said.

Even though the practice has been discredited, it's still legal in most U.S. states, says John F. Kennedy University clinical psychotherapist Douglas C. Haldeman in his 2022 book, "The Case Against Conversion "Therapy": Evidence, Ethics, and Alternatives."

States like like Oklahoma, Tennessee and Alabama offer no statewide protections for young LGBTQ people against conversion therapy, according to the Trevor Project. States like Texas, Arizona and Ohio have introduced such protections in 2021.

The harms of conversion therapy on LGBTQ youth

Research has shown conversion therapy primarily tends to be ineffective and harmful, including a 2014 study from the Journal of Counseling Psychology and a 2013 study from Journal of Homosexuality.

Depression, loneliness, social/interpersonal harm, [suicidal ideation](#) and suicide attempts tend to increase with the practice, psychologists Ariel Shidlo and Michael Schroeder found in a 2002 report.

Some of the practices used in queer conversion interventions include electric shock, deprivation of basic needs and reconditioning around sexual functioning, says Jagadīśa-devaśrī Dācus, associate director of the Institute for Sexual and Gender Minority Health and Wellbeing (ISGMH) at Northwestern University. Outcomes include self-blame, sexual dysfunction and loss of social supports.

"There are groups that still continue to perpetuate this is an effective method of helping to provide therapeutic services or supportive services to those questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity," Dācus says.

How the practice became scrutinized and where it still exists

In 1899, German psychiatrist Albert von Schrenck-Notzing claimed he turned a gay man straight through "45 hypnosis sessions and a few trips to a brothel," according to [History.com](https://www.history.com), kicking off the phenomenon of conversion therapy.

The APA classified "homosexuality" as a "sociopathic personality disturbance, when it published its first edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual in 1952. APA stated in 1973 that homosexuality was not a mental illness, a crucial milestone for LGBTQ equality.

The gay conversion therapy movement lost substantial credibility after a 2009 report from the APA showed there was no evidence for the efficacy of conversion therapies and the practice is often harmful, says Tom Waidzunas, Temple University professor and author of "The Straight Line: How the Fringe Science of Ex-Gay Therapy Reoriented Sexuality."

Exodus International, the ex-gay Christian organization that oversaw queer conversion therapy practices, ceased operations in 2013. The organization encouraged people to come out of what they called "the homosexual lifestyle."

Waidzunas says many former Exodus International staff have apologized and shared that they do not believe in changing one's sexual orientation.

Conversion therapy organization formerly known as the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, that used to partner with Exodus International, has now rebranded to the Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity.

The organization still offers "licensed professional assistance" to anyone experiencing "unwanted same-sex erotic attractions or who experience conflict between their biological sex and perceived gender identity."

Why queer conversion therapy still needs to be talked about

Lourdes Dolores Follins, a New York-based clinical social worker who primarily provides therapy to LGBTQ people, says it's crucial people know the practice impacts all kinds of queer people including the transgender community.

"The people that are portrayed as having experienced these these horrific experiences, they're usually white, they're usually middle class and they're usually cis men," Follins said. "There are so many people who are Black and brown and indigenous, who have experienced conversion therapy, whether it's called that or not. It's important to keep having conversations, keep exposing people for what they're doing."

Follins says conversion therapy needs to be part of the conversation around the increase in laws against the existence of LGBTQ youth.

"For every person who's talking about 'this is what happened to me 5, 10, 15 years ago,' I'd be willing to bet there are at least five to 10 other people who have similar stories, who just might look different," Follins said.

Where LGBTQ people can look for support

Dācus says seeking help in learning to understand and accept one's sexual orientation or gender identity as opposed to trying to change it leads to better mental health and overall wellness for queer people.

The ISGMH has found when young LGBTQ people have supportive parents or caregivers, they can form better connections, develop more positive self-esteem and experience a lower rate of anxiety and depressive episodes.

According to research released July 28 from the Trevor Project, at least one in three LGBTQ youth between the ages of 13 and 24 reported high levels of trauma symptoms, such as hypervigilance and avoidance, with only 4% of the demographic never experiencing any.

Transgender and nonbinary youth experience 44% levels of trauma symptoms while cisgender queer youth experience 25%, the research shows.

The Trevor Project offers 24-hour support to any LGBTQ youth in crisis, and GLAAD offers a resource list for those seeking help with specific needs.

And for good reason: "Being forced to be a gender that you don't identify with, or a sexuality you don't identify with, that doesn't feel right to you. You're not free, you're oppressed," Follins said. "As long as [conversion therapy](#) exists, we're not all free."

If you or someone you know may be struggling with suicidal thoughts, you can call the U.S. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 988 any time day or night, or chat online.

Crisis Text Line also provides free, 24/7, confidential support via text message to people in crisis when they dial 741741.

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