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The flawed monster that won't die: Conversion therapy in the West

There has been a recent escalation in the battle against the practice misleadingly known as conversion (or reparative) 'therapy'. The last twelve months has seen Queensland, the ACT, and Victoria implement widely varying legislation to ban conversion techniques. US states such as California (where the scale of the issue is much larger) have already had laws in place for several years, while Britain is also in discussions to follow suit. The United Nations has classified conversion therapy as a form of torture; however, with psychiatry all but abandoning this pernicious practice after homosexuality's removal from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in the early 1970s (due to unassailable evidence suggesting that not only is it ineffective, but is actually highly damaging to same-sex attracted peoples), the question remains: why are we still talking about it?

The fact is, there are some who defend its application, including the Christian Right, and rogue psychiatrists such as the late Dr Joseph Nicolosi of the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality. These (literal) 'defenders of the faith' argue that sexuality is a lifestyle choice, and that same-sex attracted peoples are 'broken' and living in a state of sin: a condition that they supposedly need to be saved from. This paper will argue that studies from as early as the 1950s (including the Wolfenden Report) suggested that a person's sexuality is not something that can simply be 'converted', and additionally, that there is no biological or ethical reason that homosexuality should be considered abnormal or undesirable. It is for this reason that the fight against a practice that, according to UCLA, has harmed 700,000 Americans, needs to be ended.