

## Education sector damaged by 'conversion therapy' research

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*This year, the Government Equalities Office launched new research into “the effects of conversion therapy in the UK”, asking LGBT activist Adam Jowett from Coventry University to recruit people to interview. Following criticism over how he was conducting the research, Carys Moseley now comments on how this government study presents an “ethical, moral and legal dilemma.”*

In May 2019, the Government Equalities Office (GEO) announced<sup>1</sup> that as part of the government’s commitment to ending ‘conversion therapy’ in the UK, psychologist and gay activist Adam Jowett<sup>2</sup> from Coventry University was recruiting people to interview<sup>3</sup> on their experiences of attempting to change sexual orientation and gender identity. This kind of research was clearly envisaged and planned<sup>4</sup> for in the second version of the Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the United Kingdom<sup>5</sup>, published in October 2017.

*“Within the next five years, if funded, signatory organisations will seek to ensure appropriate research into the prevalence and effects of conversion therapy in the UK, and into how best to work with gender and sexually diverse clients.”*

However, it will be impossible for this research to discover the prevalence of efforts to change sexual orientation; doing so would require a random representative sample of the UK population, and this research does not set out to do this. Whether or not this research will succeed in discovering “the effects of conversion therapy” is a question I will address later.

### Gay activist psychologist heads pro-government ‘conversion therapy’ research

Adam Jowett has spent most of his career writing and teaching about LGBT issues. He is chair-elect of the Psychology of Sexualities section of the British Psychological Society – one of the most influential mental health professional bodies that has signed up to the Memorandum. He is therefore hardly an independent, let alone an impartial and disinterested observer, of the issues involved.

The Memorandum also makes clear that this study will link into research on how clients with

same-sex attraction and gender confusion **should be treated** by counsellors and psychotherapists who are members of the signatory organisations. This means that academic research based on interviews with former clients will be used to dictate how all clients will be dealt with, **regardless of future clients’ desires and values.**

### ‘Conversion therapy’ research design inherently flawed

This week, Adam Jowett finally received responses to his tweet linking to the GEO call for participants, mostly from lesbian radical feminist activists asking him to look at gender reassignment for females as a form of ‘conversion therapy’<sup>6</sup>. What this means is that they think that offering teenage girls and young women who suffer from gender confusion the choice of gender reassignment to live as ‘trans men’ is really a disguised way of attempting to ‘convert’ lesbians to be ‘men’. This is because many (but by no means all) such girls and women have same-sex attraction. One person also wondered about gay activists aiming to turn straight people gay. This was probably not quite the kind of response hoped for.

The lesbian feminist argument is, of course, largely mistaken. But their point that the category of ‘biological sex’ is being eroded by those who support a therapy ban is still valid. In this case there is clear evidence for it.

The initial questionnaire for would-be participants is available on the website of Coventry University<sup>7</sup>. It asks people for their ‘gender identity’ and their ‘assigned sex’ at birth. It does not ask what their biological sex is. All this is entirely deliberate, as it exemplifies the core LGBT untruths that ‘gender is a spectrum’ and ‘sex is a spectrum’. (This is very much what we found with the Mermaids training session<sup>8</sup> for staff and governors at a Church of England primary school recently.) The problem the researcher will face, however, is that lesbian and bisexual women especially will probably refuse to answer, saying their ‘gender identity’ is ‘woman’. Also, there is no guarantee that transgender people will tick the boxes marked ‘transman’ and ‘transwoman’. Many are likely to say ‘man’ or ‘woman’ because they are treated legally and socially in most cases as that. This fundamental erasure of biological sex means that the initial data is likely to be

fundamentally flawed at the outset. Such elementary untruths should have disqualified this research in the eyes of the relevant ethics committees at Coventry University.

### **Researcher's main targets are Christianity and 'heterosexism'**

In an article Jowett published in 2014 in *The Conversation*,<sup>9</sup> we can glean that he opposes Christian support for leaving homosexuality behind, and opposes 'heterosexism'. He discusses the reaction of many gay people to radical feminist campaigner Julie Bindel saying she is unconvinced by the 'born that way' argument on sexual orientation, and that she chose to be a lesbian. Likewise, actress Cynthia Nixon from 'Sex and the City' was attacked for making the same kind of observation in 2012.

Jowett then quotes Bindel's discussion with gay activist journalist Patrick Strudwick, who initiated the current attack on counselling and therapy for unwanted same-sex attraction. Strudwick got angry with the claim that sexual orientation is a choice because, in Jowett's words:

*"anti-gay religious rhetoric is based on the assertion that we can 'choose not to be gay', and such claims can be used as a justification for those seeking to 'cure' homosexuality."*

In the comments section, Jowett responds to a reader with the following words:

*"Nobody has the right to define someone else's sexual identity for them and tell them that they're not really a lesbian, they're bisexual. And the 'born this way' argument really throws those who do identify as bisexuals under the bus. Of course they can argue that they're born bisexual but heterosexist religious rhetoric will say that they can and should choose to be with a member of the opposite sex."*

So here we have a clear case of opposition to Christian sexual morality and by implication also to permitting sexual behaviour only within the context of marriage between one man and one woman.

In response to a reader's criticism of Julie Bindel, he then wrote this:

*"I find it highly problematic when women's views are dismissed on the basis that they are feminist (radical or otherwise) nor do I believe that we should exclude those with whom we disagree from academic discourse. I could quote academics who have been making very similar arguments for a long time but they weren't the ones who were recently very publicly criticised."*

### **'We should not "choose" to be straight'**

In response to a third reader's comment, he then said this:

*"Homosexuality shouldn't be treated because it is not a mental disorder, we should not 'choose' to be straight because there is nothing immoral about loving someone of the same gender and the basis of sexual orientation is irrelevant because we are human and deserve human rights."*

*"And yet almost all of the comments on a republished version of this article on Pink News<sup>10</sup> seem to have misread my article as suggesting that being gay is a choice."*

Here we have clear evidence of Jowett's opposition to people with same-sex attraction having the freedom to choose to leave homosexuality behind and develop their natural heterosexual potential. We should be calling this out for what it is – **making homosexuality compulsory for people who are morally opposed to it. This is profoundly abusive towards people with unwanted same-sex attraction.** Coventry University and the Government Equalities Office should be roundly taken to task for supporting research on attempts at changing sexual orientation by someone with such an attitude.

### **British Psychological Society implicated in eroding parental rights**

It is highly relevant that Adam Jowett has recently tweeted with approval<sup>11</sup> a petition for Hall Green Constituency Labour Party to de-select Roger Godsiff MP for supporting the parents protesting LGBT indoctrination at a primary school in Birmingham. By virtue of his prominence within it, this is the second time that the British Psychological Society has been linked to erosion of parental rights regarding resisting LGBT indoctrination in primary schools.

Kate Godfrey-Faussett, a British convert to the Shi'i movement within Islam, was a member of the British Psychological Society, but had her membership suspended<sup>12</sup> after social media evidence emerged of her protesting against this in Birmingham, partly in her capacity as a mother of three children. Godfrey-Faussett said she would contest this suspension and attended a healthcare professionals' tribunal hearing on 9 May this year. The outcome has been adjourned<sup>13</sup>.

### **How should universities handle research on sexuality and gender?**

The fact that Coventry University has seen fit to permit Jowett's research, which appears to toe the government line on 'conversion therapy', is in marked contrast with the fate of James Caspian's research on transgender people. Bath Spa University did not allow James Caspian to conduct research interviewing detransitioners<sup>14</sup> – people who regret having undergone gender reassignment. The government did not step in to defend his academic freedom, nor the freedom of expression of his interviewees, many of whom may have not had a listening ear until approached for this project.

The Memorandum of Understanding says that the kind of research currently conducted by Jowett will be used to influence future work with clients. This is not just LGBT clients. **This is all clients with same-sex attraction and gender confusion, including the many who want professional help to be rid of these things.** This means that this research could be used to affect the work of gender identity clinics funded by the NHS, including the Gender Identity Development Service for Children and Adolescents. It could be used in training courses up and down the country and the publications based on it will be quoted in textbooks and by lecturers. It isn't a coincidence how the Government Equalities Office has never supported clinical research by psychiatrists on gender dysphoria, or on detransitioners and young people who desist from the path of gender reassignment.

### **Toeing the government line endangers future research**

It is a matter of grave concern that there is a university funding government research which is effectively shutting down free speech. To be precise, there isn't anything inherently wrong with producing research that turns out to agree broadly with a particular government policy. However, there is a very clear difference

between producing research that turns out at the end to validate a particular policy and one which ignores and effectively censors and entire sub-population of people relevant to the research in order to agree with a policy that is already founded.

Moreover, the research is intended to support the government commitment to 'end conversion therapy in the UK.' This means it will lead to shutting down future research on the subject. This is because a total therapy ban will exacerbate the current situation I have described. 'Conversion therapy' will be a forbidden practice, likely deemed 'extremist', which will be impossible to discuss openly.

### **Should this research have been given ethical clearance?**

Given all these concerns, there is a serious question as to whether Coventry University should ever have given ethical clearance to this research. A critic could argue that this is unfair. The online form does tell prospective research participants that "there is no right or wrong answer." Surely this means that people who have benefited from counselling or therapy could also take part if they wanted to.

Coventry University, like all universities, has policies on research ethics, and its academics are required to abide by them. The university needs to provide ethical approval for any academic project involving "survey work, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups or case studies." This is because this involves human subjects and is subject to data protection laws. The guidelines go on to state that,<sup>15</sup> "this is especially true of the activity requires or could involve: (1) Active or unintentional participation by human participants," and "(4) An ethical, safety, moral or legal dilemma for the researcher and/or participants in allowing the activity to proceed."

Given that this research supports the government's plans to 'end conversion therapy', an ethical, moral and legal dilemma is presented for prospective participants if they have benefited from counselling or therapy for unwanted same-sex attraction or gender confusion. For in participating in a study wedded to the idea that such counselling or therapy should cease to exist, they would be acting as useful idiots for the government, giving the study an appearance of even-handedness and impartiality that it may well not have.

In addition, if a person responds saying they did experience change in sexual orientation or gender identity as a result or by-product of counselling or psychotherapy, and were happier as a result, this would surely undermine the entire purpose of the research, which is to support the government's plan to ban all such counselling or therapy. Would this not present an ethical or moral dilemma for the researcher? This shows the illogic of stating that there is 'no right or wrong answer' to the questions.

### **Government should end its 'conversion therapy ban' obsession**

The Government Equalities Office – a taxpayer-funded government department – has, at the heart of the research, created an erosion of academic integrity and coherence. It has not had any regard for the protected characteristics of sex, religion or even sexual orientation in asking for such research. This is because people have the right to determine their own sexual orientation, and thus must surely include the right to move from homosexuality to bisexuality or heterosexuality.

Instead, the GEO has proven itself to be a vehicle for LGBT domination of the rest of society, often via the education system, and erosion of fundamental freedoms. Given this, perhaps it is time politicians started to call for the government to ditch its crazy plans to end all counselling and therapy for unwanted same-sex attraction and gender confusion. If it refuses to do that, there is a good case for the GEO to be subjected to an official investigation, if not shut down altogether.

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- <sup>1</sup> <https://equalities.blog.gov.uk/2019/05/07/research-into-the-experiences-of-those-who-have-undergone-conversion-therapy-in-the-uk/>
  - <sup>2</sup> <https://pureportal.coventry.ac.uk/en/persons/adam-jowett>
  - <sup>3</sup> <https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/>
  - <sup>4</sup> [https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/media/cptnc5qm/mou2-reva\\_0421\\_web.pdf](https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/media/cptnc5qm/mou2-reva_0421_web.pdf)
  - <sup>5</sup> [https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/media/cptnc5qm/mou2-reva\\_0421\\_web.pdf](https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/media/cptnc5qm/mou2-reva_0421_web.pdf)
  - <sup>6</sup> <https://twitter.com/DrAdamJowett/status/1132204846424240128>
  - <sup>7</sup> <https://coventry.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/efforts-to-change-sexual-orientation-or-gender-identity>
  - <sup>8</sup> <https://christianconcern.com/general/transgender-indoctrination-at-cofe-primary-school/>
  - <sup>9</sup> <https://theconversation.com/the-gay-community-should-stop-attacking-anyone-who-dares-suggest-sexuality-is-a-choice-29297>
  - <sup>10</sup> <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2014/07/21/comment-the-gay-community-should-stop-attacking-anyone-who-dares-suggest-sexuality-is-a-choice/>
  - <sup>11</sup> <https://twitter.com/DrAdamJowett/status/1137384451493810176>
  - <sup>12</sup> <https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/bps-statement-comments-dr-kate-godfrey-faussett-rse-schools>
  - <sup>13</sup> <https://www.hcpts-uk.org/hearings/hearings/2019/may/dr-kate-godfrey-faussett/>
  - <sup>14</sup> <https://www.spiked-online.com/2019/02/22/my-battle-with-the-transgender-thoughtpolice/>
  - <sup>15</sup> <https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/about-us/research-ethics/>