

Position Statement on Research on Conversion Therapy  
and Support for the LGBTQIA+ Community  
July 13, 2022

Our field is in the midst of a long-overdue reckoning with the shameful history of research on conversion therapy. The Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies recently issued an apology for the field's contribution to research promoting conversion therapy, which sparked intense discussions. This history included incorrectly conceptualizing any sexual and gender expression that was not cisgender and heterosexual as psychopathology, and a resultant damaging focus on delivering "treatment" based on suppression/conversion. Several BU faculty members who have served as past ABCT presidents have endorsed the apology. Additionally, BU Professor Emeritus David Barlow, who had published conversion therapy research in the 1970's & 80's, has since released an individual statement of regret. In light of these ongoing conversations, we are motivated to make a statement of our own at this time to clarify our departmental stance with regard to research on conversion therapy and our support for the LGBTQIA+ community.

The Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences at Boston University affirms our support for the rights of all LGBTQIA+ individuals to be accepted and valued for who they are and to be free from discrimination in the workplace, educational settings, and society as a whole. We recognize the history of wrongs committed against the LGBTQIA+ community, and that this history continues to impact people's lives. In particular, we recognize the damage that past research on conversion therapy has done and continues to do to members of the LGBTQIA+ community. This research has been used and is still being used to justify practices and policies that contribute to stigma and cause considerable harm to those in the LGBTQIA+ community. These harms include verbal and physical harassment and violence, social policies that prevent free expression of sexual and gender identity, and the continued practice of conversion therapy. *The department repudiates in the strongest possible terms this work and its legacy. In light of these moral wrongs, we call for the retraction of all published research promoting conversion therapy.* We understand that efforts at retraction have been initiated. We fully support that process.

The department is committed to raising our own and others' awareness of the ongoing threats facing LGBTQIA+ people, and to contributing our voices to the fight for equality. This means supporting the right to receive affirming and respectful treatment in healthcare, providing equitable access to opportunities, and creating safe and affirming environments. This also means recognizing the intersectionality of identities and encouraging the development and expression of each person to the fullest. It means respecting, valuing, and appreciating members of our LGBTQIA+ community. Finally, it means supporting research that addresses LGBTQIA+ health disparities and promoting resilience in LGBTQIA+ youth.

We recognize that a position statement is not an end in itself, but only a first step. Meaningful action requires reflection, outreach, and planning. We are initiating a series of conversations with students, faculty and staff in our department and the broader LGBTQIA+ community at BU to determine concrete steps forward. We will be announcing tangible actions in the months ahead.

Sincerely,

David C. Somers, PhD, Chair

Alice Cronin-Golomb, PhD, Director of Graduate Studies

Sam Ling, PhD, Director of PhD Program in Brain, Behavior & Cognition

Joanne Hebden Palfai, PhD, Director of Undergraduate Studies & Director of Academic Affairs

Tibor Palfai, PhD, Director of PhD Program in Clinical Psychology

Lisa Smith, PhD, Director of the Center for Anxiety and Related Disorders

Amanda Tarullo, PhD, Director of PhD Program in Developmental Science

Martha C. Thompson, PhD, Director of MA Program in Psychology