

Sawbones 190: Conversion Therapy Part 2

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Clint: Sawbones is a show about medical history, and nothing the hosts say should be taken as medical advice or opinion. It's for fun. Can't you just have fun for an hour and not try to diagnose your mystery boil? We think you've earned it. Just sit back, relax and enjoy a moment of distraction from that weird growth. You're worth it.

[theme music plays]

Justin: Hello everybody, and welcome to Sawbones: a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your cohost, Justin McElroy!

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: Um... well, you gave the preboarding announcement last week, so I'll try this week.

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: Um, hi. This week, we're going to be continuing a two-part series about conversion therapy. And it's to celebrate Pride month, which may seem like an odd fit, but we figured it's just as important to reflect on everything that these communities have been through.

So, we're going to talk about conversion therapy, and Sydnee has warned me that it gets pretty rough. So, if you are concerned that's something that might be triggering for you or what have you, just go ahead and hop off here, and we will pick you back up next week.

Sydnee: Thank you, Justin.

Justin: So, that being said.

Sydnee: So, if you haven't listened to our episode from last week and you're about to listen to this one, I would actually recommend you go back and listen to it, because I kind of recounted the history of the idea of conversion therapy, where it came from, specifically in the psychiatric community, the early theories on it from, you know, Freud on, and the

revolution that took place within the medical community as we began to perceive sexual orientation as just a fine way of being, that is not in any way an illness or pathological. It's just different from heterosexuality and is just as okay, and isn't something that needs to be diagnosed or treated or anything like that.

So, we've already kinda gone through that history, and it's a good story that ends with us removing homosexuality from, you know, the diagnostic manual of psychiatric disorders, and condemning conversion therapy.

And if that were the end of the story, that would be great. But unfortunately, that isn't. So, to kinda take it back, as I mentioned before, same-sex relationships were common throughout history. Especially in ancient Greece and Rome, and while there were very specific, kind of, cultural rules about who could penetrate who and where, it was generally okay for men to have same-sex relationships. And it wasn't spoken of as often for women, but it was generally okay.

This changed in the 3rd and 4th century, as there was this kind of social revolution of sorts as Christianity spread. And you began to see laws that made same-sex relationships, well, one, illegal, and two, punishable by death in some circumstances. And this, a lot of this came as you began to see more and more churches and government bodies intertwined.

And they would begin to condemn anybody who didn't engage in what they believed the only acceptable sexual relationships, and find them and hunt them down and try to prove, if they wouldn't admit to their behavior, try to prove it with horrible things like invasive examinations of the anal area to look for evidence that they'd ever engaged in anal sex, and things like that, to prove their guilt. And it was really that kind of combination of religion and government that led to—

Justin: Always a successful cocktail.

Sydnee: [laughs] Exactly. That led to the criminalization of any kind of same-sex attraction, you know, same-sex intercourse, anything like that. Certainly relationships.

So, this led to the criminalization of the LGBTQ community and their persecution for many years. But just as things were kind of improving, as we talked about in the, in, like, sort of the 1970s in the medical community, as they were rejecting the ideas that being gay was an illness

and speaking out against conversion therapy, those religious forces from long ago came back. So, since the 70s, ex-gay Christian ministry organizations have been trying to convert gay people—

Justin: We are obviously using, like, “ex-gay”, like— it’s a gross term and obviously, like, huge— we’re using massive— and we clarified last week, but just to specify, massive air-quotes any time that you feel that we are probably air-quoting things. “Ex-gay” is a bonkers term.

Sydnee: Well, and it’s a term that they use, let me clarify, that people who still would lie to you and tell you this kind of therapy works, would say that they are, quote-unquote, “ex-gay.”

And these organizations have been trying to convert gay people through a mixture of bible study, group therapy, some things like aversion therapy, which we’ve already talked about, which has to do with making somebody feel really bad about themselves for having same-sex attractions, and I imagine mainly guilt, I would have to say. There’s a heavy dose of guilt in all of this.

In fact, in 1969, the same year as Stonewall, the same year that, as we talked about in the last episode, we saw this huge, kind of, the revolution really began, especially in the medical community, responding to it. Love in Action, which was a huge so-called ex-gay ministry, was formed.

Justin: Is that the Chick-Fil-A one?

Sydnee: Was it the Chick-Fil-A one?

Justin: Is it the one that Chick-Fil-A was donating to?

Sydnee: Maybe? It’s gone now. As far I know, I think it’s gone.

Justin: Keep going, I’ll take a look.

Sydnee: A lot of these places, it was hard to figure out which ones are still around and which ones weren’t, because they’ve all kind of changed their names and are hiding now. In 1976, Exodus International was formed.

And this was a huge ministry, again, since closed, but it does still operate worldwide as the Exodus Global Alliance. And they would claim a 30-50%

success rate if you were willing to send your loved one to them to “heal” their same-sex attractions.

Justin: I was wrong. I don’t think it’s Love in Action is the... yeah. No. Not that one.

Sydnee: Okay. These were both huge groups—

Justin: There was a Love in Action Day at a Chick-Fil-A recently, but it sounds just like a nice event. [laughs] Like, I don’t think it was related to this kind of thing.

Sydnee: Alright, so those are two different things. Whatever you think of Chick-Fil-A, this has nothing to do with them.

Justin: This is non-chick-Fil-A related, except in the way that it obviously is. But it’s not specifically a Chick-Fil-A related ministry.

Sydnee: [laughs] A lot of gay conversion ministry has to do with praying. A lot of praying. Kind of asking for your creator to... heal you of these impulses. And then a lot of therapy sessions, usually with, like, a religious counselor, so like a minister or somebody else who would be not just coming from a counseling perspective, although they could be, but also from a faith-based perspective.

Usually one who would claim to also be what they would call ex-gay, so somebody who they— who would say, “I was like you and I had these same desires and I was able to suppress them, desire the opposite sex, and move forward.”

Justin: “And now I’m just crazy. Just crazy about the babes. You know, like me? You could be like me and just be babe-crazy.”

Sydnee: [laughs] And again, the idea was to help you reject your impulses and try to embrace a heterosexual lifestyle. Every major religion — I said Christian earlier, please note, every major religion kind of formed their own groups to do this within the US.

There were many different Christian denomination groups, there were also Jewish groups like JONAH that formed to do this same kind of ministry, specifically based in their faith. And they each had kind of their own way of going about it and their own false prophets who were the charismatic leaders of these groups.

And they would take out huge ads in newspapers and magazines to—mainly targeted at parents. “Send us your kids, we’ll fix them.” And there were camps. Obviously, we’ve all heard of them.

There were camps that were started that were like summer camps, except they were specifically for parents to send children if their children were exhibiting what they considered gay tendencies, or had already said that they had same-sex attraction. And these parents would be scared and pressured into sending their children so that their kids could, uh, pray and be saved.

But this wasn’t enough for some people. So, this is happening, this is big, there was, like, famously a cover of Time magazine where there was a couple and the man claims that he formerly was gay and the woman claims she formerly was a lesbian and now they’re married and together and... “Our life is so happy and we’re so thankful for these groups, these religious groups that saved us.”

So, in this milieu came Joseph Nicolosi. This was in 1992. He forms NARTH, which is the National Organization for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality. I don’t know why it’s not NORTH. For the life of me, I don’t know why it’s not NORTH.

Justin: It’s right there!

Sydnee: But it’s NARTH. [laughs] And he wrote some pretty awful books

—

Justin: That’s what Pinky from Pinky and the Brain used to say all the time, right? Maybe they were just bringing Pinky and the Brain back. “Narth!”

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Right?

Sydnee: That’s where it’s came from, I’m sure. I’m sure.

Justin: That’s where it came from, probably.

Sydnee: So, and he wrote awful books. Things like A Parents’ Guide to Preventing Homosexuality and things like that. And the goal was to, as he

put it, "Help gay people reach their heterosexual potential." I don't know that I've ever reached my heterosexual potential.

Justin: I don't feel like I'm— yeah, I guess not.

Sydnee: Through what he called "reparative therapy". This is where we really first see that term, if you've heard the term reparative therapy. It's actually a very specific kind of conversion therapy. The two are often used interchangeably, but it's really specific to this tradition from this guy.

So, he enlists a bunch of other homophobic therapists and doctors to come help him in this effort, and he also partners with religious organizations. So, he can do it both— he wants to do it both ways.

He wants to get medical professionals, psychologists, therapists, social workers who still, even though all of their major organizations have rejected this, who still believe in conversion therapy, and he wants to bring in the religious organizations as well so that they can also use the religious angle on patients.

And he actually, you can see that in that he worked out of a clinic that he called the Thomas Aquinas Psychological Clinic. Very clearly combining the religious and pseudo-scientific aspects of this. And he would use a mixture of sessions with things like, again, confrontational therapy in the tradition of Bergler, which is— confrontational therapy is I think we've mentioned before, is basically abusing— emotional abuse.

Justin: Yelling and screaming and— yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. You just yell and scream at somebody. Aversion therapy, so again, the same things we've heard of before. Have somebody recall a time when they had a same-sex fantasy or attraction, and while they are recalling it, or show them a picture of something, have them, um, something as simple as snapping a rubber band on their wrist every time to kind of link a painful stimuli with this, or things as serious as electric shocks or medications that would make you vomit every time.

He was also a huge fan of showing people pornography in treatment.

Justin: Okay. Unorthodox.

Sydnee: So, yeah, this was kind of a big sticking point as we kinda get to the end of this group later, is that— especially heterosexual

pornography and the thought that, "Well, if I just show you enough men and women having sex, you'll kind of get over this."

He also would promote the idea that if we could just get— specifically for men in this case, if we could just get men acting more masculine...

Justin: Which meant?

Sydnee: So, specifically, what he recommended were things like drinking Gatorade.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: That if you would just— if you wanna stop being gay...

Justin: I wondered why they print that on the label, about how it cures you of being gay. I'm so happy to have an answer to that.

Sydnee: "If you wanna stop being gay, here's what you do. You look at this picture of boobs and you drink this Gatorade."

Justin: At the same time.

Sydnee: "And then I would highly recommend that you call all of your male friends 'dude'."

Justin: Um...

Sydnee: Because that's— I don't know what's more masculine than that.

Justin: He should've manufactured his own Gatorade bottle that had pornography printed on the labels. Cause that would be—

Sydnee: Kill two birds with one stone.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Right. And like, you open the cap and underneath it says "Great job, dude."

Justin: "Great job, dude."

Sydnee: Now, and this seems, like, funny and harmless. He also did things like beat people.

Justin: Oh. Well now I feel bad about joking around, Sydnee.

Sydnee: These kind of, this way of inciting violence was also not just to hurt somebody into rejecting the thing you wanted them to reject, it was also considered like a masculine behavior. This was all to, like, increase masculinity. You know, fighting was supposed to be very masculine, so if you fought more, you'd... you'd be more attracted to women.

He claimed that— and I've already mentioned that a lot of these therapies were targeted at children. Largely because you would have adolescents who would just begin to kind of voice their sexual preferences or kind of reveal to their parents, especially at the time in society when, and I mean, this is in the— now let me say, this is in the 90s, so this isn't that long ago, but I think we can all agree that societal acceptance of the LGBTQ community has changed tremendously since the 90s.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: So even then, to come out as gay in 1992 would have still been, you know, kind of a big deal for a lot of people and a lot of different communities. And there were a lot of parents who initially would have reacted with fear and anger and have no understanding and no resources.

And here you have this guy who's writing endless books about it and who's publishing articles and ads in newspapers and magazines and saying, "I can help you, I can fix your kid, and I can recognize and cure homosexuality in patients as young as three." Was his claim.

That you could send me your three-year-old and I could tell you if they might turn out to be a gay or lesbian, and I can prevent it for you. So, again, a lot of these people were kids.

And conversely, you know, he would get parents to send the children to his programs, and then, once the kids would get there, he would tell them that their parents are to blame for them feeling the way they feel. For them having the attractions that they have.

And he would usually try to tie it to some kind of abuse or neglect, whether or not this ever existed. And then he would— if he couldn't find anything like that, he would say, "You know, it was probably just because your parents didn't hug you enough."

And he would say horrible things like “Fathers, hug your sons, because if you don’t some other man’s going to.” Those were his taglines.

So, that’s the thing, he would trick these parents into sending their kids there, and then he would convince the kids that their parents were terrible people. Not because they sent them to this awful camp, but because they were the reason that they had these same-sex attractions.

And he also, he also had this wild belief that at any given time, specifically for men, this was aimed at men, you had to be vigilant, because at any given time, a man who was already heterosexual would be at risk for becoming gay if they experienced some sort of failure in their life.

And so, this constant fear that if you didn’t get a promotion you wanted or, I don’t know, you lost at a round of golf, that you might start becoming gay.

Justin: Explain Barry Manilow, then. He’s gay and everything he does just turns to gold.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: The man hasn’t failed at anything in a 50-some-odd year career.

Sydnee: I don’t think I’ve named a single thing that this guy got right, so.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: This is no surprise.

Justin: Just add it to the list. Well folks, I’m gonna go scream for ten minutes straight, because that was all really horrible. And then we’re gonna take a break and go to the billing department, right Syd?

Sydnee: Let’s tell you about some of our sponsors.

[ad break]

Justin: So, uh, where were we, Syd?

Sydnee: Well, Justin, I’m about to tell you how things fell apart for NARTH.

Justin: Oh, well, that's something.

Sydnee: So, a couple things happened to this really just horrible organization that began to lead to its demise. First of all, there was a Dr. Berger, who was a member of their scientific advisory committee, who wrote a paper in 2006—

Justin: The same Dr. Berger?

Sydnee: That was Bergler.

Justin: Bergler, okay. Sorry.

Sydnee: Different one, yeah. And in it, he said, you know, there are a lot of kids who go to school who are already kind of exhibiting some of these same-sex attractions, or maybe they are non-gender-conforming in terms of their dress or their mannerisms, you know. Just not fitting what they considered at the time standard, binary gender roles, right?

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: And he said, you know, the right way to treat these kids, parents, teachers, the way to handle these kids in your classrooms is to just let whatever happens happen.

So, let's say that all the other kids tease and bully and taunt and humiliate the child who is different. Let it happen. They need to feel shame. They need to feel guilt. And they need to be harassed for who they are. So, basically, it's fine. Just let the natural order of things, and let these kids be, you know, victimized by other children.

So, this was published and this was not received well. No matter what you thought of the LGBTQ community, what you thought of NARTH, what you thought of conversion therapy, the idea that parents and teachers should be condoning that kind of, you know, harassment was not well accepted.

Justin: No kidding, yeah. So you don't think teachers and parents should be deputizing their kids to bully people. That seems like kind of a bad idea.

Sydnee: Exactly. That was pretty well rejected. That was in 2006. Now, soon after that, I guess another member who thought, well, old Berger, man, he got the spotlight for that one, I'm gonna try to take it up a

notch. He wrote a piece— and this has nothing to do with their already persecution of the LGBTQ community. He decided to go a whole other direction and write a piece of their website which kind of tried to justify slavery?

Justin: Hey, how's your committee going? It seems to be pretty bad. It seems like maybe some unorthodox opinions.

Sydnee: Yeah. Yeah. And maybe they're just rampantly trying to offend everyone now with these horrible opinions.

Justin: Yeah. Go figure.

Sydnee: So, these really, these two events really started to lead to the downfall of NARTH and more and more people deciding this organization really wasn't for them, and kind of alienating themselves from the more fringe members of the medical community that had still kind of embraced them.

And kind of the end of it, for the most part, happened actually earlier this year when Dr. Nicolosi died. So, he just died earlier this year. And with that, his practice closed, the Thomas Aquinas Psychological Clinic closed. And there are other doctors and therapists who learned from him and are still out there doing these things, but the giant organization, as it were, has mostly ended.

Now, do not be fooled, though. It is difficult to find NARTH under that name on the internet. But that is because they go by a different name now. The Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity.

Justin: Gross.

Sydnee: But again, do not be fooled. They are very much the same, even though I think— I don't have evidence of this, I think they are moving away, at least from I've read, they're moving away from some of the more overtly physically abusive therapies. The emotional and psychologically abusive therapy that is conversion or reparative therapy is still being done. And as a result of this, there are states that have specifically barred them from seeing children. Some states.

Justin: That's something, I guess.

Sydnee: Not all. Most of the other organizations, things that I mentioned like Love in Action and Exodus, they fell apart and a lot of the reasons— these aren't the only groups— a lot of the reasons that these organizations fell apart is because the leaders came out and said, "We were wrong, and we're sorry, and we're disbanding this group because," in most cases, "I'm gay, and I'm still gay, and I've always been gay and it never worked."

Justin: The people running the groups?

Sydnee: The people running the groups.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: In many cases, they were disbanded and their leaders went on to, you know, marry their partners and, you know, live out the rest of their life as they truly were, and apologize for all the harm that they did.

Even the couple that was on the cover of a magazine was later— same thing happened. It's just because you can't— it's not— it doesn't work! It doesn't work.

And so, a lot of these organizations started disbanding because they said "You know what? This doesn't work." And that was great, and it's wonderful that these people realized they were wrong and apologized.

But the problem is that they didn't stop doing this, at least for the most part, until about a third of the LGBTQ youths in America had been treated in some way with conversion or reparative therapy. One in three.

I said this in the previous episode, but I wanna reinforce this again, conversion or reparative therapy, whatever you wanna call it, has been found to lead to depression, anxiety, self-destructive behavior, drug abuse, homelessness and suicide.

Even now, while it has been discredited by essentially every major medical organization and decent person, including the AAFP— I'm a member of the AAFP, and one of the first things I did as I started doing this research was go look up our position statement.

Justin: [laughs] Yeah, "Are we cool? Okay."

Sydnee: Yeah. I wanna make sure I can still be a member. Yeah, and the AAFP included. But, uh, organizations like the APA and the National Association of Social Workers, they have all said this doesn't work, we don't recommend it, this is not something that— it can be harmful. They've all made that statement, it can do harm.

That being said— and that's great. That's wonderful that everybody's rejected it. That being said, nobody's stopping any of their members from doing it.

So, just because the National Association of Social Workers or the American Psychiatric Association says, "This doesn't work, you shouldn't do it," if one of the their members is performing it on people and harming them, it's not like they're taking their license away or formally reprimanding them or, you know, helping them be accused of malpractice, or anything like that. So, there isn't a lot of aggressive action taken to stop members from doing it. So, some still do.

There have been some individual state court cases that have been effective in punishing specific groups, and like I already mentioned, especially groups that target children.

There are multiple states where it is no longer legal to target children with this kind of therapy. They haven't been able to do that for adults, because the idea is that they are making the choice on their own.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Even though, again, it's essentially malpractice when taken from a medical perspective. And this refusal, like I said, of the major medical organizations to condemn it, allows psychiatrists and psychologists and social workers and counselors, and basically anybody else in medicine who still believes this way, to help organizations like the new incarnation of NARTH and the many others like it to continue in their work. Especially the ones that are kinda partnered with religious organizations.

They're still in business. They are mixing medical treatment, therapy, religious confrontation, try to force people to change who they are. Some of the more recent things that have come out that I've read— a lot of this came from a trial against JONAH, which was a Jewish organization that attempted to change people's sexual orientation through, again, like,

therapy, but also bizarre treatments like having people stand in front of a mirror and remove one piece of clothing at a time as they said mean things to themselves.

Justin: Yuck. Ugh.

Sydnee: And then touching themselves with a therapist in a room. I mean, with the doctors and things in the room.

Justin: Ugh.

Sydnee: Re-enacting past sexual abuses. Things like group nudity and cuddling, like, as these bizarre ideas like this is how you are— this is how you learn how to be comfortable with other men in a non-sexual way. We're all gonna get naked together. I mean, a lot of these are kids, again. Weird things like hold these oranges and they represent testicles.

Justin: Okay...

Sydnee: Yeah...

Justin: There are other fruits. I mean. Out there. You don't have to just pick oranges.

Sydnee: Than oranges?

Justin: Yeah. That's just a bad choice all round.

Sydnee: You don't want to give oranges a bad rap?

Justin: Well, they're way too big. Have they not seen testicles?

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: That's lunacy!

Sydnee: I don't know. I don't know what—

Justin: It doesn't even make sense.

Sydnee: I know, I know. It's nonsensical. It's all nonsensical. They do the same thing with, like, the confrontational therapy where they tell people that you're bad and you're gonna die soon and you're gonna have a miserable life. They call them gay slurs.

They are made— again, the parents are blamed for it, so they are— one specific treatment was that they would give them pillows and say, “This pillow represents your mother, what I want you to do is hit it as hard as you can with this tennis racket until your hands bleed. So that you punish your mother for doing this to you.”

That group specifically lost their court case and was not allowed to do that anymore.

Justin: Great.

Sydnee: Thank goodness. But these are religious organizations that are doing this stuff.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And again, they do it in conjunction with people who claim to be medical professionals, who have the degrees and the licenses, even though I would not call them medical professionals by any stretch. So, they’re saying that it’s scientific. It’s not.

Justin: It’s not.

Sydnee: They also— there are some groups who have tried to play this middle ground, which I think is just as bad. Where they say, “You know what? Maybe you can’t change, but we can at least help you stay celibate forever.”

Which is just so incomprehensibly sad to even think about. But that’s how some people have found their... religious middle-ground. “Well, we won’t persecute these people, we’ll just tell them not to ever have sex, or have a relationship, or experience romantic love. And then they’ll be fine.”

And these are people who we’re assuming want to, by the way. I’m not saying it’s bad if you don’t want to experience romantic love, if that’s not your thing, that’s not your interest, that’s fine. But these are people who, as far as we know, still want to.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And this isn’t just in the US. In other places this is happening. In South Africa, gay men and boys are often forced into conversion camps

where you just basically do a lot of hard labor with the thought it'll make you really masculine if you just do a lot of hard labor.

Justin: Follow that with some Gatorade to rehydrate afterward.

Sydnee: Exactly. Call everybody "dude". Yeah. And, you know, the only thing that has helped has been the tireless work of groups like the Human Rights Campaign, the Southern Poverty Law Center, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, all these different organizations who have kind of taken the route of finding ways to challenge these groups from different angles. So like, in one instance, there was an organization called People Can Change, and they actually challenged them to the FTC, the Federal Trade Commission, because their marketing claims are false.

Justin: Right. You're not fixing anybody, so you're lying.

Sydnee: Right. So, since it's all based on lies, they're actually challenging them in court through that way. Which is a really— and that's also been very successful.

And again, the main thing about all this, in addition to the fact that it's incredibly harmful, entirely discredited by all medical organizations and is based on a diagnosis that isn't a diagnosis at all, it doesn't work. It just doesn't work.

And they've done studies to go back and see, did any of this therapy work? There was a very famous case where a Dr. Spitzer, a very famous psychiatrist had actually done a study where initially he had said, you know what, maybe in some cases this therapy can actually be successful.

Well, in 2012, this was a huge blow to the conversion therapy world, he came out and said, "My study was wrong. I've reviewed my data. I was wrong, I drew terrible conclusions. I should never have done it. It was incredibly harmful. Please forgive me for this, I've done huge harm. This was wrong."

You can't— there's nothing wrong with lesbian people, or gay people, or bisexual people, or transgender people. There is nothing wrong with this community. There's nothing to fix. And none of these things you're doing work at all and they only do harm.

Justin: Yeah, I wanted to clarify something real quick. You've mentioned LGBTQ a few times. Am I correct in assuming, even though we've talked

about, like, this quote-unquote therapy being applied to gay people, like, did you come across anywhere in your research these same principles being applied to transgender people?

Sydnee: Definitely. Anybody who was— who they would have considered, kind of, from their terminology, “deviant” from what they would consider traditional gender roles, gender behavior, presentation.

So, yes, definitely, you would have been subjected to this same kind of treatment whether you were transgender or gay or lesbian or bisexual, or anything other than, you know, heterosexual, cisgender. Anything else was unacceptable throughout history and in these various groups. So.

A lot of, historically, a lot of this treatment was focused on gay men initially. They were victimized initially. But everybody was. That’s not to say lesbians weren’t. But you see, like, historically, a lot of focus on, um, anal sex.

Justin: Just like everything else. Just like everything else, it’s focused on men first.

Sydnee: Oh yeah, you guys have it so hard.

Justin: No, I meant that in like, a—

Sydnee: Oh, I got you.

Justin: Either way, just like, you know.

Sydnee: No, but I mean, yes, all members of the LGBT community were certainly victimized equally, and then different groups by different organizations and to varying extents.

Certainly, I am not saying that any member of this community was not persecuted. And doesn’t continue to be by these groups to this day. I did find this fact that I thought was very interesting. For all of those people out there who do practice conversion therapy or believe that it is wrong to be gay, LGBTQ—

Justin: The Venn diagram of which, I assume, does not overlap with the Sawbones audience extremely prominently. Probably a thin crescent there.

Sydnee: I would hope not. I would hope not, but it also is important to know this. People who are prejudiced against the LGBTQ community die, on average, two and a half years earlier than the rest of their decent human peers.

Justin: Hey! Well, at least we get to end on a happy note.

Sydnee: I tell you, Justin, doing this— doing these episodes—

Justin: That was a joke, sorry.

Sydnee: [laughs] Doing these episodes has— it was really hard to read about all of these horrible things that have been done. But not nearly as hard as it would have been to go through them, so I am not— I am not in any way saying that it was.

But it really made me step back as a physician and think, like, there were a lot of doctors involved in this stuff and they did terrible things. And I started to worry, you know, is that something that at any point, like, as a physician, I could be doing something that we'll look back on in 100 years and say, "What a monster she was, and her peers and her colleagues, to do that kind of thing."

And I've thought about this long and hard, I've done a lot of soul-searching. And I think the difference— I don't think that I am, I think probably we're gonna learn a lot and there are things that I'm doing that are wrong right now, you know, that we're all doing that are wrong and we'll learn how to do better.

But everything I do, and I think most people are this way, I believe that most people are this way, I am led by my true love and compassion for the human race. And I think that if you are led by that, by the acceptance of all of us as equal humans on this planet, you won't do things like this. Only a refusal to believe that or accept that or embody that or an inability to feel that would lead you to do these things.

Justin: That goes ditto for me, except for the parts in this episode when I have audibly and inaudibly wished death on people. So, I don't want that to seem hypocritical, for sure.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: But I just wanna say, real quick, this might have seemed a weird choice for Pride month, I guess, but I just would like to, as a straight dude, I would just like to say, pride, a lot of people probably think of that as individual pride, pride in who you are and your own sexuality and gender identity and what have you.

But I hope that if you take something positive away from this, I hope it's additional pride in your communities, and the community that you share together. Because I think that it is just staggering how much that you have had to endure, and how much people in this community before you have had to endure just for the right to love who they love and be who they wanna be.

And I think that that's really inspiring. So, be proud in yourself and who you are, 100%, but spare some pride for this community that you're part of and how hard they have fought and how far they have come, because it's pretty astounding.

Sydnee: I agree. And for the rest of us who would consider ourselves allies, another thing that you might consider— I mentioned the Human Rights Campaign.

Justin: Yep.

Sydnee: They have done a lot of the work in taking on these different groups. You can always donate to the Human Rights Campaign at [HRC.org](https://www.hrc.org). You can become a member there. There's also, like I mentioned, groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center who do a lot of hard work to fight this.

Justin: I wish you could give anti-donations to some groups. Wouldn't that be nice? If you pay money to take money away from the bad guys?

Sydnee: Well, you can in a sense. There are— obviously, you mentioned Chick-Fil-A before, and they're not doing it now, but they were previously supporting groups that practice conversion therapy.

And finding out businesses that you patronize, finding out if they are donating money to organizations that do this kind of thing is a good thing. Because then you don't go there and don't buy their things anymore. And I think that's a great message to send, is "I won't support organizations that will fund this kind of stuff."

Justin: Yeah. And do your own research on that, cause I feel like Chick-Fil-A has kinda gone back and forth on it. I'm not sure where they're at right now.

Sydnee: I know, I know. I thought that they had stopped— I'm not sure.

Justin: I thought I read they had stopped, but...

Sydnee: Yeah. But do your research on those things, I think that's always good, and then, you know, don't vote for political candidates who endorse this kind of therapy for like, I dunno, vice president, or anything like that.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Or certainly at any level of government. Because they're wrong and it's unscientific, and they're wrong, and it's dangerous, and it's harmful, and it shouldn't be practiced.

Justin: So, there you go. Thank you so much for listening. Thanks to The Taxpayers for the use of their song "Medicines" as the intro and outro of our program. Thanks to MaximumFun.org network, and that's gonna do it for us, Syd. So, until next week, my name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: And as always, don't drill a hole in your head.

[theme music plays]

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