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The absences of LGBTQ-related language in Iowa school handbooks: School handbooks as a catalyst for change

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**The absences of LGBTQ-related language in Iowa school handbooks:
School handbooks as a catalyst for change**

by

Joy Linquist

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The Graduate College will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2017

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ABSTRACT

It is the intention of schools to meet the needs of each student, including students who identify as lesbian, bi-sexual, gay, transgendered, or questioning (LGBTQ). However, practices that discriminate against marginalized populations and a long history of inequities exist in the school system, where the status quo is perpetuated. It is the responsibility of school leaders to be social change agents for justice and equity. School leaders can use school handbooks as a catalyst to make our schools more inclusive, and equitable for each. Student handbooks alone won't promote equity, but they do serve an important role, as they reflect the priorities and values of the school building and district as a whole. In addition, handbooks provide guidelines to aid and support for equitable outcomes, or positive experiences for LGBTQ youth.

The history of schools and purpose of public education is outside the scope of this research, however, it is important to consider at least the alignment or misalignment there might be with regard to the education of students who identify as LGBTQ. This alignment or misalignment was examined in this study to determine the extent to which LGBTQ-related language was present in student handbooks in Iowa secondary schools. These findings of this study evidenced a significant lack of LGBTQ -related language in the texts of the handbook from the sample.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Studies show that the LGBTQ youth experience victimization in schools (Proteat, et. al, 2011 GLSEN, 2015, McClelland Institute, 2017, Russell, 2011, Toomey, 2011, Iowa Pride Network, 2009) and LGBTQ youth are not included in the heteronormative culture of schools (Workman, 2006). Meaning, school artifacts like curriculum, professional learning planning documents, or student handbooks must include LGBTQ-related language. Instead, schools operate with a heteronormative mindset when creating lesson plans and expectations for LGBTQ youth in schools. Each student, including LGBTQ youth, have the right to be included in schools and not left out of student handbooks, an artifact that can set the tone for in what schools believe and for how students are expected to behave. Each student, including LGBTQ youth have the right to be safe at school and not mistreated by peers based on their identity or sexual preference.

Since the research demonstrates that students who identify as LGBTQ are more at risk for suicide, physical assault, and verbal harassment (GLSEN, 2017), it is important for schools to explicitly provide protections and supports in the school artifacts that outline the student expectations. However, school handbooks, designed to outline student expectations, leave out explicit LGBTQ language. Students in schools who do not identify with the heteronormative culture are mistreated, verbally harassed, physically assaulted, experience depression, attempt suicide, and achieve lower grades than their heterosexual peers (GLSEN, 2015, McClelland Institute, 2017, Russell, 2011, Toomey, 2011, Iowa Pride Network, 2009).

A discussion of the LGBTQ youth experience is important to this study, and will be addressed in more detail in the literature review of his paper. However, much research already exists to share the LGBTQ school experience, so it is not my intent to research the LGBTQ experience in Iowa schools.

I am, however, interested in artifacts that schools create to support LGBTQ youth in schools. The artifact that I selected and analyzed for this dissertation study is the student handbook. Handbooks are accessible to students and families and should be LGBTQ-inclusive, but they are not. LGBTQ-inclusive for this purpose of this dissertation study means that artifacts, like handbook text, do not include LGBTQ terms like: lesbian, gay, transgendered, student expectations for transgendered restroom use, locker room use, or use of pronouns.

Handbooks would provide for students and families much-needed guidance in schools, which perpetuate heterosexual norms by leaving out this information. Policies and other artifacts can be utilized as mechanisms to better meet the needs of students, particularly students from marginalized populations. There is a significant gap in the research on this topic, so this study aims to fill that gap.

Schools must create inclusive artifacts throughout the learning community. If these artifacts are not inclusive, students can make assumptions that they are not protected. When documents are not inclusive it also creates assumptions that the community is not inclusive, as the values of the community often are reflected in student handbooks. The research study was designed to determine whether or not school artifacts, handbooks for this dissertation study, use terms that can support LGBTQ youth in schools. These artifacts like school policy and handbooks can help to provide supports or guidance for LGBTQ students and

families. My hope is to inform our profession and provide guidance for administrators to be explicitly protective of students who identify as LGBTQ in our schools. This chapter will provide the problem that exists in schools for LGBTQ youth and the purpose of the study. Then, I will provide a brief overview of the methodology and the theory of action used to frame this study. Finally, this chapter will conclude with the significance of the study and a chapter conclusion.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the enactment of Iowa Safe Schools legislation in 2007, a significant gap remains between the schooling experiences of straight students and those who identify as LGBTQ (GLSEN, 2009, 2015, McClelland Institute, 2017, Russell, 2011, Toomey, 2011, Iowa Pride Network, 2009). Students who identify as LGBTQ in schools are more likely to feel emotionally distressed, attempt suicide, and have a lack of support (Cianciotto and Cahill, 2012). In addition, Cianciotto and Cahill (2012) shared that students who identify as LGBTQ experience lower attendance rates, lower grades, and the future aspirations are impacted as well. I believe that policy or procedure language should be explicit, because that can impact the experience of students, particularly marginalized sub groups who are having negative experiences at school.

School policy guides the work of the learning community and often has legal backing, and district or school procedures must be aligned with these policies. These procedures, often codified in artifacts like handbooks, syllabi, or school blogs, are often created to support the implementation of the policies. These procedural rules are not policy but are often written to help guide school staff. School artifacts can be written documents,

experiences, tangible items or other activities that take place in school. In essence, these artifacts are the guide for school procedures. Students, staff, and families read artifacts like handbooks for guidance. It is critical for handbooks to include terms that support students who identify as LGBTQ. That way, school leaders and the community of learners might understand how to support students better. Halverson (2003) supports the need for school artifacts as he discusses why artifacts are important. School artifacts help to shape systemic practices (Halverson, 2003). He argued that school leaders use artifacts to build the necessary conditions for professional communities. How this can be applied to handbook artifacts is that if the necessary conditions are set, or explicitly stated in handbooks, then systemic practices may be shaped for the future. Systemic heteronormative practices can be challenged with the help of explicit LGBTQ-related language in the text. For this study, I analyzed a network of locally designed artifacts, school handbooks, to gain insight on LGBTQ-related language. School handbooks typically define the school expectations, processes, or procedures of the school. Therefore, I approached this work to take a critical look at the language in school handbooks around inclusiveness for LGBTQ youth.

Purpose of Study

This research study's purpose was to determine in what ways are Iowa secondary school students who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Questioning (LGBTQ) represented in artifacts, specifically student handbooks. It was my intent to explore the extent to which handbook artifacts, use explicit language which could potentially contribute to or improve the negative experiences of LGBTQ students. This

interpretive research study explored a representative sample of student handbooks in Iowa schools.

Student handbooks are used as a communication tool from school to home around the expectations, protective rights, or procedures of the school. Therefore, these texts should be inclusive in nature and representative of the study body. Using tenets of textual analysis and queer theory, I examined the language of student handbooks to better understand the extent to which LGBTQ-related language exists. For this dissertation, my research questions were as follows:

- 1) What is the language in student handbooks as it relates to LGBTQ students?
- 2) What themes, regarding the protection of LGBTQ students, have emerged from the analysis of school handbooks?

This dissertation study addressed the gap in research around LGBTQ-related language, specifically the lack of LGBTQ explicit language found in Iowa school artifacts, school handbooks. Identified themes around practices and procedures were examined. This study is different, because there are no other studies that examine Iowa school handbooks and the extent they include LGBTQ-related language.

Research suggests that explicit language in policy, practices, expectations, or procedures can impact the LGBTQ experience in schools (GLSEN, 2017; McClelland Institute, 2017). Therefore, it was this researcher's intent to examine school handbooks and determine the extent of inclusiveness of LGBTQ-related language as well as make recommendations to Iowa educators based on the findings of this study.

Brief Overview of the Methodology

The methodology I used for this research study was Textual Analysis. I examined a representative sample of secondary student handbooks in the state of Iowa. This handbook analysis examined the extent to which LGBTQ-related language existed. This researcher openly coded for common key terms and analyzed the findings overall. Using the Queer Theory framework, I also looked for emergent themes as they related to explicit and implicit language. Language in the handbook texts that is present or absent can either perpetuate the heteronormative status quo or disrupt it. I used the Queer Theory lens to examine the text and present the findings. This Methodology Chapter 3 explains this process in more detail.

Definition of Terms

Clarification of key terms is necessary to ensure a clear understanding of this research study. Therefore, I have provided a list of key terms and definitions related to schooling and LGBTQ youth below.

Agents- Students or staff of dominant groups in American schools. Examples are: heterosexual, male, white, or Christian.

Targets- Students or staff of oppressed or marginalized groups in American schools. Examples are: homosexual, bi-sexual, transgendered, female, non-white, or non-Christian.

LGBTQ- Students or staff who identify as Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgendered, questioning.

LGBT- Some researchers studied only students who identified as LGBT, not Q. Therefore, this term is present in this research study, not to be confused with LGBTQ.

LGB- Some researchers studied only students who identified as LGB, not T or Q. Therefore, this term is present in this research study, not to be confused with LGBTQ.

Inclusive- A school environment that not just tolerates, but includes students who identify with marginalized target groups. This research study examined specifically the handbooks to determine the extent of inclusiveness, or prevalence of LGBTQ language in the texts. LGBTQ-inclusive language will be defined in Chapter 4.

Artifacts- Any school or district-created documents, particularly student handbooks are examined as critical artifacts analyzed in this research study.

Student Handbooks- School or district-created artifacts that describe the policies, procedures, and expectations of the school community. This research study focused on the student handbooks and the extent to which they are inclusive.

Policies- This research study provides a brief overview of what policies are as compared to Handbooks. Policies are the School Board approved rules of the district. This research study is specifically interested in policies intended to protect students who identify as LGBTQ from Harassment or Bullying, as well to promote inclusiveness in curricular events, extra-curricular events, and inclusion in daily experiences at school.

State and National Policies- State and federal laws that require districts and schools to create board policies that protect students and staff who identify as LGBTQ.

Iowa Safe Schools Act- A Law passed in 2007 that requires Iowa school districts to create a policy that must include the following:

A definition of bullying and harassment.

A statement that all students and adults must not engage in bullying or harassment.

A procedure for reporting bullying or harassment.

A procedure for conducting investigations.

Includes protection based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Must be publicized with no clear distinctions as to how or where.

GSA- Gay Straight Alliance. A student-led organization that promotes positive experiences for LGBTQ youth in schools.

Themes of Transformative World View- A paradigm that takes an ethical stance of inclusion and challenging oppression in social structures (Martens, 2009). This research study uses transformative paradigm to truly transform the school community and to speak for marginalized populations, like LGBTQ students in Iowa schools.

Significance of the Study

The mission of Iowa Safe Schools is critical to the work that educators do. It is, however, the school team who must implement the mission in order for it to be successful in

providing safety and security to Iowa students. One step in the implementation of enacting safe school legislation, is to ensure that faculty, staff, and students know the expectations, protections, processes, and procedures in Iowa schools. Since school expectations are found in student handbooks, it is important to ensure that these artifacts include explicit language. Due to the negative experiences shared by students who identify as LGBTQ (GLSEN, 2014, Robinson, J.P., & Espelage D.L., 2012, Condiannicotto and Cahill, 2012, Bochenek and Brown, 2001), the focus of this dissertation study was the language in the handbooks as a representative sample of Iowa schools in determining the prevalence of LGBTQ –related language.

A gap in the research existed regarding the language school districts use to communicate school-level protections, procedures and expectations in student handbooks. Without including LGBTQ-related language, LGBTQ youth cannot assume that the school intends to create an inclusive environment. By sharing the results of this study with Iowa school leaders, districts will be provided with additional guidance around the need for promoting equity for LGBTQ youth in school handbooks. I will share the findings of this study with organizations like One Iowa, who support schools across the state to become more inclusive overall. One Iowa and other social justice organizations may use the findings of this study to continue to educate districts across the state to support schools in a continuous quest to increase inclusiveness. It is my hope that future school leaders enrolled in Iowa State University read this dissertation study during leadership preparation. In addition, I will share the results with superintendents across the state to hopefully help schools create more inclusive handbooks. School handbooks may become more inclusive with LGBTQ-specific protections in schools. Most importantly, if handbooks become more

inclusive, that could mean more positive experiences for LGBTQ youth in central Iowa Schools.

Limitations and Delimitations

School leaders must be aware of the institutional barriers that exist and counter or dismantle them by increasing awareness of the inequities of the system and promoting equity. Barriers that exist include school leadership values and actions. Community can also have a significant impact on the values of the community which often are revealed through analyzing school artifacts, like handbooks. School handbooks analyzed for this study demonstrated that a change is needed. School leaders can consider how they might be change agents and champions of equity for each student.

This study was delimited to schools in Iowa. This researcher chose Iowa only due to personal interest of making an impact within my own community of learners. The study is limited by the accessibility of updated online handbooks in Iowa. While the handbooks are usually posted online, each may be limited by the school teams who wrote them. Meaning, the limitations of the textual findings are dependent upon the knowledge of the authors. However, the findings of this research can be generalized for all school districts to consider since it is a representative sample of Iowa schools.

Conclusion

To sum up the Chapter 1 Introduction, I first presented the statement of the problem in schools, where students who identify as LGBTQ are treated negatively as compared to their straight peers. I discussed the purpose of the study and defined relevant terms. I also

discussed the significance of this study as well as the limitations and delimitations. Next, I will discuss this study's literature review.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to examine relevant literature related to disparate experiences in schools for LGBTQ youth and the theoretical frameworks through which this problem can be explored. This literature review examines the experiences of LGBTQ youth in schools as compared to their peers. Next, there is a review of policies intended to protect LGBTQ youth in schools as well as some discourse around how the policies may have impacted student experiences. Then, I discuss handbooks as school artifacts, how they are defined by Halverson (2003), their relationship to school policy, and how they can serve to either to perpetuate and/or improve the experiences of marginalized youth. Finally, Queer Theory, the theoretical framework used to guide this study, is explained as it relates to the LGBTQ youth community as a marginalized subgroup in schools.

The LGBTQ Student Experience

The LGBTQ experience in schools is oppressive, where students who do not represent the dominant heterosexual norm are marginalized (Robinson and Espelage, 2011,2012, Proteat et.al, 2011, Garvey and Rankin, 2015, GLSEN, 2015, 2017 McClelland Institute, 2017, Russell, 2011, Toomey, 2011, Iowa Pride Network, 2009). Garvey and Rankin (2015) found that students who are gender-conforming are perceived by peers to be part of a more positive climate in school, whereas peers who are gender non-conforming create for straight peers a perception of school that is less positive. This notion of students needing to conform to a heteronormative culture could be an underlying cause of victimization of students who identify as LGBTQ in schools. This section will discuss in more detail the disparate treatment of LGBTQ youth in school.

Iowa School Climate Data

The Iowa Pride Network's Iowa School Climate Survey (2009) found that LGBTQ youth in Iowa high schools were 84 percent more likely than their straight peers to be physically harassed, 84 percent more likely to be physically assaulted, 79 percent more likely to have lies or rumors spread about them, 39 percent more likely to have had personal property damaged, 78 percent more likely to have skipped class in the past year due to feeling unsafe, 59 percent more likely to have stayed home from school due to feeling unsafe, 2.03 times as likely to be cyber-bullied, and 56 percent more likely to have considered committing suicide.

National School Climate Data

More recently, a national survey conducted with students across the country found that students, who identify as LGBTQ, felt unsafe, heard biased remarks, missed school, experienced harassment, and faced discriminatory practices in school (GLSEN, 2015). Nearly fifty-eight percent of LGBTQ students felt unsafe at school, 31 percent missed at least one day of school due to unsafe or uncomfortable feelings, and over 70 percent avoided activities. Moreover, 85.2 percent of LGBTQ students surveyed experienced verbal harassment, and 27 percent were physically harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression.

This is a problem and may be caused by the heteronormative culture in schools where LGBTQ youth are disenfranchised and not included.

If the GLSEN National School Climate Survey is not compelling enough, the Frances McClelland Institute for Children, Youth, and Families reported on how bullying in

schools impacts Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, and Transgendered (LGBT) youth. For this report, the term Questioning (Q) was not included in the survey, but did find that 90 percent of LGBT teens heard the word “gay” used offensively, 85 percent were verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation. 44 percent were physically harassed because of their sexual orientation (McClelland, 2017).

McClelland Institute Survey Data

The McClelland Institute (2017) found lasting impacts from the negative experiences of LGBT youth in schools. LGBT youth were 2.6 times more likely to report clinical levels of depression, 5.6 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, and twice as likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors. In addition, the victimization of LGBT youth in schools decreases self-esteem, life satisfaction, and social integration (McClelland Institute, 2015).

Depression, suicide, STD, and HIV risks are serious health risk implications of treatment in schools. Dr. Stephen T. Russell, Professor in Family Studies and Human Development at the University of Arizona stated, “We now have evidence of the lasting personal and social cost of failing to make our schools safe for all students” (2017, p.3). These studies show the marginalization of LGBTQ youth in schools and uncovers disparities from the straight experience. It is true that these studies are not necessarily the same students for whom the handbooks in this study were written. However, this research does address the experiences of youth nationally and in Iowa. It is not likely that outcomes of Iowa LGBTQ youth in these 43 schools have totally dissimilar experiences.

Emotional Distress and Suicide

Robinson, J. P., & Espelage, D. L. (2012) discovered huge disparities among LGBTQ students and their heterosexual peers with regard to experiences of victimization and suicidal thoughts and attempts. A research sample of over 11,000 secondary students from Dane County, Wisconsin showed that students who identify as LGBTQ experience a higher rate of victimization in the form of bullying than their heterosexual peers (Robinson, J.P., & Espelage D.L., 2012). Furthermore, this victimization has contributed to students considering and attempting suicide (Proteat et. al, 2011). These researchers argued that this higher rate of victimization for LGBTQ peers attributed to higher rates of suicidal ideation, suicidal attempts, and absences from school. LGBTQ-identified students were 3.3 times as likely to think about suicide, and 3.0 to attempt suicide.

Emotional safety is just as critical as physical safety. There is a need for more explicit language in school artifacts like handbooks, beyond policies that often are not read by students or families. It is this researcher's argument that more needs to be done, including ensuring that our student handbooks in Iowa schools are LGBTQ-inclusive and that school staff implement the safety procedures and support processes for all students, including those who identify as LGBTQ. Implementation in schools is outside the scope of this research, but is worthy to note. No law, policy, or procedure can support students without the implementation from staff and students. An increase in inclusion should increase the safety of LGBTQ youth. Safety includes emotional safety, like ensuring that all students know about supports in schools, have access to inclusive curriculum, access to a restroom aligned with his/her gender identity, or the ability read a student handbook related to LGBTQ youth. If the handbooks are inclusive of LGBTQ-related language, it is possible

that emotional safety could be increased for LGBTQ youth. Studies show that students who identify as LGBTQ are not emotionally or physically safe in schools (Robinson, J.P., & Espelage D.L., 2012).

Some students are so emotionally distressed from treatment at school that they resort to suicide attempts, and some complete the suicide. Cianciotto and Cahill (2012) studied students who identified as lesbian, gay, or bi-sexual (LGB). Their findings highlighted that 33% of LGB youth reported a past suicide attempt. In one particular case that was highlighted in this study, a student's life was threatened in a note reading, "Die, Die...Dkye Bitch, Fuck off. We'll Kill you". When she reported it to a teacher, the response was, "Why does that word bother you? Are you a lesbian?" The principal offered no help either. This student attempted suicide as a result of the bullying and lack of support. This study aims to highlight these examples, because school administration who are agents, or part of dominant groups in society, if unaware of biases, may unintentionally dismiss negative behaviors of other agents and targets, namely LGBTQ youth in schools, are bullied and not protected.

Academic Difficulties Impact LGBTQ Youth

Student attendance, grades, graduation rates, and future aspirations are all impacted by the treatment of LGBTQ youth in schools (Cianciotto & Cahill, 2012, McClelland Institute, 2017, GLSEN, 2015, 2017, Russell, 2011, Toomey, 2011, Iowa Pride Network, 2009).

According to Cianciotto and Cahill (2012), the academic achievement suffers if students identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, and Transgendered (LGBT). Student attendance, grades, graduation rates, and future aspirations all are impacted by the treatment

of LGBT youth in schools. LGBT youth are truant more often and score lower on school performance and satisfaction indicators (Cianciotto & Cahil, 2012). In addition, in 2002, the New York Department of Education reported “torment experienced by many LGBT youth as one of the leading causes for their dropping out of school”, (Cianciotto & Cahil, 2012, p. 50). Cianciotto and Cahill (2012) found that LGBT youth were twice as likely to not make plans for attending post-secondary institutions, less likely to say there were going to college, and reported lower grades than other students. Academic achievement certainly impacts students who identify as LGBTQ, and more severely when students were harassed because of their identification (Cianciotto, J. and Cahil, S., 2012).

Because LGBTQ youth were treated poorly in schools, there was a need for policy, practices, and procedures to protect them. Some researchers argued that anti-bullying policies were not enough to keep students safe who identify as LGBTQ, and they recommend additional policies to promote safety and support (Robinson, J.P., & Espelage D.L., 2012). In the next section I examine the policies that are intended to support LGBTQ youth.

Efforts to Improve the LGBTQ Student Experience

Human Rights Watch (2001) reported and claimed a systematic injustice to students who identified as LGBTQ in America’s schools. The report appropriately entitled, “Hatred in the Hallways”, calls out the government, school officials, teachers, and administrators for failing to keep students who identify as LGBTQ safe from “discrimination, harassment, and violence” (p. 5). Human Rights Watch interviewed 140 youth, ages twelve to twenty-one from October 1999-2000 in California, Georgia, Kansas, Massachusetts, New York, Texas,

and Utah. The team also interviewed 130 adults including staff and parents (Human Rights Watch, 2001). According to Bochenek and Brown (2001), “deeply held prejudices against marginalized groups can never justify violations”, and that in this report, they documented the, “devastating impact of pervasive animus towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered youth” (p. 4). For example, in 1999, according to the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey, LGBT youth were nearly three times as likely as heterosexual peers to fight, to be assaulted, or threatened with a weapon and four times as likely to be truant for not feeling safe” (Bochenek and Brown, 2001). This report brought to light the systemic social injustice in schools for students who were not part of the heteronormative culture.

Following this report, policies were reviewed in many districts in the country to support the safety of LGBTQ youth. However, some districts simply sent memos, instead of rewriting a policy. An example of this is in 1998, a Denver school district sent a memo to all high school principals addressing its anti-harassment policies and that schools were to, “ensure that students are informed that intolerance against others, including gay and lesbian students, will not be tolerated” and to “remind staff members that the school not ignore inappropriate remarks or slurs, for in doing so, they endorse them” (Bochenek & Brown, 2001, p. 21). A memo artifact, while a seemingly active step to support LGBTQ students in schools, once again marginalized LGBTQ students as not important enough to protect them in schools. While this step was intended to promote equity and safety for LGBTQ youth, a memorandum from a principal lacks the legal protection desperately needed by students who identified as LGBTQ in our nation’s schools. School districts needed strong protective policies with inclusive language, and school staff who would implement the policies.

The lack of clear policies was evident in the “Hatred in the Hallways” report by the Human Rights Watch (2001) that uncovered a perverse inequity in our nation’s schools, where students felt unsafe. The Human Rights Watch offered recommendations to our nation’s schools. Key recommendations included a review of district nondiscrimination policies for inclusion of protections for LGBTQ students. There was a call for “explicit language” to protect students based on sexual orientation or gender identity. In addition, all schools were asked to “immediately evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of their nondiscrimination policies” (Human Rights Watch, 2001, pp. 9-16) in an effort to close the gap between theory and practice. This report shared the importance of state legislatures to enact legislation to protect LGBTQ youth, for the United States Department of Education to monitor, for schools of education to include LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, and finally for federal and state governments to enact legislation to protect staff and students from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Without LGBTQ laws and protective policies in place, all Iowa students are not safe, including students who identify as LGBTQ. It is important to note that LGBTQ students attending schools with LGBTQ-protective policies did report fewer negative treatments than students who attend schools without protective policies (GLSEN, 2014). The policies that were created are a good step toward creating more safe environments for students. However, more needs to be done, because overall students who identify as LGBTQ are less safe than their straight peers (Cianciotto & Cahil, 2012). Explicit LGBTQ-related terms and protective language in school artifacts, like student handbooks is important. The next section of this chapter will discuss national and state protective policies that have been created with the intention to keep LGBTQ youth safe in schools.

National and State Policies Intended to Improve the LGBTQ Experience

Without LGBTQ-related laws and protective policies in place, all Iowa students may not be safe, especially those who identify as LGBTQ. LGBTQ students attending schools with LGBTQ-related policies reported more positive experiences than students who attend schools without protective policies (GLSEN, 2014). First, I will address the reason behind the need for state and national protections. Then, I will discuss the national and state protective policies that have been created. Despite the policies and procedures that are in place, however, Iowa students, who identify as LGBTQ, are victims of physical and verbal harassment (Iowa Pride Network, 2009, GLSEN, 2015, Cianciotto, J. and Cahil, S., 2012). They are harassed by their peers and feel unsafe in Iowa high schools (Iowa Pride Network, 2009).

The Safe Schools Improvement Act and the Student non-Discrimination Act at the federal level both support LGBTQ students in the United States (U.S.) (Retrieved 2-8-15, <http://www.iowasafeschools.org>). The Safe Schools Improvement Act requires all public K-12 schools to enact anti-bullying policies that include specific protections for bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity. These laws make a difference. In 2005, GLSEN found that students at schools with comprehensive anti-bullying policies similar to the one required by the Safe Schools Improvement Act were far less likely to report harassment (Retrieved November 28 2014, <http://www.glsen.org>). In addition, other legislation, such as the Student Non-Discrimination Act, prohibits discrimination in public schools based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. The next section of this literature review will examine the state-level policies.

State-level Policies

In Iowa, a task force was created in 2002, and leaders across the state worked for five years hosting community forums with regard to the importance of protecting all students. On September 1, 2007, Governor Chester John “Chet” Culver and Lt. Governor Patty Jean Pool Judge, with the help of State Representative Roger Wendt and State Senator Michael W. “Mike” Connolly, enacted the Safe Schools Law, SF 61, intended to protect Iowa students who identify as LGBTQ.

Iowa law required school districts and accredited nonpublic elementary and secondary schools to adopt the board policy. Since 2007, the Iowa Safe Schools Law requires school districts to have an anti-bullying and harassment policy. This policy, by law, must include the following:

- A definition of bullying and harassment.
- A statement that all students and adults must not engage in bullying or harassment.
- A procedure for reporting bullying or harassment.
- A procedure for conducting investigations.
- Includes protection based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity.
- Must be publicized with no clear distinctions as to how or where.

These Bullying and Harassment policies must include protection based on “the following traits or characteristics: age, color, creed, national origin, race, religion, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical attributes, physical or mental ability or disability, ancestry, political party preference, political belief, socioeconomic status, and familial status” (Retrieved 2-8-15, <http://www.iowasafeschools.org>). Local school boards

have the authority to add to this list, but may not omit any of the listed characteristics. The Iowa Safe Schools Law is intended to be LGBTQ-inclusive because it includes bullying and harassment policy requirements protection based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Iowa Code (2015, February 8) does grant specific protections to LGBTQ youth, including in athletic participation. Iowa Code Section 216.9 will not allow “unfair practices and discriminatory acts in education” (Retrieved from <http://www.iowasafeschools.org>). LGBTQ polices exist in Iowa to protect student-athletes from being discriminated against. The Iowa High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) created and addresses LGBTQ-inclusive guidelines. The Iowa Code (2015, February 8) defines gender identity as meaning a person’s identity regardless of assigned sex at birth (Retrieved from <http://www.iowasafeschools.org>). Transgendered student-athletes are protected by guidelines under the IHSAA (Retrieved from <http://www.iahsaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Transgender-Guidelines.pdf>), including:

Definition of gender identity.

Use of gender-neutral pronouns and name changes.

Access to locker rooms and bathrooms.

Overnight accommodations.

Apparel and dress codes.

Confidentiality.

The American Civil Liberties Union (2017) reports that the following states have laws Intended to protect transgendered students: Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut,

Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Vermont, Washington, and the District of Columbia (Retrieved September 9 from <https://www.aclu.org/>). General protections of the First Amendment, such as freedom to express one's own gender identity through speech or clothes, are not explicitly discussed often in schools. Discussing policies with parents and students, as well as staff training, could be helpful.

According to a recent article in the Des Moines Register, Iowa leads the nation in LGBT student protection (Ryan, 2015). However, recent data suggest that these students do not feel safe or protected in their schools (GLSEN, 2015). In fact, as previously stated, Human Rights Watch (1999-2000) found that there is a “devastating impact of pervasive animus towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered youth” (p.4). Therefore, creating LGBTQ- protective practices or procedures is at best a critical starting point, for school districts in Iowa and across the country to create safe schools for these marginalized groups. Students who identify as LGBTQ are outside of the dominant culture of heteronormativity and school artifacts are created with heteronormative biases that must be examined and dismantled.

School artifacts can be a catalyst to transform schools by promoting equity. Handbooks are a key artifact in schools that can help to set the tone for conditions for equity in schools if the text includes LGBTQ-related terms and guidance is provided to students regarding expectations to meet the needs of subgroups who are marginalize in schools.

Handbooks as Key Artifacts

Since there has been a state law created to protect youth in schools, yet, LGBTQ youth remain marginalized and unsafe, more needs to be done (Iowa Safe Schools Law 2007, GLSEN, 2015). We should be more aware of these institutional barriers and counter them as change agents. We must dismantle these barriers by calling them out and being explicit about the expectations, procedures, and protections for all students, specifically for LGBTQ youth in Iowa schools. One way to combat the heteronormative culture in schools is to explicitly state LGBTQ-related language in artifacts like school handbooks. Some studies suggest that for marginalized populations that explicit inclusive language is needed (Wherry, 2009) and that explicit language can increase safety (Workman, 2006).

Artifacts are defined as routines, procedures, programs, or policies that help leaders shape the practices in schools (Halverson, 2003). Artifacts are created by districts to support the work of the learning community. School handbooks are an example of an artifact that supports the learning community. School handbooks are handed to students and parents alike. In these handbooks are descriptions of the practices, procedures, and even some specific policy is mentioned. Therefore, the network of artifacts help to build community in schools to influence practices. For example, artifacts like handbooks help to guide the work of the learning community. Iowa state law does mandate specific protective language intended to combat bullying of LGBTQ youth in schools. This mandated language will be shared in detail in a future section of this paper. In addition, as stated previously, it is important for leaders to become more aware of the hidden meaning behind textual silences and non-inclusive culture in schools. Handbooks are often written to help define the expectations, protections, processes and/or procedures of the school. Often, what is deemed

important at school is what is printed in student handbooks. I have been a school administrator for the past eight school- years, and I have served on the policy committee in one Iowa district, as well as revised multiple handbooks for schools at the high school and middle school level. This process is often one where schools include staff input to ensure that communication of school expectations, protections, processes and/or procedures are clear for all stakeholders. This process does include district-mandated text as well, but often leaves out student input and LGBTQ representation or voice.

For example, handbooks explicitly state the disciplinary procedures of the schools. Therefore, if a student who identifies as LGBTQ is harassed, explicit language of protection would be helpful for stakeholders to hold students accountable for their actions. In addition, when all students, staff, and families read the handbook with inclusive, explicit language that protects students who identify as LGBTQ there might be fewer incidents involving harassment of LGBTQ youth. Handbooks typically have little to no oversight, whereby school teams set the expectations in this artifact. While the intent of the handbook language might be supportive in nature to all students, when it is actually implemented by schools, the subjective language and heteronormativity of the text provides no clear guidance for LGBTQ youth. It is also important to note that student handbook language usually reflects community values. This too can cause the handbook text to not align with the needed protections of LGBTQ youth.

From Policy to Handbooks

It is important to include explicit language in handbooks, to eliminate doubt around the protections for LGBTQ youth in schools. This study explores the prevalence or absence

of explicit language that may support or undermine inclusive practices for LGBTQ youth. As stated previously, school handbooks are important artifacts, because the texts provide guidelines for student expectations, practices, and procedures.

Even when policy is discussed and developed, there exists a gap between policy and implementation. Hill (2006) argues that language matters when it comes implementation. She mentioned that the meaning of words is shaped by context and that the technical language matters; precise definitions and terms are critical as it relates to policy. The discourse around technical or explicit language in policy is key for school handbooks. Honig (2006) examines implementation of policy and the trends regarding why policy gets implemented and why it does not. According to Honig (2006), educational trends suggest a need to re-examine the gap between policy and implementation, and that the meaning of words shapes the context. This is important because, despite policies attempting to protect students, disparities still remain between LGBTQ and straight youth in schools. An example of policy that has been in effect since 2007 in Iowa will be discussed in the next section.

Regardless of the efforts of legislators to pass laws that require districts to combat bullying and harassment, LGBTQ youth are treated poorly compared to their straight peers (Iowa School Climate, 2009, GLSEN, 2015). Iowa is a state with a compliancy law that instructs all districts to have a bullying and harassment code. This code requires all districts to have an inclusive board policy that must include the following:

A statement that all students and adults must not engage in bullying or harassment.

A definition of bullying and harassment.

A procedure for reporting bullying or harassment.

A procedure for conducting investigations.

Includes protection based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Must be publicized with no clear distinctions as to how or where.

These policies can be helpful, but if they are not explained in student handbooks and accessible to students and families they can be useless. School handbooks identify expectations and procedures that set the stage for conditions. Therefore, leaders might consider adding more explicit LGBTQ-related language in the handbooks that include LGBTQ-related terms and supports available. Then, handbooks can be a catalyst for change if accessible.

Previous Research on School Handbooks

What research has shown regarding handbook language is that the language of the handbook can be the primary focus of social change (Burl, 2012) and that the discourse is not inclusive without the explicit rhetoric of those who aim for inclusion (Everett, 2015). The textual language of student handbooks when analyzed may reveal a significant lack of inclusiveness.

Language in handbooks is important, and can be a catalyst for social change. One researcher examined the language in handbooks as it relates to the personal experience of human touch. Burl (2012) used Textual Analysis to study school handbook policies regarding student-to-student touch. He argued on the importance of school handbooks that, “Although high school student handbooks and codes of conduct appear humdrum and innocuous, they play a large part in the broad discourse about touch in America. They may be the most important documents in the controversial discourse about student-to-student touching” (p. 5). He used textual analysis to study the policies on student-to-student touch in

Michigan high schools. What society values, finds its way into artifacts developed by school leaders.

This particular study examined student-to-student touch and created text to determine to what degree touch was acceptable in schools in Michigan. The researcher analyzed the text of the school handbooks and constructed meaning regarding what society in Michigan values. Specifically, Burl (2012) tried to construct the meaning of “touch” through the textual analysis of school handbooks (p. 8). This study is similar to the handbook study in my research where I tried to construct meaning around the values of communities based on the prevalence of LGBTQ-inclusive language found in school handbooks. What schools, community, and school leaders value, can be found in handbooks.

Burl (2012) found that handbooks often unpacked policy for students but still focused on the perceptions of adults, not the students (p. 6). Therefore, the school handbook text analyzed in Burl’s 2012 study adopted the administrative discourse, not the discourse of the students’ definition of touch. Text created in handbooks describing student-to-student touch was most often contextualized as, “inappropriate”, “fighting”, “battery”, “assault”, “sexual”, “groping”, or “public displays of affection”(Burl, 2012, p. 10). The language was all prohibitive in nature and widely negative. Human touch as a positive interaction was rarely found in the handbooks of this Michigan study (Burl, 2012). Burl also found ambiguous language where students and family would need to figure out the meaning behind the text. He argued that the texts, “do not always use explicit or specialized language to define concepts” (9). This study called out a need for explicit language in school handbooks to specifically help the learning community decode the policy and understand

the meaning of touch for high school students. Similarly, in my study I examined the text of Iowa school handbooks.

Theoretical Framework: Queer Theory

Queer Theory focuses on how individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered, yet does not objectify them. Instead, this approach examines the cultural and political realms of society and aims to hear the voices of those who have been suppressed (Gamson, 2000). While this study does not include the actual voices of LGBTQ youth, it does support the need to hear their voices through representative texts, like student artifacts handbooks as an example. Queer Theory helped to frame this work and uncover institutional policies and handbook language.

Brief History of Queer Theory

Queer Theory has its roots in what is defined as the Homophile Movement at the end of the 19th century, specifically in Germany, as liberation movement began to increase tolerance of homosexuality and recognize it as a “natural human phenomenon” (Jagose, 1996, p. 22, Lauritsen and Thorstad, 1974). In 1869 German legislators were considering laws to make homosexual acts illegal for men. Karoly Maria Benkert opposed the legislation and wrote a letter to the German minister. Hence, 1969 marked the centennial anniversary of gay liberation (Jagose, 1996). Benkert made the rightful claim against the oppressive heteronormative penal code by stating that homosexuality, “neither harmed anybody nor infringed on their rights” (Jagose, 1996, p. 23). Berkert’s letter was crafted with explicit language to overturn the oppressive laws of the society. He proposed a codification of explicit, protective language for gay men. My research study also considers the need for

explicit LGBTQ-related language in student handbooks. And this study will examine the extent to which LGBTQ-related language exists or is left out in Iowa student handbooks.

In 1924, the Chicago Society for Human Rights was the first recorded organization in America to demonstrate protective language for Americans who identified as LGB, however, this organization was implicit in doing so (Jagose, 1996). Instead of boldly stating protections for homosexuals, it called them out as having, “mental and psychic abnormalities” (Jagose, 1996, p. 24) that have led to their lifestyles and called out that basic human rights were being withheld. In this case, implicit language intended to support rights of the marginalized, can cause misunderstandings that further oppress, rather than liberate. Therefore, in my research study examining student handbooks, I looked for explicit and implicit language that is intended to protect students who identify as LGBTQ.

In 1953, the first issue of *One*, a homosexual magazine, was published. This magazine explicitly stated pride in being gay (Jagose, 1996). Following the publication of *One*, an organization called Mattachine Society anticipated gay liberation to become mainstreamed and they continued to represent minority populations, specifically homosexual men who were being oppressed by the dominant culture (Jagose, 1996). The liberation of lesbians was supported by the Daughters of Bilitis, who also explicitly stated support against the heteronormative society that oppressed homosexuals (Jagose, 1996).

On June 17, 1969 an event happened in New York that left that date to be referred to as Stonewall Day. Police raided a gay and drag bar in New York that was called Stonewall Inn and riots erupted (Jagose, 1996). Queer Theory roots grew as a natural response after Stonewall Day. In 1972, Dennis Altman discussed the relationship between gay liberation and other counter-culture movements (Jagose, 1996). He wrote *Homosexual Oppression and*

Liberation which criticized the ‘American Dream’ and argued against the marginalization of lesbian and gay Americans (Jagose, 1996). Queer Theory was emerging as a gay liberation philosophy that was, “aimed to secure more than tolerance for homosexuality “(Jagose, 1996, p. 40).

Queer Theory Today

Ticcotto (2017) wrote about Queer Theory and its introduction in elementary school. A University of Arizona professor, Dr. Kristin Gunckel (2017) argued to introduce Queer Theory in elementary school. Queer Theory, as described by Gunckel (2017) debunks the idea that heterosexuality is the only normal form of sexuality. Queer Theorists like Gunckel (2017) use a critical lens and examine why heterosexuality is considered the norm and challenges the thinking to disrupt the current status quo of a binary system of sexuality. This work can stop the disenfranchisement of populations like LGBTQ youth. Instead of society constructing meaning that heterosexuality is a preferred orientation (Gunckel, 2017), with more inclusive artifacts, like handbooks, LGBTQ youth may increase positive experiences at school and heteronormativity challenged. Explicit language in artifacts like school handbooks is critical to this process.

If handbooks and other school artifacts considered more LGBTQ-related language, and not wholly comprised of heterosexual text, a school community can help debunk the idea that the only norm is to be straight. Instead, students who identify as LGBTQ may feel included and valued as part of the normative culture in schools if the artifacts schools create include LGBTQ-related terms. Queer Theory helped to inform this study, as

heteronormative culture exists and the absence of LGBTQ-related terms in school handbooks perpetuates that norm.

Queer Theory Informing this Study

Despite policies that were enacted with the intent to protect LGBTQ students, these students still experience discrimination. As a reminder, 66% of LGBTQ youth in our nation's schools reported some discriminatory practices or policies, and sixty-five percent reported that others have experienced it (GLSEN School Climate Survey, 2014). Therefore, Queer Theory would argue that the heteronormativity of school culture must be disrupted. One way to disrupt this norm is to examine procedures and expectations defined by school handbooks and other artifacts that perpetuate the status quo in schools. Using the tenants of Queer Theory and studies on the LGBTQ experience of heteronormative school culture, this research will help to fill the gap in understanding around handbook artifacts and how the language that is present or absent speaks to Iowa school culture as perpetuating the status quo.

Conclusion

Queer Theory was the theoretical framework used to guide this study. Chapter 2 first examined the pervasive negative experiences of LGBTQ youth in schools. Schools marginalize LGBTQ youth and school artifacts, like handbooks, perpetuate the victimization of students in that subgroup. Chapter 2 outlined the relevant literature related to LGBTQ experiences in schools for youth, then a review of policies intended to protect LGBTQ youth in schools was presented. I also specifically addressed the role that handbooks could play in the disruption of the heteronormative culture of schools while also

providing discussion on Queer Theory and how that framed this study. I discussed how handbooks as school artifacts, were defined by Halverson (2003) and their relationship to school policy. School handbooks may either perpetuate the status quo or if LGBTQ-related terms, guidelines, and supports are included in handbooks, the experiences of these marginalized youth can improve. Therefore, it is important to consider that heteronormative culture and school artifacts that perpetuate that norm should be examined and changed. The next chapter will discuss the methods utilized for this research study.

CHAPTER 3. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the design and methodology that was used to answer these questions. First, however, there will be a brief explanation of my positionality and the world view that framed this study. Next, an overview of the method and design will be shared. Then, I will explain the selected research design, the qualitative method, instrument, and a description of the sample selection method. Finally, I will provide an overview of the data analysis process, limitations of this study, and ethical considerations of this research.

Explicit Language

This research study was designed to gain an understanding around the specific language in school student handbooks in Iowa and to uncover the extent of inclusivity of the LGBTQ-related language in handbooks. Some studies suggest with regard to marginalized populations that explicit inclusive language is needed (Wherry, 2009) and that explicit language can increase safety (Workman, 2006). Therefore, student handbooks *could* result in fewer negative experiences for students who do not fit into the heteronormative structure of schools. This research study aims to determine to what extent school artifacts, handbooks for this research study, include LGBTQ-related terms.

Using tenets of textual analysis and queer theory, I examined the language of student handbooks to answer the research questions below:

- 1) What is the language in student handbooks as it relates to LGBTQ students?
- 2) What themes, regarding the protection of LGBTQ students, have emerged through the analysis of school handbooks?

Positionality

I am a White, female, Christian, married, heterosexual, a school principal, and a mother. I understand that most of my identity groups are agents, with the exception of being a female where I can be a target in some groups. No school experiences that I had will ever compare to the negative experiences of many k-12 students who identified as LGBTQ in Iowa schools over the years. While not all experiences are negative, the experiences of my two first cousins was horrific for them. One identified as male, and his sister identified as female. Both were harassed, and harmed emotionally and physically in their schools in Iowa. My role with regard to this research is that I am committed to supporting students in Iowa who identify as LGBTQ. I feel a professional and personal responsibility to protect Iowa students. I am a principal of a middle school in Iowa where many students identify as LGBTQ.

My personal relationship with my two cousins who once identified as lesbian and gay provided the motivation for me to increase protection and support for individuals who identify as LGBTQ in Iowa schools. My cousin who identified as female until this year, now identifies as male. This is important, because it helped me to understand gender identity and orientation can be fluid. It also helped me to understand that my cousins needed transformative leaders like me in their schools to help and support. Unfortunately, that was not the case for them, but it is the case for my students at Harding Middle School where I serve as principal.

My cousins are considered targets and I am, like many in schools, an agent. Agents have privilege and targets are oppressed by agents or systemic structures. The idea of the target and the agent is common knowledge for those who study cultural proficiency

continuum, and LGBTQ youth in schools are targets. Targets need to be protected by the laws, policies, handbook expectations, staff, and by students.

I am hopeful that all districts have policies in place, especially since Iowa law requires them. My biases include a strong belief that all students are entitled to protective policy and implementation of that policy. I also believe that school should be inclusive. I am currently supporting our Gay Straight Alliance at my school to create more inclusive curriculum experiences and a more inclusive handbook. For these reasons, it is important to analyze school policy and handbooks related to LGBTQ inclusiveness.

I identify as heterosexual and part of the dominant culture, so it may be difficult for me to recognize some of my own biases. Thus, it is important that I acknowledge this possibility. In addition, I will attempt to control for this bias by using Queer Theory as a theoretical framework. This framework will allow me to examine schools and my own thinking with a critical lens.

Explicit protective language for students who identify as LGBTQ is likely not part of the norm in most schools. I assume this, because I have served in Iowa schools since 1995 as a student teacher, classroom teacher, high school athletic and academic coach, consultant, School Improvement Leader, Associate Principal and Principal. There have been thousands of school artifacts created, read, analyzed, and written by me over the past 22 years. These school-created artifacts guide decision-making, teaching and learning, and also guide expectations in school. One artifact that supports students, staff and families to gain understanding of the school-wide expectations is the student handbook. I believe it is important for school leaders to examine school artifacts with an equity lens to determine

whether the artifacts, like handbooks, supports each student through the terms and phases found in the texts.

It is important to note that I advocated in my school, Warren G. Harding Middle School, to have a more LGBTQ- inclusive handbook. I had been advocating for that for a few years. I am proud to mention, that while our school is not part of this research sample, we now have included some model LGBTQ-related terms and explanations in the text of our school handbook and the district's middle school handbook.

As a school leader, I have had several families over the past few years meet with me regarding the transitioning experiences of their students. We have discussed restroom use, safety, and support to help the students while at school. I believe that it is critical to explicitly state the rights of transgendered students in school handbooks. Therefore, I collaborated with the Chief of Human Resources and Executive Directors of my district to promote the inclusion of LGBTQ-related language in student handbooks. I am proud of the leadership mindsets and ethical beliefs to meet the needs of each student in our district. The district consulted with our attorneys to ensure that the text language was consistent with Iowa law and was included in the text of the handbook. Our district's approach to meeting our students' needs was aligned with best practices and for that I am very proud. I am hopeful that other school leaders read this dissertation study and use model language in their school handbooks in the future as well. I am hopeful that this transformative approach is encouraging to other leaders.

Transformative World View

My positionality discussed above provides a bit of insight into my worldview. I used a transformative worldview as the motivation behind this work. A researcher uses transformative paradigm to truly transform communities through the work and to speak for marginalized populations, like LGBTQ students in Iowa schools.

I utilize a transformative worldview to ensure that that artifacts, like handbooks, are promoting equity, rather than oppressing already marginalized populations in schools. Handbook artifacts represent the agenda of the school and this language will continue to oppress minority populations without being explicit. This dissertation study was designed to examine the handbooks in Iowa schools for the purpose of publishing the results and making a change by transforming student handbooks in schools to be LGBTQ-inclusive. This transforming of student handbooks, as Mertens (2010) describes, is aligned with how the transformative paradigm emerged, “in response to individuals who have been pushed to the societal margins throughout history and who are finding means to bring their voices into the world of research” (p. 10). In the previous literature review I described a brief history of Queer Theory, and in that description there was a history of gay and lesbian populations being oppressed and pushed to the margins of society much like the Transformative World View describes.

I selected the Transformative Paradigm for this dissertation study, because as a Middle School Principal in Iowa I recognize a need to increase inclusiveness in schools. I also support the Transformative World View notion that as a researcher, my ethical focus is on human rights and that the implications of this research should be to dismantle the system

where a, “broad range of people” are “generally excluded from mainstream society” (Mertens, 2010, p.11).

Educators are social change agents, and thinking should align with a Transformative Paradigm where, “respect, beneficence, and justice” (Mertens, 2010, p. 12) are paramount and that I should be constantly focused on social justice. In this dissertation study, I examined student handbooks to understand the extent to which LGBTQ-related terms are present in the texts. This research study identified the dominant narrative and emergent themes will be presented in the findings of Chapter 4 of this dissertation. Later in Chapter 5, recommendations on how to best promote equity using handbook texts will be discussed. A discussion of the implications of the emergent themes will also be addressed. The next section will discuss further the significance of this study.

Significance of the Study

From this work, leaders will become more aware of the hidden textual meanings and absence of LGBTQ-related language in school artifacts like student handbooks. Not only school leaders, but also other stakeholders like students, parents and community, may have an interest in this work. Parents may desire to learn more about the policies or practices, both in theory and action, which may protect and support their children. Teachers and other staff will learn more about how policies in Iowa districts protect students appropriately. School leaders will learn about including LGBTQ-related language to consider for handbooks. Most importantly, students who identify as LGBTQ will be directly impacted if school leaders determine that the policies, procedures, and written handbook language are not LGBTQ inclusive, and they take corrective action. Furthermore, if schools

take corrective action and increase the social justice in the learning communities, this will impact society to disrupt the notion that heterosexuality must be the norm.

Regarding the disruption of the notion of heteronormativity, this design and methodology drew from Queer Theory, where I analyzed and coded the text for inclusion or exclusion of words. Davis et al (2015) used text analysis through a critical lens as they focused on language that was present and absent. Coding also helped determine the themes that are present in handbooks of Iowa secondary schools. Similarly, I analyzed and coded for themes by the key words or statements related to LGBTQ youth. From my experience as a school principal, I anticipated some of the common words I coded for are as follows: all, every, each, all students, inclusion, anti-bullying/harassment, sexual orientation, gender identity, and GSA (Gay Straight Alliance). I also analyzed for the absence of inclusive language. The next section of this paper will discuss in more detail the approach I took to analyze the text.

Limitations and Delimitations

This Qualitative Textual Analysis dissertation study is confined to Iowa school districts only. I only included Iowa schools, because I have an interest in improving Iowa schools for students who identify as LGBTQ. Further research that can support this work will would be to uncover the experiences of Iowa students in secondary school who identify as LGBTQ. For this dissertation study, I am only concerned with the handbook language that could potentially impact treatment of Iowa students who identify as LGBTQ. This study is limited by the knowledge of Iowa learning communities who created the artifacts, or handbooks. This knowledge is limited, and handbooks may not be inclusive because of a

lack of institutional knowledge. This is worthwhile for any school leader to read as a guide to create school artifacts, not just handbooks, in each community. This is also a worthwhile study, because there is a significant gap in the research around secondary school handbook language expectations to support students who identify as LGBTQ.

School leaders must be aware of the institutional barriers that exist and counter or dismantle them by increasing awareness of the inequities of the system and promoting equity. Barriers stand in the way of the much needed social change impact transformation. Barriers include school leadership values and actions. Community can also have a significant impact on the values of the community which often are revealed through analyzing school artifacts, like handbooks. If school handbooks analyzed in the texts of this study are found to be void of explicit LGBTQ-related language, a change is needed.

This study was delimited to schools in Iowa. This researcher chose Iowa only due to personal interest of making an impact within my own community of learners. The study is limited by the accessibility of updated online handbook artifacts in Iowa. While the handbooks are usually posted online, each may be limited by the school teams who wrote them. Meaning, the limitations of the textual findings are dependent upon the knowledge of the authors of these artifacts. However, the findings of this research can be generalized for all school districts to consider since it is a representative sample of Iowa schools.

Textual Analysis Studies

For this research study, I chose Textual Analysis as my approach to examining 43 handbook texts. My approach drew from the work Vasquez, J., Brown, K.D, and Brown, A.L., (2012). Vasquez et. al (2012) used Critical Race Theory lens and Textual Analysis

approach to examine the text of standards. Vasquez et al. (2012) examined student social studies standards. These researchers uncovered how these standards addressed race, but at the same time also marginalize populations. This process the “illusion of inclusion” (Vasquez et.al., 2012). Researchers examined the text for inclusion and exclusion of explicit race terms in the standards. They also examined how color, race, and racism appeared in text. First, they documented the frequency of terms like race and racism in text. Second, they used a critical lens to examine issues of race and racism in the curriculum. They highlighted relevant standards in the curriculum, and coded each as a reference (Vasquez et al., 2012 and Davis, et al. 2015). Lastly, they made meaning from the analysis.

This work also drew from a study done by Davis, Gooden, and Micheaux (2015). This research focused on the School Leadership Standards and the race language that was explicitly stated in these standards. They found that the leadership standards did not explicitly reference race, and suggested the potential impact that could have on school policy or the implementation or accountability of the education of all students (Davis et al 2015). Therefore, my study focused heavily on the explicit language with regard to LGBTQ youth in schools.

Gooden (2012) argued through critical theories, and textual analysis that voices of the marginalized will be heard and that when these voices are omitted from the leadership standards, the status quo will be perpetuated. Students, who identify as LGBTQ, have been marginalized and left out of handbooks, curriculum, and safety policies or procedures. This omission could impact the overall experiences of LGBTQ youth. School artifacts, like handbooks should be LGBTQ-related and explicit.

Additional studies that helped frame this research design of Textual Analysis all examined texts using the process of finding relevant vocabulary, coding the text with common words and themes, and making meaning from emergent themes (Fairclough, 2003, Jerskey, 2006, Wiemik 2002, Davidson and Cliff 2015, and Workman 2004). These researchers also examined explicit, inclusive language as well as language that is present or absent in texts.

What this textual analysis study contributes to Iowa school leaders is a more comprehensive analysis of various district policies that are intended to protect LGBTQ youth. To learn more about the current LGBTQ procedures in Iowa schools, this research will examine Iowa school handbooks for inclusive LGBTQ language. As mentioned in previous sections of this paper, Iowa law prohibits discrimination against students based on the following characteristics: Age, Color, Creed, National origin, Race, Religion, Marital status, Sex, Sexual orientation, Gender identity, Physical attributes, Physical or mental ability or disability, Ancestry, Political party preference, Political belief, Socioeconomic status, and Familial status (<http://www.iowasafeschools.org/index.php/history-of-iowa-safe-schools>). School and district handbooks may state the non-discrimination policy, but if the language of the handbooks throughout the text reflects dominant cultural values, not traditionally marginalized populations, this could show a lack of concern for LGBTQ youth.

Schools handbooks are often a reflection of the values of the school community, and if LGBTQ youth are left out, this could be a signal to some students that they the school is not inclusive. School handbooks are used by schools as a primary communication tool for parents, students, and community and should reflect the policies or procedures of the school. If explicit language protecting marginalized populations, especially those who are treated

poorly, is omitted from the handbooks, this could impact the level of protections perceived or experienced by students who identify as LGBTQ. For this research study to be valid and trustworthy, the data must be collected from a representative sample of the school districts in the state of Iowa. The next section of this chapter will discuss the sample section for this research study.

Other researcher's use of qualitative method of Textual Analysis also helped to frame this study. Cho and Lee (2014) help define methodology, method, and clarify analysis of textual content as a research methodology. Crotty (2003) defined methodology as the "strategy, plan of action, process or design" (p.2) and defines method as "the techniques or procedures" used in collecting and analyzing data (p.2). This research study used Textual Analysis to examine handbook texts, and in the next section, I will further explain Textual Analysis and how it was used.

Textual Analysis is the method that I selected to examine student handbooks of Iowa schools. Fairclough (2003) describes critical analysis of texts as social science that has an interest in the relationship between textual language and aspects of social life. Linguistic analysis of text. Fairclough (2003) examines texts through social research themes include but are not limited to the following: governance of new capitalist societies, globalization, hegemonic struggles to give universal inequities. These themes and more helped to inform this research study, as there is a clear hierarchy within the structure of school can marginalize some students, especially those who identify as LGBTQ. Also, hegemonic struggles of LGBTQ youth are real, and how schools govern or set expectations for its students can create a safe space or destroy it. Globalization of social issues is the responsibility of schools and LGBTQ youth issues are of global concern.

This study used textual analysis as an approach for analyzing documents, in this case – student handbooks (Vasquez et al., 2003). What society values, it may create policy around to protect. Furthermore, what schools value, gets written into artifacts, like student handbooks.

Student handbooks are written to communicate protections, procedures, and expectations for all students. Schools are provided much latitude in the development of the network of artifacts that guide their learning communities. Textual analysis includes reading the text, documenting common terms, coding for themes, then analyzing (Vasquez et al., 2003) and that is my plan for this research. For the purposes of this study, I analyzed the constructed text of a diverse sample of student handbooks in Iowa secondary schools. I gained an understanding of handbook language, determined the extent to which LGBTQ-inclusive language exists, and uncover emerging themes in the handbooks relevant to this research study's focus on inclusiveness for LGBTQ youth.

Fairclough (2003) pioneered a less detailed approach to textual discourse analysis that in short is called Textual or Text Analysis. I also drew from Halliday's (1978, 1994) work to by using Textual Analysis to examine how the inclusiveness of the text is relevant to the relationship of the social life of LGBTQ youth in schools. Analyzing texts within social theory and research is a method where one works within categories and logic to develop theories, (Fairclough, 2003). I used the themes found in the texts and created meaning from the vocabulary selected to construct school handbooks.

Creating meaning from the handbook texts, this research study focused specifically on vocabulary relations where the patterns of words are examined (Fairclough, 2003, Firth

1957, Sinclair 1991, Stubbs, 1996). Understanding text as “parts of a social event” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 21) guided this work, as schooling is a social event where marginalized students may not experience it in the same way as their peers. Fairclough (2003, p. 27) stated that texts have their own “causal powers of social structures and practices” and it was my intent to uncover the causal powers and social structures or inequitable practices that may exist in the handbooks of Iowa schools. I also considered the language that was absent, not just present, in the texts. Absent text could speak volumes to the importance or value schools place on the LGBTQ youth experience in schools.

This researcher examined text and text relations that are “*in presentia*” and “*in absentia*”, or present and absent in the text (Fairclough, 2003 p. 37). My research study examined not only present vocabulary patterns, but also language that was absent from the text. Language *in absentia* from student handbooks will cause the researcher to draw meaning about social structures in schools. It is this researcher’s belief that what a school values, it codifies and places in student handbooks. Therefore, the social structures that exist in schools that marginalize populations, should be eliminated. It is my belief that by examining the language in student handbooks, a clearer understanding of the values of community as it relates to LGBTQ-inclusiveness are revealed.

Using Textual Analysis, I also examined if a power structure existed within the texts by examining whether the texts were of primarily dominant culture language, or if the marginalized population of LGBTQ youth were represented in the handbook artifacts. Textual Analysis examines texts for social practices, events, networks, and social structures (Fairclough, 2003). The social structures or events that included or excluded students who identify as LGBTQ were considered when coding the texts. I also examined the network of

texts to derive meaning from the vocabulary around the extent of inclusiveness of LGBTQ-related language in the handbooks. I used a Queer Theory lens to determine what social structures (*if any*) are clearly defined within the text.

Coding Process

I analyzed school artifacts, handbooks, to find common themes. I first used an open coding method examining for the presence and absence of LGBTQ inclusive language. That means, I tried to have an open mind in reading a smaller sample of handbooks as a cold read without looking for any language that based on my biases, experience, and reading of the literature might be LGBTQ-related. I highlighted these terms and phrases in the handbook. I used blue for anything related to bullying and harassment, I used pink for LGBTQ-explicit language, and I used yellow for words like all students or other terms that were mentioned noticeably more than other terms or phrases in the texts. Therefore, I open-coded 9 handbooks, one from each of the Area Education Agencies in the state of Iowa, highlighting text with specific colors for LGBTQ inclusive language, and other common terms like all, every, or each. I also coded for bullying and harassment language. After I manually coded one handbook from each of the 9 Area Education Agencies, I used the common terms to input into a data analysis software program called NVivo to search all of the texts for these terms.

I learned how to use NVivo to analyze 43 school handbooks with this software. Then I used a Queer Theory lens to examine LGBTQ issues of heteronormativity. For example, themes that emerged among the 43 texts would tell a story. I made meaning from this story as it related to whether the text themes promoted equity or oppressed LGBTQ youth. I also kept a Transformative World View in mind, to consider how the text was perpetuating a

status quo of heteronormative culture. I also considered ways to change that notion for LGBTQ youth in schools by being more inclusive in the artifacts we create in schools. Some of those studies are highlighted in the following section of this chapter.

Research Sample

For this dissertation study, I reviewed student handbooks of secondary schools across the state of Iowa. There are 322 school districts in the state of Iowa from which I will strategically selected the sample schools for this study. As Merriam (2002) argues, it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned. In that regard, the selected sample will be purposeful. For that reason, I did not select schools in only one concentrated region of Iowa. Instead, my interest lies in my entire home state of Iowa where I serve as an educator. I wanted to learn more about the extent of the LGBTQ-related language in student handbooks across the entire state in a variety of communities. Therefore, I can share these results across the state to inform leaders of best practices in handbook LGBTQ-related language.

The sample schools were selected from each of the 9 Iowa Area Education Agencies (AEAs) across the state of Iowa: Heartland, Keystone, Central Rivers, Prairie Lakes, Mississippi Bend, Grant Wood, Northwest, Green Hills, and Great Prairie. The sample represented urban, suburban, and rural school areas. The sample also included schools residing in cities/towns with a wide range of populations and socioeconomic classes.

The school sample resides in cities or towns that ranged from less than 500 to over 200,000 in habitants. Every AEA was represented across the state to capture as diverse of a

school population as possible in the state of Iowa. In some AEA regions it was necessary to select more urban areas than rural, because there are few urban areas in the state of Iowa. I decided to not use the names of the schools or principal names, as this information would not add to the meaning of the findings. If there had been clear themes where urban or rural towns produced more inclusive texts in general, the names of the districts or schools may be helpful in this case to help educate the AEA around importance of inclusivity of school artifacts. However, the findings were generally the same with exception to one student handbook which is considered a model for others.

Regarding the inclusion of schools residing in cities to small towns, this is important to not make assumptions about the LGBTQ-related language in handbooks in rural Iowa. Some schools in the sample will reside in urban areas like Des Moines where inhabitants number 200,000 or more. Other schools in the sample represent towns with 1,000-10,000 inhabitants.

The targeted sample size was from 40-45 school handbooks. This targeted range allowed me to find a variety of schools from each AEA and considered 4-5 per agency. The number will varied slightly based on the range of city populations in each region. Therefore, some AEAs included more schools than others, depending upon how homogenous the schools were in each region. In addition, throughout the search, I considered that I might find some handbooks that had model language that I wanted to include in the study to support the work overall. I did find one model district handbook where I discussed the findings in detail.

Therefore, the sample target size remained flexible, and I ended with a sample of 45, where only 43 school handbooks were located on the websites. Therefore, the textual analysis was conducted using 43 secondary school handbooks.

Once the data were collected, the school names were changed to pseudonyms. The reason I did this is because I wanted to help answer a question about the leadership of the sample schools. I wanted to help draw some conclusions about the educational background of the leadership sample who are responsible for the gross underrepresentation of LGBTQ students' rights in school handbooks. Therefore, I examined the licensure of the principals of each school. Because I reviewed that information online, I determined that I should use pseudonyms, even though all information researched for this dissertation study is publicly posted on websites and accessible to anyone. The school websites not only post student handbooks on public websites, but they also post the names of the principals. In addition, the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners posts the assignments and licensure of each educator on their website for any person to review. I looked for any correlations between licensure and LGBTQ-related handbooks. This exercise was only intended to gain insight on the sample principal group as a whole and to provide an additional check on the leadership of the sample group. This section of the dissertation was only to be considered during the analysis phase of the paper and as a potential next step in research for future leadership studies. It is not the intent of this researcher to draw any conclusions around the relationship between years of experience, type of licensure, or other endorsements in relation to LGBTQ inclusive leadership. However, this research topic can be considered in the future project. This information was gathered only to help frame the results of the data.

Data Collection and Analysis

As these handbooks were analyzed for content, a three -part process took place: 1) I first conducted an open-coding process with a diverse group of 9 schools from the sample, one from each AEA searching for common key words/terms 2) Then, I used those common terms to execute an A priori coding search with NVivo with all 43 handbook texts. 3) Then, I examined the context of the terms from the search within the text statements. 4) I created meaning from these textual terms and phrases. I also examined what was missing from the text. For example, transgendered language was missing from nearly all texts. Information about student use of pronouns or names that align with the student's identity was missing from most texts. This experience allowed me to create meaning that opened the door to a rich repertoire of social-scientific constructs by which texts may become more meaningful in ways that we may not be aware Next, I searched for understanding of the listed key words used in the content. Then, I tried to make meaning through examining the context of the language that was present. Like Davis et al (2015) did in the case of race, I determined meaning of the text of the handbooks as it related to LGBTQ inclusiveness, or related to LGBTQ. I then analyzed the text to create meaning around these words.

Due to the large number of school handbooks in this study, I relied not only on hand-coding, but also data analysis software. To complete the analysis of the sample collection data, I used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software program. This software allowed me to analyze all 43 texts with accuracy and efficiency. The software program was able to search for common phrases, frequent words, it creates visual representations of frequent words, highlights, and codes the texts in preparation for analysis.

Terms Used for Frequency Counts and Coding

I first executed an analysis through open-coding with nine handbooks, one from each AEA. I did this to determine which key words were most prevalent in the selected texts. I also used the open-coding to gain insight on what LGBTQ-related text was present in the 9 handbooks. As a reminder, I tried to remain aware of my biases as described in my positionality. I also examined the 9 handbooks looking for any language that based on my biases, experience, and reading of the literature might be LGBTQ-related. I highlighted these terms and phrases in the handbook. I used blue for anything related to bullying and harassment, I used pink for LGBTQ-explicit language, and I used yellow for words like all students or other terms that were mentioned noticeably more than other terms or phrases in the texts. I found the following terms in the 9 artifacts and determined that the following words would be part of the frequency count for the remaining 34 handbooks as well. The words that were found in these original 9 artifacts were: *equity*, *students*, *all students*, *bullying*, and *harassment*. I also determined that other words should be included in the frequency count of LGBTQ-related language. My biases based on my positionality previously discussed in this dissertation prompted me to search further for the following terms: *straight*, *lesbian*, *gay*, *bisexual*, *transgender*, *questioning*, *inclusive*, and the literature supported my biases to include those terms in the search. Therefore, these terms were added to the NVivo word frequency queries that I ran on all 43 texts. After completing the literature review, there were other words that were also included in the word frequency search. Therefore, literature review on Queer Theory prompted me to execute additional searches for the following terms: *queer*, *he*, *she*, *they*, *male*, *female*, *man*, *woman*, *men*, *women*, *sex*, *orientation*, and *gender fluid*.

Through the data analysis process, several policies were found in the handbooks, and some terms were selected from the policy language in those texts. Policy language found in the handbook texts prompted me to further search for the following terms in the handbooks: *sexuality, equal, equity, equality, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity*.

During the analysis phase, I coded the data into like categories including: heteronormative language, explicit LGBTQ-related language, policies including LGBTQ youth, prevalence of dominant culture language, equity and equality language, and bullying and harassment occurrences in the handbooks. As each search for terms was executed, the context of the sentence or paragraph was considered to help make meaning of the LGBTQ-related language present and absent in the text. After this stage of initial coding by hand with highlighters and then with an initial NVivo search, an additional search for the following terms took place in order to examine to what extent similar language was found regarding the following: *locker rooms, restrooms, name use, dress code, human growth and development*. I created a table of most frequently found words. From this table, I began using more frequent words as the priority searches for in-context themes.

When some themes emerged and vocabulary was present or absent, this allowed me to determine which key words should be considered for A priori coding using NVivo. I then used NVivo software to determine the frequency of words in the text. I searched for the key words in NVivo as I uncovered the context by which the terms were introduced in the handbooks. Then, with each layer, I went back and ran additional queries in NVivo to ensure that I had not missed similar language used in additional texts. Lastly, I examined the text in the electronic copies of the handbooks where NVivo's search found LGBTQ-related

language. This layered process helped me to make meaning from the texts and present the three themes that emerged as more dominant key findings in the 43 handbook sample.

Textual Analysis was used to determine to what extent LGBTQ-related language was mentioned in the texts (school handbooks) across the state of Iowa. I first looked for key words that were repeated. I then color coded by highlighting for themes. Then, I used NVivo to analyze the text by running queries for frequently used words. This was very helpful to use this program, because it could quickly search all 43 texts at once and helped me to locate where in the texts specific words were used. Finally, I constructed meaning around not only the explicit language present, but also absent. I then discussed the findings and made recommendations for school handbooks to become more inclusive. The coding instrument (Figure 1) that I used to track emergent themes is below.

Figure 1: Coding Instrument – Emerging Themes

AEA	Theme #1	Theme #2	Theme #3	Etc.	Notes
School					

Ethical Considerations in Data Collection and Analysis

This study did not include humans, therefore, IRB approval was not required. This researcher did contact IRB at Iowa State University to ensure that approval was not needed

and it was confirmed that was the case. Since all artifacts that were analyzed were found on publicly accessible websites, this research study was low risk in that regard. However, the findings determined that there could be risk to the safety and security of LGBTQ youth if leaders do not transform their schools to become more inclusive. I considered implications of the research, like how the data analysis was conducted and I chose to not include school or principal names, since the overall findings determined a significant absence of LGBTQ inclusive language.

Creswell (2014) suggests that when selecting sites, it is not a good idea to choose one in which I have an interest in the outcomes. He claims that it does not allow for objectivity or multiple perspectives. Therefore, for this study I did not select my current school or any of the 6 Iowa schools in which I have worked. I also avoided the schools where my 3 children attend. I selected a diverse sample from across the state of Iowa. I do care about the outcomes of the state schools in the sample, but I was able to remain objective with regard to the findings for schools with which I do not have a personal relationship.

After the open-coding experience, I anticipated that I may find a significant lack of LGBTQ-related language in the Iowa handbooks. I chose to use simple pseudonyms for the school names. Because the information is available on school websites for the purpose of being read by students and families. I believe that districts do not have an expectation of privacy regarding this information, but a general synthesis of the data without sharing school names is an appropriate way to report the findings.

This data is reported honestly, including what I may perceive as positive and negative results. The results are also reported in a clear, straightforward language, as

suggested by Creswell (2014). Lastly, an ethical consideration I addressed is to remain respectful of the cultural norms of the schools selected into the research sample (Mertens, 2010).

Trustworthiness

This research study is valid, reliable, and trustworthy. It is valid, as the sample size selected included 45 schools from diverse communities across the state of Iowa. The findings are reliable, because the research method of Textual Analysis was implemented with fidelity based on other studies that used this approach. In addition, my experience as a principal of a secondary school provides for me a strong base of understanding how school handbooks are created. In addition, I decided to select two peer reviewers, who are both middle school principals, to examine this work and spot check the findings as a modified member-checking process. My peer reviewers include one female who identifies as straight and one male who identifies as gay. These peer reviewers helped me to address any biases that may exist.

Conclusion

As a reminder, I examined school handbook texts to answer the following questions: 1) What is the language in student handbooks as it relates to LGBTQ students? 2) What themes, regarding the protection of LGBTQ students, have emerged through the analysis of school handbooks? This research study's aim was to answer the questions and determine to what extent LGBTQ-related language exists in Iowa school handbooks. By including explicit LGBTQ-related language in student handbooks, the once marginalized students may

be supported in a more equitable way by increasing inclusiveness of the learning community.

The findings Chapter will discuss in detail the extent of LGBTQ-related language found.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

Using Textual Analysis previously discussed, I created meaning from 1,871 pages of text from 43 Iowa school handbooks and these three prevailing themes emerged from that stage of analysis: (1) presence of heteronormative language and a gross absence of LGBTQ-related language found in the handbooks, (2) an inaccurate conflation of equity and equality and (3) bullying and harassment or safety language compliantly present. Each of these key findings will be presented and discussed in this Chapter. First, this chapter will recall the coding process used to uncover these themes. I will also provide a working definition of LGBTQ-related language as the focus of this research study. Then, I will present each of the three themes and how these findings support the heteronormative culture of schools, while also oppressing further LGBTQ youth

Queer Theory Frames the Three Themes

As I discuss each of the three themes, I will expand upon how Queer Theory framed this study and these key findings. As a reminder, Queer Theory debunks the idea of heterosexual norms and aims to help society from constructing meaning that heterosexuality is the preferred orientation (Jagose, 1996, Lauritsen and Thorstad, 1974, Ticotto, 2017, and Gunckel, 2017). Framing this work through Queer Theory lens takes a critical look at how school leaders might analyze school artifacts and consider ways we might challenge the status quo, or disrupt the thinking of a binary system of sexuality. These three themes will all be analyzed using Queer Theory: (1) presence of heteronormative language and a gross absence of LGBTQ-related language found in the handbooks, (2) bullying and harassment or safety language present, but as a result of compliance, not commitment, and (3) an

inaccurate conflation of equity and equality. Jagose (1996) discussed Queer Theory as a gay liberation and counter-culture movement. This notion of presenting the counter-culture of LGBTQ youth disrupts the binary systemic thinking in schools. These handbook artifacts were examined with a transformative belief system and through the Queer Theory lens.

Recalling the Coding Process

The research sample originally included 45 schools, but two schools did not have their handbooks posted on the website, or at least they were not readily accessible. The data from this study was uncovered by applying the coding method discussed previously in this paper. I used manual open-coding with nine handbooks, one from each AEA, to determine the key words that are most prevalent in the texts. As described in previous sections, I used high-lighters and hand-coded each of the original 9 texts with an open mind and coding for any topics that frequently were mentioned. I tried to keep my biases out of this search while open-coding to determine what LGBTQ-related text was presented in the handbooks. However, it is impossible to ignore information that you already know through experience or reading. Therefore, I recognize that this original search is not without bias.

As a reminder, the words that were found in these original 9 artifacts were: *equity*, *students*, *all students*, *bullying*, and *harassment*. My biases based on my positionality previously discussed in this dissertation prompted me to search further for the following terms: *straight*, *lesbian*, *gay*, *bisexual*, *transgender*, *questioning*, *inclusive* and the literature supported my biases to include those terms in the search. The literature review on Queer Theory also prompted me to execute additional searches for the following terms:

queer, he, she, they, male, female, man, woman, men, women, sex, orientation, and gender fluid.

Policy language found in the handbook texts prompted me to further search for the following terms in the handbooks: *sexuality, equal, equity, equality, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity.*

During the analysis phase, I coded the data into like categories including: heteronormative language, explicit LGBTQ-related language, policies including LGBTQ youth, prevalence of dominant culture language, equity and equality language, and bullying and harassment occurrences in the handbooks. As each search for terms was executed, the context of the sentence or paragraph was considered to help make meaning of the LGBTQ-related language present and absent in the text. After this stage of coding, an additional search for the following terms took place in order to examine to what extent similar language was found regarding the following: *locker rooms, restrooms, name use, dress code, human growth and development.*

When some themes emerged and vocabulary was present or absent, this allowed me to determine which key words should be considered for A priori coding using NVivo. I then used NVivo software to determine the frequency of words in the text. I searched for the key words in NVivo as I uncovered the context by which the terms were introduced in the handbooks. Then, with each layer, I went back and ran additional queries in NVivo to ensure that I had not missed similar language used in additional texts. Lastly, I examined the text in the electronic copies of the handbooks where NVivo's search found LGBTQ-related language. This layered process helped me to make meaning from the texts and present the three themes that emerged as more dominant key findings in the 43 handbook sample. Table

1 below illustrates the number of sources and occurrences of each LGBTQ-related term found in the sample of 43 handbooks in Iowa.

Table 1: Frequency of LGBTQA-related Text in School Handbooks

<i>Frequency of Terms from 43 Handbook, 1871 pages of text.</i>	<i># Sources</i>	<i>#Occurrences</i>
Students, All Students	41	9,575
Bullying or Harassment	40	592
Equity	28	108
Straight	0	0
Lesbian	0	0
Gay	1	1
Bisexual	0	0
Transgender	1	8
Questioning	0	0
Inclusive	23	53
Queer	0	0
Sexuality	4	8
Orientation	41	180
Gender	40	268
Gender identity	40	185
Equal, Equality	37	150
He, she, they	Inconclusive	Inconclusive
Male	5	7
Female	7	11
Man, men	24	38
Woman, Women	23	40
Sex	41	235
Gender Fluid	0	0
Locker rooms	39	499
Restroom(s)	16	27
Dress Code	41	262
Human Growth or Development	39	606

LGBTQ-related Language

Before I present these emergent themes, I will discuss briefly my quest to create a definition of LGBTQ-related language. Because my literature search yielded no studies on the LGBTQ-inclusiveness of school handbook text, I decided to search elsewhere to create a working definition of inclusiveness in other educational settings. The definition of inclusiveness I found that helped me to frame my thinking was through the understanding of inclusive curriculum. GLSEN (2017) described LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and the role educators play in this way, “After determining educators should spend time identifying the extent to which LGBT-related content is present in their current curriculum, care should be taken to fill in gaps while looking for opportunities to deepen student understanding” (Retrieved 10-23-17 from https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/LGBT%20inclus%20curriculum%202014_0.pdf).

Gaps in this literature can be filled to deepen student and family understanding around LGBTQ youth. Schools can help to fill that gap by creating opportunities to share information about LGBTQ youth school expectations and supports. School handbooks can help with that if the text is more explicit and includes LGBTQ youth in the text. While executing the analysis phase of this study, I determined that the word *inclusive* was too broad and did not accurately define this research. Instead, I decided to use ***LGBTQ-related***, which is a more accurate description of the focus of this dissertation study. The three themes that emerged will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. First, I will provide an excerpt from one handbook text that touches on all three emergent themes. In the handbook of School [C] the following language was found,

All students will have an **equal** opportunity for a quality education without discrimination, regardless of their race, religion, socioeconomic status, color, **sex**, marital status, **sexual orientation, gender identity**, national origin or disability. The education program is **free of discrimination** and provides **equal opportunity** for **all students**. The education program will foster knowledge of, and respect and appreciation for, the historical and contemporary contributions of diverse cultural groups, as well as **men and women**, to society. It will also reflect the wide variety of roles open to both **men and women** and provide **equal** opportunity to **both sexes**, (Handbook School C, 2017, p.31).

This handbook language while likely intended to support each student, including LGBTQ youth, only further marginalizes some. The use of “all students” having “equal” opportunities and “free of discrimination” could be argued when nationally, the literature review shared findings that all students were not treated well in some schools in the nation, specifically LGBTQ youth. This text also exemplifies heteronormative language, where “both sexes” and “men and women” are used those who do not identify as male nor female are left out. A binary sexuality system was illustrated through this text example. In addition, the handbook conflates equality with equity.

Equity would provide each student with what they need, not necessarily an equal experience for all students. Students are unique and have unique needs. Therefore, equity is needed, not equality. Lastly, this text example discussed “an appreciation” and “respect” for diverse cultural groups. This is positive language that can be appreciated. What is missing is specific LGBTQ-related explicit language protecting this minority population a safe environment. The handbook texts overall do include explicit LGBTQ-related bullying and harassment language throughout. However, as this chapter will examine each of the three

themes in more detail, more clarity on the compliancy around this explicit language. The next section of this chapter will address in more detail each of the three themes that emerged.

Theme #1 Presence of Heteronormative Language and a Gross Absence of LGBTQ-related Language

Since the literature review found significant gaps among how LGBTQ youth reported on their achievement and treatment in schools across the nation, this study examined school handbook artifacts to determine to what extent LGBTQ-related language existed throughout these handbooks. It is this researcher's belief that handbook artifacts can help to disrupt that norm and promote equity instead if the handbooks include explicit LGBTQ-related language. School artifacts, like handbooks, can provide clarity for students and families regarding expectations of students, including LGBTQ youth. It is this researcher's belief that not all marginalized subgroups must be explicitly represented in handbooks, but for some minority populations this could help to fill the gap in understanding about expectations and supports at school. Some research on race and explicit language does discuss the importance of explicit language (Workman, 2006 and Wherry, 2009). If the subgroup is significantly discrepant from peers with regard to the outcomes in school according to the literature, it might be helpful to include explicit language of protections for that marginalized group. Explicit LGBTQ-related handbook language is the focus on this study, because according to the literature discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, they are the most at risk group in schools today. As stated in the literature review of this paper, 85 percent of LGBTQ youth have been verbally harassed and 44 percent have been physically harassed because of their sexual orientation (McClelland, 2017). No other sub groups are

known to have reported this level of treatment by peers. Yet, the school handbooks oppress these students further by leaving them out of the text.

Heteronormative Thinking Likened to Colorblindness

Davis et al. (2015) described a similar case around the importance of explicit text language in leadership standards as it related to race. Like LGBTQ youth, students of color have been marginalized in schools. Through the examination of Leadership standards, Davis et al. (2015) explained that, color blindness does not take into account persistent racism. He also discussed that when we do not consider the permanency of systemic racism, the result creates great inequities for people of color. This research study examined the systemic oppression of students who identify as LGBTQ. Explicit language can be critical due to the inequities that exist for LGBTQ youth with regard to personal physical and emotional safety as discussed in the literature review of this dissertation study. This next section will further describe the findings of this study where a gross absence of LGBTQ-related language was found in the handbook text sample.

As stated in the previous definition of terms, a school environment that not just tolerates, but includes students who identify with marginalized target groups, is considered inclusive. This research study examined handbooks to determine the extent of included LGBTQ-related language in the texts. Although these terms were rarely found in the sample handbooks outside of compliance –related policy language, when they were found, they helped to fill gaps in understanding around expectations of treatment toward students who identify as LGBTQ and supports for this marginalized subgroup in schools.

An example of heteronormative language found in School [S3], was that when the text offered a complaint form for students and families to complete if a student was

harassed, the form used binary sexual language. There was information guiding the student to determine more about the nature of the complaint, including whether or not the student was harassed related to their gender identity or sexual orientation among other reasons. The next part of the form requires the complainant to mark whether they are male or female. No other options were available. This shows an example where the school included in the school handbook a support, complaint form, for students who identify as LGBTQ, but a misunderstanding of binary language further marginalized the students. Other examples of binary language were present in the texts like School [R's] use of study hall passes allowing only one male and/or one female out of class at one time (p.10). These text examples illustrate an absence of LGBTQ-related language that can perpetuate a status quo of heterosexuality being the norm, and more examples will follow in the next section.

Absence of Language Perpetuating the Norm

Among the pages of the text from 43 school handbooks, there were only a handful of times that LGBTQ youth was mentioned explicitly in the text. Only one time was gay mentioned, and it was included as it related to GSA or Gay Straight Alliance Club. School [S] was an outlier and included GSA in the list of activities offered to students, whereas other schools listed activities, but not GSA,

School- -Sponsored Student Organizations School-sponsored student organizations are those which are recognized by the school district and board. School-sponsored student organizations include: Key Club, Family and Consumer Science Club, Art Club, DECA (course enrollment required), International Club, Student Council (elected members, as well as work-on members, as well as work-on members) , National Honor Society (by invitation only) , GSA (Gay Straight Alliance)members) , National Honor Society (by invitation only) , GSA (Gay Straight Alliance), (School S Handbook, 2017, p.20).

In addition, Treble Choir as a co-curricular offering in School [E]'s handbook. Instead of describing the class based on the vocal range of students, this class is only offered to female students as explained here, "The purpose of this organization is to develop good vocal fundamentals through group rehearsals and performances. The Treble Choir is open to all female students, (p. 52). These examples illustrated heteronormative language that is prevalent throughout the texts.

In addition, the words lesbian, straight, bisexual, and queer were not mentioned at all. As will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5, only one other school, School [B], described the rights of transgendered students in school. While it could be argued that every other subgroup was barely mentioned too, LGBTQ youth experience gross mistreatment from peers according to the research discussed in the literature review (GLSEN, 2015). Therefore, the absence of LGBTQ-related language was found overall.

Therefore, since students who identify as LGBTQ are verbally and physically harassed at an alarming rate as compared their peers in some of our nation's schools and according to the literature review (GLSEN, 2015), explicit LGBTQ-related language in school artifacts like handbooks, is something school leaders might consider. From the keyword search using NVivo, the word 'inclusive' was found 53 times within the pages of text. However, even though this term discussed LGBTQ-related inclusivity only a few times, the term being used even in a different way demonstrates some hope for this language to grow. Also, although the data table shows that the word "questioning" was used in the handbooks, it was used in context to mean something completely different. This example illustrates how this term was used as it was related to homework integrity, "instances questioning academic integrity and/or assignments never completed may earn zeroes" (p.

33). Therefore, both questioning and queer were not found in any of the 43 handbooks related to LGBTQ youth.

These data revealed a significant absence of LGBTQ-related language that perpetuates systemic straight privilege. Davis et al. (2015) discussed this silence regarding race as perpetuating dominance in schools. Schools are perpetuating heteronormative dominance in schools when school artifacts remain silent and leave out LGBTQ youth. This is evidenced by Table 1 where the frequency of occurrences from the keyword search for LGBTQ-related language is represented. The findings show a gross absence overall.

Heteronormative Thinking Model

I examined this pervasive disregard for LGBTQ youth in student handbooks with a Queer Theory lens. This examination revealed straight privilege as the culture of schools as described through these Iowa school handbooks. Specifically, transgendered students may be confused and need guidance around rights at school. Students need information about which restroom or locker room they may use at school. The students attending 42 of 43 schools in this sample were not informed via the handbooks that they may use the pronouns and names of their choice. When this basic guidance is not present in the sample of school artifacts, schools muscle their straight privilege and control even the personal and private use of the restroom. School [B] provided this guidance, but 42 of 43 schools did not. School [B] promoted equity by using model LGBTQ-related language in the handbook. Nearly all other schools in this sample did not demonstrate equity for LGBTQ youth. School [B] will be discussed in more detail in the discussion in Chapter 5. Just like colorblindness, “devalues the Code of Conduct Policy 512. Student conduct which violates policies and

rules of the Council Bluffs Community School salience of race and obstructs any critical examination of the status quo” (Davis et. al, 2015), a heteronormative thinking model devalues LGBTQ youth in schools.

As a reminder, nearly 2000 pages of text were analyzed, representing 43 schools in Iowa. Yet, LGBTQ youth were not represented explicitly in school handbooks. Schools might consider providing more specific guidance and explicit LGBTQ-related language to help fill the gap of understanding around the rights and expectations at school for students who do not identify as heterosexual.

Dominant Culture Present

Heteronormativity perpetuates the agents in society and the dominant culture prevails, while LGBTQ youth continue to be marginalized. Throughout the handbook texts there is a strong sense of dominant culture overall. This is not surprising, but is noteworthy to share supporting the heteronormative theme that emerged. First, as previously mentioned, the overuse of *all students* in the handbook texts almost erases the individuality or individual needs of each student. This type of language is not consistent with promoting equity where each student is considered as an individual, rather than lumping all students together. This language perpetuates systemic oppression and does not elevate the voices of LGBTQ youth or their needs. A consistent dominant culture theme surfaced with the lack of LGBTQ – related language in nearly all texts. This section will discuss dominant culture found in the texts.

Names and Pronouns

Students have the right, even without parental permission, to be called by their preferred name and pronoun choice. However, nearly all texts did not include explicit language that discussed students' rights to do that. Instead as it relates to name usage, 42 handbooks only mentioned dominant culture language around legality of names. This example of that text is a typical sample of what was present in the handbook artifacts, "If a student's legal status, such as the student's name or the student's custodial arrangement, should change during the school year, the parent or guardian must notify the school district. The school district needs to know when these changes occur to ensure that the school district has a current student record" (pp. 55-58). Instead of addressing in handbooks the importance of one's name to any given student in relation to his or her identity, most texts only discussed this information as it related to the parent or guardian notification of such change. This is problematic and perpetuates dominant culture, while ignoring subgroup needs. Only one handbook discussed the student's right to his/her name in school. This handbook will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Non-binary Pronoun Use Considered a Positive

It is important to be called by name, and it is also important for others to use students' preferred pronouns. This may not be an issue for students who are straight and already identify with their birth-assigned gender, name or pronouns. Excluding that information in nearly all texts is an example of how dominant culture is present in the handbook text overall. I noticed a trend with the use of pronouns and decided to critique the use of pronouns in the handbook texts. Generally, the texts included non-binary pronouns relating

back to students as the noun. The most prominent pronoun noticed was “they”. Here is an example from School A. of what was found in general throughout the texts regarding pronoun use of noun/pronoun agreement, “The term ‘school activities,’ means all school activities in which *students* are involved whether *they* are school-sponsored or school-approved, whether *they* are an event or an activity, or whether they are held on or off school grounds” (p. 5). Another example of the use of “they” is in this this excerpt found in a letter from the principal in the handbook of School [R],

Throughout the year, I hope you will see that our priority is not to simply teach students facts and figures – it is to arm them with the knowledge and skills *they* will need to find success in our ever-changing world. As we work to achieve this goal, we remain committed to our mission: To develop world-class learners and citizens of character in a *safe and inclusive* learning community, (School R Handbook, 2017, p.3).

These examples are prevalent throughout the handbook artifacts. This indicates a possible shift from complete heteronormative language to a more gender-free pronoun usage overall. Here are a few more examples of that from the texts.

Some additional examples of non-binary pronoun use found in school [O]’s handbook are as follows, “In order to earn credit in each course *students* must not only achieve the academic expectations of the course; *they* must also satisfy the attendance requirements as adopted by the Board of Education” (p.5). School [O] continued its use of non-binary gender pronoun language when a singular noun “student” was mentioned with a pronoun agreement use of “they” in this example, “When a **student** reaches their fifth unexcused absence, **they** will be allowed one opportunity to apply for reinstatement to the class. The student will need to complete and return a reinstatement application within two school days. The **student** will then receive a hearing before the principal or a panel of teachers where **they** can request to be reinstated” (pp. 5-6). Therefore, the use of non-binary

pronouns is typical in school handbooks. These handbook texts are meeting the standard for pronouns use and in some cases trying to promote inclusivity. These findings are consistent with LGBTQ-related language. However, other language reinforces the binary system in some policies included in the texts.

Reinforcing Binary System

School [P3] included a policy addressing gender fair opportunities. This policy language included in the handbook reinforces the binary system and uses the words men and women, leaving out those who do not identify as male or female,

Equal Educational Opportunity (BP 503.8) Policy Title: Multicultural and Gender Fair Education Opportunity Enrolled children in the [P3]Community School District shall have an equal opportunity for a quality public education without discrimination regardless of their age, color, creed, national origin, race, religion, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, *gender identity*, physical or mental ability or disability, ancestry, political party preference, political belief, socioeconomic status, or familial status. The requirements not to discriminate also extend to employment therein and to admissions thereof. The education program shall be free of such discrimination and provide equal opportunity for the participants. The education program shall foster knowledge of, respect and appreciation for, the historical and contemporary contributions of diverse cultural groups as well as *men and women* to society. It shall also complement the efforts to diversify the staff (affirmative action) and preserve the integrity of our student population (Desegregation), (School Handbook P3, 2017, p. 6).

The language of this example from School [P3] was likely intended to create a gender fair environment for students in this school. The text highlights the importance of gender identity, but then offers men and women as the two options for contributions made to society. This example is contradictory and would be confusing for individuals who do not identify as male or female. An additional example of this type of language found in the texts from the handbook of School [I] also discusses men and women in a section entitled, “Equal

Opportunity”. The text reads, “Students are educated in programs, which foster knowledge of, and respect and appreciation for, the historical and contemporary contributions of diverse cultural groups, as well as *men and women*, to society. **Students** who feel **they** have been discriminated against are encouraged to report it to the school district Affirmative Action Coordinator” (p. 8). This excerpt exemplifies how the school views persons as either male or female. Therefore, students who do not identify as male or female are left out. This example does, however, use non-binary gender pronouns.

Locker Rooms and Restrooms

Discussions about locker use was found to perpetuate status quo and dominant culture in all handbooks, but one. Forty-two of forty-three handbooks in the sample only mentioned lockers as it related to straight students. In only one model handbook, which will be discussed in Chapter 5, were locker room and restroom use guidelines discussed regarding transgendered students. In nearly all handbook artifacts, students are left to wonder where they might change or use the restroom nearly all Iowa schools. The locker room text found in handbooks is like the below example from School [N],

LOCKER ROOM / PE / ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION: Due to the new floor, students will be required to have separate, clean, and rock free shoes to participate in gym. In order to maintain our gym floor we do require that student shoes be closed toed and rubber soled. The gym shoes need to be separate from the shoes students wear outside. In addition to shoes, we promote the practice of good hygiene of all students. With that said, students participating in 5th- 8th grade PE will be required to change clothes; however, showering after PE will be optional, (School N Handbook, 2017, p.20).

This heteronormative approach, like colorblindness with race, can perpetuate societal inequities that create disparate experiences for students that could widen the gap of understanding, (Davis et al., 2015). Considering locker room use or physical education and

athletic participation for each student, these examples represent the typical language found in the handbooks analyzed. It is important to note that this language has its focus on dominant culture. The legal rights of transgendered students are left out. The text focused on PE rules like how to check out a locker, or how to appropriately dress or participate instead. There is also language in one example that it is up to the instructor to determine if showers are necessary. While that was not a typical statement found, it could be concerning for LGBTQ youth who may or may not be uncomfortable undressing or showering at school.

There was only one school handbook in the sample that addressed the rights of transgendered students to use the locker room or restroom with which the student identified, and this example will be discussed in Chapter 5. All other locker room text was of the dominant culture language, not considering students who do not identify with their birth-assigned gender. Therefore, text language about physical education overwhelmingly supported the dominant culture theme found in the handbooks.

Typical restroom use language appeared 24 times in these handbooks. However, this language did not include any LGBTQ-related terms or vocabulary. Instead, the language represents a binary heterosexual norm. Some examples of that typical language include School [P2]'s handbook, "Students may sign out from the media center to go to the restroom with permission" (p.9). Additionally, School [S2] discussed restroom use as it related students on suspension, "The suspension supervisor will determine when the restroom breaks will be held" (p. 42). These examples perpetuate the dominant binary culture whereas there is no information shared in any other text, except in School [B]'s handbook discussed in detail previously, that discusses restroom use in LGBTQ-related

vocabulary. Furthermore, School [S2] text suggests that schools control one's basic need to use the restroom. General restroom procedures were outlined,

Restroom Expectations Students will be allowed restroom breaks. If a student needs to use the restroom other than at the designated break, they must ask the teacher for permission to leave the classroom. Each school building will have specific restroom rules. The general district-wide restroom responsibilities are: Wait quietly and take your turn. Always flush. Wash hands and throw paper towels in the proper receptacle. Turn off the faucet when finished. Return to line or room when finished, (School H Handbook, 2017, p.57).

Expectations or procedures were the most common types of occurrences with regarding handbook text addressing restrooms or locker rooms. Overall, the restroom and locker room handbook texts support the dominant culture theme and left out LGBTQ youth. Instead, the language expectations, while typical and helpful, do not support LGBTQ youth to understand which restroom they may use. There is no other language to provide that information to students in the handbook texts of the sample.

Dress Code

Student dress code could potentially be a concern for LGBTQ youth, especially for students who identify as transgender or who like to express themselves differently than the heterosexual norm at school. Dress code language found in the text perpetuated the status quo of dominant culture, and only in one school handbook was there language that debunked it. One handbook explicitly stated that students could dress according to their identity, whereas nearly all other (42 of 43) language in the text around dress code left that information out. Typical statements found in the text were like the below statement from [P] School,

Dress Code (BP 502.1) There is a strong connection between academic performance, students' appearance and students' conduct. Inappropriate student appearance may cause material and substantial disruption to the school environment or present a threat to the health and safety of students, employees and visitors on school grounds. Students are expected to adhere to reasonable levels of cleanliness and modesty. Students are expected to wear clothing that is appropriate to their age level and does not disrupt the school or educational environment (School P Handbook, 2017, p. 40).

Modesty is difficult to define. In addition, it would be difficult to define subjective terms like disruption or determine who would feel threatened. This type of language in the text supports the dominant culture. If the dominant culture feels comfortable with the dress choices of others, there will be no concerns. Will the administration, teachers, or students be disrupted if a boy identifies as a girl and wants to wear a dress to school? The text language provides no guidance for some LGBTQ students and families concerning dress. Instead, most of the examples in the text support the status quo. A clear example of this is school [C] where the following text describes the heteronormative culture as the standard, "The Board believes inappropriate student appearance causes material and substantial disruption to the school environment or presents a threat to the health and safety of students, employees and visitors. Students are expected to adhere to standards of cleanliness and dress that are compatible with the requirements of a good learning environment. The standards will be those generally acceptable to the community as appropriate in a school setting" (pp.24-25). This text is the norm for the handbook sample. This text could re-victimize students who could be considered a disruption for dressing in non-conforming ways. Instead, authors of school artifacts could use the student handbook as an opportunity to promote equity. These opportunities to promote equity were missed in nearly all instances and dominant culture was promoted instead.

Additional Examples of dress code are presented here. Each of these examples represents the typical language found over 262 occurrences throughout the 43 texts related to “dress” in school. This example addresses student appearance and was found in School [M2]’s handbook regarding dress standards,

The standards will be those generally acceptable to the community as appropriate in a school setting. The Board expects students to be clean and well-groomed and wear clothes in good repair and appropriate for the time, place and occasion. Clothing or other apparel promoting products illegal for use by minors and clothing displaying obscene material, profanity, or reference to prohibited conduct are disallowed. While the primary responsibility for student’s personal appearance lies with the students and their parents, appearance disruptive to the education program will not be tolerated. When, in the judgment of a principal, a student’s appearance or mode of dress disrupts the educational process or constitutes a threat to health or safety, the student may be required to make modifications. It shall be the responsibility of the superintendent, in conjunction with the principals, to develop administrative regulations regarding this policy (School M2 Handbook, 2017, p. 16).

This next example was addressed in School [P]’s discussion of student dress and hygiene. In this example, extensive discussion of school dress is discussed, including sexual innuendos and hate messages and intolerance being prohibited. This discussion is more descriptive and implicitly related to LGBTQ youth. This example does not, however, provide LGBTQ-explicitly related language. It also does not address wearing clothing aligned with one’s gender identity,

At school or at school-sponsored activities, hats and any other clothing displaying/advertising items that; promote or condone illegal activities and/or substances promote the use and/or legalization of alcohol, tobacco, or controlled substances; displays obscene material, profanity, vulgar statements, satanic symbols, gang symbols, hate messages, sexual innuendoes, suicide, intolerance, violent messages, reference to subversion, or other messages which are interpreted as being inappropriate or offensive, are considered a violation of this policy. (School P Handbook, 2017, pp. 24- 25).

The last example representing over 200 occurrences of dress code in the handbook samples is from School [W], where the dominant culture theme is also present. This language is typical of the language found across all 43 texts regarding what is expected of students to wear at school in Iowa,

DRESS CODE All students are required to dress for school in a CLEAN, NON-REVEALING, APPROPRIATE manner. If a student's clothing is found to be inappropriate, as determined by the principal, the student may be sent home or given other clothes by the school to wear. Examples of inappropriate dress are: Spaghetti strap tops unless a t-shirt is worn under. Midriff shirts exposing excessive amounts of the stomach Clothing that relates to alcohol, drugs, tobacco or sex related topics. Rock band t-shirts which promote violence, as interpreted by the principal. Jewelry, or clothing that is potentially dangerous or offensive, as interpreted by the principal.(School W Handbook, 2017, pp. 12-13).

Dress code handbook language represents the dominant culture theme. Students who identify as LGBTQ will not be informed regarding school policy and dress expectations relating to a student's identity.

Human Growth and Development

Another missed opportunity to present a case for debunking heteronormativity culture is through the Human Growth and Development courses offered in schools. Several handbooks addressed Human Growth and Development as a required course, yet parents can have their children excused from this portion of their education. There is no evidence that Human Growth and Development is LGBTQ-inclusive, or at least included LGBTQ-related terms in the handbook when discussing a Human Growth and Development course.

Curricular expectations like Human Growth and Development courses or Physical Education participation, are seemingly harmless discussions of locker room use, but these findings exemplified a heteronormative, dominant culture. School handbooks could serve as

a catalyst to change if they were inclusive of LGBTQ-related language. Instead, they present normative heterosexual culture like in this example from School [C2],

Human Growth and Development Human growth and development can include topics such as self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, human sexuality (including stereotypes, abuse, harassment and sexually transmitted diseases), substance abuse, stress management and suicide prevention. Parents/guardians are encouraged to speak with school staff regarding content at specific grade levels and in specific courses (School C2 Handbook, 2017, p. 10).

Other examples of typical language found in the texts are similar to School [A], “The school district provides students with instruction in human growth and development. As mandated by Iowa Code, a student is not required to take instruction in the human growth and development portion of the health curriculum if the parent or guardian requests the student be excused. A form to request this exemption may be obtained in the principal’s office in each attendance center”, and it continues with an excusal discussion, “Parents may review this curriculum prior to its use and have their child excused from human growth and development instruction. Parents should contact the Chief Academic Officer if they wish to review the curriculum or to excuse their child from human growth and development instruction” (p. 7). This exemplifies a missed opportunity in the handbook texts to promote equity by providing explanation of the importance of Human Development courses. In addition, school handbooks might be an appropriate place to introduce the notion that development of identity and sexual norms differ for some students and families. It is also arguable that each student needs Human Growth and Development courses, rather than offering excusals to be dismissed from the course. The text language perpetuates dominant culture and the sub theme of Christianity, as parents often prefer to excuse students from courses like these due to religious reasons.

Revisiting Theme #1 Using Queer Theory

These handbook artifacts clearly present the notion of a dominant culture where heterosexuality is the norm. When examining these texts through a Queer Theory lens, the findings presented a dominant narrative that leaves out LGBTQ youth. These school artifacts disenfranchise minority populations and send a message that LGBTQ youth are not valued since they are not present in the school handbooks. This dominant culture theme examined and presented examples from the handbooks about use of preferred names and pronouns, locker room use, and dress code. Each of these subthemes examined supported the notion that the counter-culture narrative was silenced and the binary system of sexuality was present instead.

I examined the texts to find a gross absence overall of LGBTQ-related language. The text language oppresses LGBTQ youth through silencing them by leaving them out. These school artifacts generally help society to construct meaning that heterosexuality is the preferred orientation, instead of debunking that notion. The simple fact that the words gay and lesbian are absent from all texts creates a narrative of schools perpetuating the norm of a binary system and leaves out LGBTQ youth.

Theme #2 Inaccurate Conflation of Equity and Equality

Mann (2014) shared in an article called, “Equity and Equality Are Not Equal”, and that we should not use the terms equity and equality as interchangeable since they have different meanings. Mann wrote, “There is a common misconception that equity and equality mean the same thing — and that they can be used interchangeably, especially when talking about education. But the truth is **they do not — and cannot.** Yes, the two words are

similar, but the difference between them is crucial. So please, don't talk about equality when you really mean equity" (p.1, Retrieved 11-24-2017 from <https://edtrust.org/the-equity-line/equity-and-equality-are-not-equal/>) While educators may use both terms, equity and equality, using them interchangeably shows a lack of understanding with regard to their true meanings. In the school handbook texts, I found interchangeable use of equity and equality. Also present was a significant use of terms like "students" or "all students" when discussing expectations for each student, including LGBTQ youth. The theme of this section is the inaccurate conflation of equity and equality that was found in the school handbook texts.

Before sharing a conflation of equity and equality, I will first share an example of equity language found in the handbook of [M] school, "The [M] Community School District will do everything in its power to promote and integrate a curriculum that will foster respect and appreciation for the cultural and diversity found in our country and an awareness of the rights, duties, and responsibilities of each individual as a member of a multicultural, non-sexist society. Complaints may be directed to the School Counselor, equity coordinator at (p.2). This is a strong statement to promote equity for each student.

The language of the text mentions, "each individual", not lumping every student into statements like "all students". This textual language is also consistent with a commitment to equity, where it reads that the district will do "everything in its power" (p. 2) to promote and integrate curriculum. That is a very strong statement of support to each student, including LGBTQ youth. What is missing is explicit LGBTQ-related language in that statement.

However, it does support equity and does not conflate it with equality. More commonly found, however, were statements of nondiscrimination intended to promote equity, but instead inaccurately conflated equity with equality or omitted equity completely.

One text example from the handbooks where equal language is used and equity language might be considered for the future was found in the handbook of School [S1] and in a section called, “Equal Education Opportunity” (p.5). It reads, “ It is the policy of the [S1]Community School District not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion, creed, age (for employment) , marital status (for programs), sexual orientation, gender identity and socioeconomic status (for programs) in its educational programs and its employment practices. There is a grievance procedure for processing complaints of discrimination. If you have questions or a grievance related to this policy please contact the district’s equity coordinator” (p.5). While this statement on the surface promotes fair treatment and non-discriminative practices, if we examine the text more deeply, the terms “equal education opportunity” and break that down, there may not be a true conflation of the terms equity and equality, but there is a misunderstanding of what handbooks profess from this sample of 43 texts as compared to what the literature review states nationally and in Iowa with regard to marginalized practices and treatment of LGBTQ youth (GLSEN, 2015, Iowa Pride Network, 2009). If educational opportunities are not equal. The literature review of this dissertation provided evidence that nationally and in Iowa, students reported to have been mistreated at alarming rates as compared to their straight peers, (Robinson and Espelage, 2011,2012, Proteat et.al, 2011, Garvey and Rankin, 2015, GLSEN, 2015, 2017 McClelland Institute, 2017, Russell, 2011, Toomey, 2011, Iowa Pride Network, 2009). Therefore, equitable educational experiences are needed, where

LGBTQ youth can receive the school supports needed that are unique to this population. The statement does mention that that complaints may be sent to the Equity Coordinator. However, the language of this text does not indicate that the handbook provided a true understanding of equity.

Mann (2014) argued that equity, “levels the playing field” (p.1) if students get what they need, instead of equal treatments to all students. Mann summed up the difference between equity and equality in this way.

Yes, making sure all students have *equal* access to resources is an important goal. All students should have the resources necessary for a high-quality education. But the truth remains that some students need *more* to get there. Here’s where equity comes in. The students who are furthest behind — most often low-income students and students of color — require more of those resources to catch up, succeed, and eventually, close the achievement gap. Giving students who come to school lagging academically (because of factors outside of a school’s control) the exact same resources as students in higher income schools alone will not close the achievement gap. But making sure that low-income students and students of color have access to exceptional teachers and that their schools have the funding to provide them with the kind of high-quality education they need to succeed will continue us on the path toward narrowing that gap. Equality has become synonymous with “leveling the playing field.” So let’s make equity synonymous with “more for those who need it (Mann, 2014, p.1).

Mann’s argument focuses on giving students what they need. If LGBTQ youth need explicit language of protections, information about restroom use, explicit language in handbooks discussing the use of preferred pronouns, additional supports to help with discriminative practices by the dominant culture, or other supports unique to LGBTQ youth then this is equity, not equality and equitable practices will be required. Other text examples were similar. Another typical statement reads as follows, “The [S2] Community School

District is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. It is an unfair or discriminatory practice for any educational institution to discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, religion, age (for employment), disability, socioeconomic status (for programs), marital status (for programs), or veteran status in its educational programs and its employment practices.” (p.1). While it is important to refrain from discriminating based sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity, it is also difficult to accurately claim one’s school or district as an “equal opportunity” school/district. Furthermore, it may be more fitting for schools and districts to promote equity, instead of equality.

As we examine the context of language with a Queer Theory lens and look at the work “opportunity” alone, this word allows for the dominant culture to be satisfied with providing opportunities for students to take. Unfortunately, sometimes just having an opportunity where students have “equal” access, is not enough. Students in schools having access and expectations to use those opportunities based on need is more equitable than simply stating that equal opportunities exist. Therefore, there is room to grow in the understanding of true equitable language and practices for this school and others as well.

All Students Language

There is a difference between LGBTQ-related language and other language that is perceived as inclusive, but really is not. Some could assume that using terms like *students*, or even *all students* is inclusive by nature of each at school. However, the heteronormative culture in schools is pervasive and the handbook language found in these texts demonstrated an inaccurate conflation of equity and equality. This means that the authors of student

handbooks, likely school leaders, are confused and use equity and equality interchangeably. This erroneous thinking devalues LGBTQ youth and leads to further victimization by perpetuating the status quo in schools.

Like other marginalized students in school, LGBTQ youth are underserved and silenced by heteronormative school artifacts like handbooks. Davis et al. (2015) argue that schools should present the counter-narrative. Examining the history of race in schools marginalizes subgroups further when there is, “no language within the text” (Davis et al., 2015, p. 354), to enter the counter-narrative into the curriculum. Just like race and equity language is needed in school curriculum artifacts, LGBTQ and equity language is also needed in handbook artifacts. This language within the text is needed to debunk the mainstream culture, and instead promote equity for each student regardless of identity or sexual preference.

All language is not equitable. The findings of this textual analysis illustrated that perceived inclusive language, or language promoting equality and not equity, was pervasive throughout the 43 school handbook artifacts. These terms should not be conflated. The handbook artifacts NVivo frequency word search found 9,575 occurrences of all or students within 1,871 pages of text. That means, that each page averaged over 5 occurrences of the words *all* or *students*. Using terms like all students or students in general assumes that each student is considered. General non-specific terms that lump each student into a normative category undermines the individuality or individual needs of each student and devalues subgroups. For the purposes of this dissertation study, using all language does not promote equity for LGBTQ youth. Instead, the term erroneously conflates equality or expectations for all students, as equitably considering the needs of each student. Thousands of examples

of perceived inclusiveness, or conflating equality and equity, were found in the handbook texts. An example of that type of language that was found throughout 42 of 43 texts is described in this letter from the principal to the students at High School [B],

This student handbook contains various rules and procedures you are responsible for as well as suggestions for high school success. We want *all students* to be successful and hope you feel comfortable asking questions if there any items you don't understand.

School focuses on providing *all students* with the opportunity to excel in academics and extra-curricular activities so that our *students* may become positive contributing members of our school and community. We encourage *students* and parents to be involved in our school and hope to work with you during your high school experience. (School Handbook B, 2017, p. 2).

This language of the text is the most common type of language found throughout all 43 texts in the sample. Yet, only one which will be described in Chapter 5, differentiate for subgroups and provide a more equitable approach with regard to LGBTQ youth needs. For all other texts, however, this notion of equality is conflated with equality and inclusiveness of LGBTQ youth is perceived, but that is not the reality.

Encouraging *students* to be involved, or providing *all students* with an opportunity to excel is not the only role of schools. School handbook texts might offer more than encouragement or providing opportunities. Schools might ensure that the dominant and subgroups, including LGBTQ youth, are participating fully in the school experience. In order to do that, handbook language that is more explicit could help. If LGBTQ youth express themselves, and are not forced to assimilate into heteronormative culture, there might be improvements to the school experience for LGBTQ youth. Handbook text that is more explicit regarding LGBTQ-engagement in academics and activities might help. However, the text language found in this research sample did not include much explicit LGBTQ-

related language. Instead, the school handbooks lumped all students into one group, while leaving out minority populations who experience systemic marginalization in schools. More text examples of this will follow.

Handbook text of School [P] presented the following mission statement, “ The mission of the [P] Community School, serving as a unifying agent of our communities, is to provide lifelong learning through the commitment to quality educational programs that prepare the *students* to be effective, successful, and responsible citizens” (p.1). There is a misalignment between what is professed for all students in these sample handbook texts and the differences in outcomes according to the literature review on national and Iowa LGBTQ youth experiences for each student. Here are some additional examples of school handbook artifacts that use terms like “all” or “all students”. School [C] stated in the handbook, “**Students** must be problem solvers, act responsibly, work hard, and show respect in and out of the classroom” (p. 24). School [N] discussed core values using “all students” language in this excerpt,

We Maintain the following Core Values for **all students**

1. Safe environment 2. Students as unique individuals with diverse interests and abilities 3. Good citizenship (e.g. Integrity, Ethics, Respect, Responsibility) 4. Achievement of each person’s full potential (Doing your Best!) 5. Partnerships with parents 6. Partnerships with community 7. A well rounded comprehensive curriculum 8. Lifelong Learning for all (School N, 2017, p.3).

School [A], also used the term “all students” in this text, “Achievement and Responsiveness whereby: **All students** are engaged in and accountable for their learning. **All students** are achieving their potential and prepared for success beyond K-12”, (p.3). The text later presented conflicting terms by stating **all students** and individualized together.

This statement might read “each student” to make it more equitable, “**All students** are accessing individualized and challenging programming” (p.12).

We cannot erroneously conflate equity with equality as educators. These findings do not lift the voices of the oppressed or promote equity. Instead, this language of lumping each student into one same group only perpetuates the status quo where LGBTQ

Revisiting Theme #2 Using Queer Theory

In general, handbook texts conflated equity and equality. These data may present a perceived belief that each student is covered when terms like *all students* are used. Queer Theory would challenge that thinking and help to stop the disenfranchisement of minority populations, like LGBTQ youth in schools. Since I examined the texts, and found a gross absence overall of LGBTQ-related language, this absence further oppresses LGBTQ youth. In addition, equality suggests that every student needs the same thing. Equity suggests that each student’s individual needs are considered and supported. School handbooks also use opportunity as staple language. Queer Theory would debunk the use of equal opportunity, but instead use terms like experiences for each, including LGBTQ youth. Since students who identify as LGBTQ are not explicitly considered within the language of the handbook texts, the constructed meaning that heterosexuality is the preferred orientation is present.

Theme #3 Bullying and Harassment and Safety Compliantly Present

Theme one of these findings addressed the absence of LGBTQ-related language and a strong theme of heteronormative language present. Theme two discussed an inaccurate conflation of equity and equality found in the handbook texts by using terms like all students in general, rather than using explicit LGBTQ-related language in school handbooks

and providing clarity around the equitable needs for LGBTQ youth in handbooks. The third theme that was found as a dominant presence in these 43 school handbooks is about bullying, harassment, and safety.

As a reminder, safety at school is a concern for LGBTQ youth, as the literature review provided multiple sources of evidence from schools around the country and in Iowa specifically where LGBTQ youth are not safe in some schools (Robinson and Espelage, 2011, 2012, Proteat et.al, 2011, Garvey and Rankin, 2015, GLSEN, 2015, 2017 McClelland Institute, 2017, Russell, 2011, Toomey, 2011, Iowa Pride Network, 2009). While this sample of 43 schools is representative of the handbooks in the state of Iowa, the researcher does not claim that students in these 43 schools are not safe. However, if these 43 schools of the sample provide similarly reported experiences of other students from national and state studies, their experiences produce worse outcomes for LGBTQ youth than their straight peers. This research study was not about the experiences of LGBTQ youth in these 43 schools, however. This researcher was interested in what the handbooks state about safety for LGBTQ youth in Iowa schools.

Safety concerns, including bullying and harassment, is the third theme presented in the findings of Chapter 4. Bullying and/or harassment terms were the second most mentioned terms in handbooks, following the term “students”. Bullying or harassment language and statements of non-discrimination were present in all school handbooks. Safety is a priority for schools and there is a legal obligation to include bullying and harassment policy or procedures in student handbooks, which explains why this language is so prevalent across the texts.

Explicit Bullying and Harassment Language

In all, there were 592 times that bullying and/or harassment was mentioned within the pages of text. The range was from 39 to 3 occurrences per handbook. The average number of times bullying and harassment was mentioned in each handbook was 13.77. This is noteworthy, because one might appreciate the explicit anti-bullying text of Iowa student handbooks. Explicit language can send a clearer message that bullying will not be tolerated.

In contrast, there is also a consideration to be made that with so many occurrences of bullying and harassment, it might be inferred that in these schools there are many bullying instances. Language often occurs in school artifacts when they are needed, therefore, some schools may need more language of protection against school bullies. However, explicit language against bullying or harassment may support students and families and may help to increase feelings of safety in schools.

Bullying and harassment language has been present in school handbooks since the Iowa Safe Schools Law (2007) where the state required schools to have policies addressing bullying and harassment in schools. While this law is not just intended to stop bullying and harassment of LGBTQ youth, there is specific language that requires schools to include that students would be protected from bullying based on gender identity or sexual orientation. Recommendations were also made at that time for schools to have anti-diversity clubs or GSAs. Yet, only one of the schools in this sample a decade later has a GSA publicized in the handbook. This school will be discussed in the model school section of Chapter 5.

Compliance or Commitment?

My biases as an educator for over 20 years helps me to understand our work related to compliance and commitment. Compliance means that we do things, out of necessity or

because we are told that we have to do them. A true commitment means that we not only comply with what is being asked of us, but we do it with a sense of pride and ownership in the work. When we are truly committed to a calling, we want to do the work because we believe in it and its purpose. We will go above and beyond the minimum required of us to get the job done. As a school leader, I see both compliance and commitment in our work.

There is a clear theme that schools are following the law and publicizing the information for students and families, since the terms bullying and/or harassment was mentioned nearly 600 times in 43 school handbooks. Because the law recommended that school include the bullying and harassment policy language in student handbooks, in all 43 school handbooks, it was found. Even though most handbooks read as rules and regulations, expectations, or procedures, rather than policy, with regard to bullying and harassment, policy language was included. Next, I will next share some examples of the text language found in the sample.

School A provided a clear example of bullying and harassment language in their handbook. This school provided a more comprehensive explanation of bullying and harassment than most schools and an excerpt from this text is included here.

Bullying will not be tolerated in [A] Schools. The Board is committed to providing all students with a safe and civil school environment that is free from bullying and in which all members of the school community are treated with dignity and respect. To that end, the Board has in place policies, procedures, and practices designed to reduce and eliminate bullying, as well as, processes and procedures to deal with incidents of bullying, (School A Handbook, 2017, p. 13).

This text provides clarity on the school's vision to reduce and eliminate bullying. This text does illustrate a commitment to eliminate bullying. The text continues with examples of

bullying that help provide clarity for students. While all examples of bullying provided in this excerpt, it provided more clarity regarding the definitions of bullying than other schools.

Bullying may include, but is not limited to, the following behaviors and circumstances: Verbal, nonverbal, physical or written bullying, hazing, or other victimization that has the purpose or effect of causing injury, discomfort, exclusion, fear, or suffering to the victim; Repeated remarks of a demeaning nature that have the purpose or effect of causing injury, Implied or explicit threats concerning one's grades, achievements, property, etc. that have the purpose or effect of causing injury, discomfort, exclusion, fear, or suffering to the victim. Demeaning jokes, stories, or activities directed at the student that have the purpose or effect of causing injury (School A Handbook, 2017, p. 13).

This school's handbook language included treating people with dignity and respect. In addition, this language provided for students and staff information about what bullying is and that it will not be tolerated and why. There are many examples of bullying and harassment language throughout the texts. Most of the texts provide a general statement and without additional contextual language around it that show a commitment to safety.

As mentioned previously, the words bullying or harassment was located through the search using NVivo 592 times. This is nearly an average of 14 times per handbook. Most handbook examples found included a typical statement that was replicated in various forms throughout the texts and read similarly. A few schools moved beyond the legally required language to show a stronger commitment to safety than others.

This statement found in High School D's handbook (pp.7-8) provided specific language of the policy and procedures for bullying and harassment in school. This school included the legally required language, but also included resources for students and families. This information is useful to this study, because it is a strategy that provides a pedagogical

approach to stop bullying by providing students and families resources rather than only providing a list of consequences or intolerable behaviors at school.

School [D] stated in the handbook that, they are, “committed to providing all students with a safe and civil school environment in which all members of the school community are treated with dignity and respect. To that end, the District has in place policies, procedures, and practices designed to reduce and eliminate bullying as well as processes and procedures to deal with such incidents when they occur” (pp. 7-8). This school text focused on the vision of the elimination of bullying, rather than using reactionary language in the school text. Students are asked to follow this mantra, “We will not bully others. We will try to help students who are bullied. We will try to include students who are left out. If we know that somebody is being bullied, we will tell an adult at school and an adult at home” (pp. 78). This is the only school in the sample that included language like this where students are asked to try to include others who are left out. This is important, because in a heteronormative school culture, without peer groups who support LGBTQ youth, it is likely lonely for this group of students who are systemically marginalized.

High School [D] also includes multiple resources for students and families. These resources to support families and their students to prevent bullying and provides information on how to respond if their students are bullied. The resources included are as follows:

Web Resources for Teens and their Parents <http://www.tolerance.org/pt/>
Tolerance.org promotes and supports anti-bias activism in every venue of life.

<http://xblock.isafe.org/> Get the 411 on what i-SAFE has to offer. Here you’ll find links to the latest and greatest iMENTOR news and programs.

<http://www.stopbullyingnow.com/> The links on this site will lead you through an exploration of interventions that work to reduce bullying in schools.
Practical Prevention Strategies by Jeffrey R. Sprague and Hill M. Walker

Schools Where Everyone Belongs by Stan Davis Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do (Understanding Children's Worlds) by Dan Olweus

Mom, They're Teasing Me: Helping Your Child Solve Social Problems by Michael Thompson Harassment – Sexual, Racial, and Other

In the above excerpt, School [D] demonstrated that they want to educate students and families, rather than just focusing on reactionary consequences if someone is bullied at school. While this information is helpful, it lacks guidance or resources for families of students who identify as LGBTQ and are bullied at school because of that identification.

According to the review of the literature on LGBTQ school experiences, we know that 85 percent of LGBTQ youth surveyed reported having been verbally harassed and 44 percent physically assaulted (Robinson and Espelage, 2011,2012, Proteat et.al, 2011, Garvey and Rankin, 2015, GLSEN, 2015, 2017 McClelland Institute, 2017, Russell, 2011, Toomey, 2011, Iowa Pride Network, 2009), it is critical to examine our resources and provide LGBTQ- inclusive educational material for students and families. This district did include in the handbook text more precautionary measures than others from the sample, but there is no explicit information to help this specific subgroup stated in the handbook. High School [D] continued with a clear definition of harassment, “Harassment is defined as anything a normal person would consider threatening, including continuous threats, teasing, put-downs, physical or verbal abuse based on race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation” (pp. 7-8). The handbook also provided examples of harassment including, “offensive contact, jokes, stories, pictures, or objects” and sexual harassment including, but is not limited to, “unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonable interfering with an individual's school performance or creating an

intimidating, hostile, or offensive school environment” (pp. 7-8). Then the handbook texts provide guidance for what students should do if this occurs.

A missed opportunity here was to include definitions of harassment of students who identify as LGBTQ. For example, including additional text examples of harassment like offensive jokes about another student’s identity or sexual preference would provide explicit language of protection for LGBTQ youth.

Lastly, the prevalent theme of bullying and harassment text found throughout the handbook artifacts in Iowa demonstrated compliance with the Iowa Safe Schools Law (2007). Most districts did not include any additional LGBTQ-related language beyond what was required by law. This section of the findings did report the language of schools that made attempts at moving from compliance only statements to some commitments to equity, but most schools simply stated the legally required information only.

One final example I will share in this findings section of the dissertation is bullying and harassment was found in High School [S] handbook. This language exemplifies most common language found among the handbook samples, and this language represents compliance with the law only. Although Iowa schools are following the law, there are very few examples overall where LGBTQ youth are explicitly supported in the handbook texts as it relates to bullying and harassment. Yet, marginalized LGBTQ youth across the nation and in Iowa have in other studies reported that they were verbally harassed and physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation (McClelland, 2017). This is important, because intentional and explicit language protecting LGBTQ youth was not prevalent throughout the handbook texts in this sample of 43 handbooks. Currently, the bullying and harassment language of this sample is not explicit and similar to the example below from School [S],

Harassment and bullying of students and employees are against federal, state, and District Policy. The District is committed to providing all students with a safe and civil school environment in which all members of the school community are treated with dignity and respect. To that end, the board has in place policies, procedures, and practices that are designed to reduce and eliminate bullying and harassment as well as processes and procedures to deal with incidents of bullying and harassment. Bullying and harassment of students by students, school employees, and volunteers who have direct contact with students will not be tolerated in the school or school district, (School S, 2017, pp. 7-8).

School [S] also defined bullying in its handbook as prohibiting, “harassment, bullying, hazing, or any other victimization, of students, based on any of the following actual or perceived traits or characteristics, including but not limited to, race, color, creed, age, sex, national origin, religion, marital status, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical attributes, physical or mental ability or disability, ancestry, political party preference, political belief, socioeconomic status or familial status. Harassment against employees based upon race, color, creed, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, religion, age, or disability is also prohibited” (pp. 7-8). The handbook text also addressed that if the harassment puts the student in reasonable feeling of fear of harm, then that is bullying. Furthermore, the language addressed that the student must have had, “substantially detrimental effect on the student’s physical or mental health” (pp.7-8). This phrase is part of the legal definition of bullying which is a very high bar and to meet that definition, it could be assumed that students would have to be significantly harmed to meet this definition. Any student, including those who identify as LGBTQ should not have to wait to be harmed before it stops.

Explicit Language is Needed

As reported previously in the literature review, some LGBTQ youth are harassed with use of terms like “faggot” or “dyke”. Handbook text from School [S] further defined bullying as, “Repeated remarks of a demeaning nature that have the purpose or effect of causing injury, discomfort, fear, or suffering to the victim; Demeaning jokes, stories, or activities directed at the student that have the purpose or effect of causing injury, discomfort, fear, or suffering to the victim” (pp.7-8). This language while not explicitly supporting LGBTQ youth, was stated as policy and found directly in the school handbook. This language addressed a common issue reported by LGBTQ youth across the country and in some Iowa schools, verbal assault, (Robinson and Espelage, 2011,2012, Proteat et.al, 2011, Garvey and Rankin, 2015, GLSEN, 2015, 2017 McClelland Institute, 2017, Russell, 2011, Toomey, 2011, Iowa Pride Network, 2009).

Even with language like this in handbook texts, it is not explicit enough. This more general protective language has been included since 2007 in many school handbooks, and students are still not safe in some schools (Robinson and Espelage, 2011,2012, Proteat et.al, 2011, Garvey and Rankin, 2015, GLSEN, 2015, 2017 McClelland Institute, 2017, Russell, 2011, Toomey, 2011, Iowa Pride Network, 2009). This research suggests that the absence of LGBTQ-related language in school artifacts, like handbook, might not be working. District policy of non-discrimination must translate into true protections in school. Since implementation is outside the scope of this research, it is my intent to highlight the themes present instead. The theme of bullying and harassment and safety concerns or recommendations suggests that there is a problem in schools. It is refreshing to find that this policy language was found throughout the handbook samples, in every handbook. However,

a clear commitment to promoting safety for LGBTQ youth was not found overall, as the language present was required legally. Therefore, compliance, not commitment was the likely motivating factor to include this language.

Therefore, it is common for districts to share similarly stated policies regarding student or staff protections. Policies are written by the district in line with the law, but student handbooks often address the procedures by which the policies will be enacted. Policies that are written are influenced by the norm in society, and society's norm is straight. To date, research has not addressed the gap in including LGBTQ-related language in school handbooks in Iowa. This study addresses this gap, however, and they were examined with a Queer Theory lens.

There have been various policy studies conducted to examine policy language (Davis, 2009). Much of that work has been focused on marginalized populations as it relates to race or ethnic background. Often the research is grounded in court case decisions supporting equity and access or the need for explicit language in the workplace or schools, (National Research Council, Fairness in Employment Testing, 1989). Another school example of this is bullying and harassment language that will be discussed next.

School Handbooks an Extension of Board Policy

School [W] called handbooks, “an extension of School Board Policy” (p. 21). Handbooks as extensions of policy where procedures or regulations are explained in the text can provide guidance to families on safety. This same school, School [W] provided parent safety information to discuss safety measures that parents can take to support their students

at school and in the community. Any support schools might provide to parents and families regarding how to protect and support students is good to include in handbooks.

School [T] provided information about what inclusion means regarding bullying and harassment policy. School [T] also provided information that an inspection of instructional materials for inclusivity would take place. This district made an effort to promote inclusivity, but we do not know how they define it. When the curriculum reflects the students in the classrooms, it can become more meaningful to the students. Although the handbook states that it is promoting inclusivity, in practice that may not be happening. However, this research study is not examining practice or implementation of such procedures. It is only focused on handbook language. While inclusivity in instruction is considered a recommendation for other schools to consider, there are other examples too in the content of the handbook texts that support safety for each student.

Parent/Guardian Resources for Safety

This theme of safety and recommendations was represented by supports for any struggling students considering suicide. The following text was found in School [A]'s handbook, "Suicide Prevention Lifeline, The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a 24-hour, toll-free suicide prevention service available to anyone in suicidal crisis. If you need help, please dial 1-800-273-TALK (8255). You will be routed to the closest possible crisis center in your area" (p.24). This information is an important resource to students and families, especially for LGBTQ youth who are more at risk for suicide than other youth in schools. The McClelland Institute (2015) reported that LGBTQ youth are 5.6 times more likely to attempt suicide. Therefore, this handbook example supports LGBTQ youth if they

are in need of suicide support, even though the language of the text does not explicitly state that it does.

Overwhelmingly, these data suggest that bullying and harassment, and other school safety concerns, are important enough to have included nearly 600 statements about bullying and harassment in the handbooks of this sample. This theme was evident in the text and represents an implicit support to LGBTQ youth. While there was some legally compliant explicit language present in each handbook, the extent of additional LGBTQ-related language was virtually non-existent in nearly all school handbooks.

Non-Discrimination Language

Non-discrimination statement language was prevalent in all 43 student handbooks from the sample. While this is generally seen as a win for LGBTQ youth, it is also another demonstration of compliance. As previously discussed in the literature review, Iowa Code requires that schools have a policy that includes protections against bullying and discrimination based on race, gender, ethnicity, gender identity, and sex. Almost every school from the sample also included a non-discrimination statement. In almost every handbook, the only statement that included the term identity was found in a legally bound non-discrimination statement, not as an illustration of true commitment to safety for LGBTQ youth. Since most school handbook texts only stated the bare minimum required by the law, this shows that districts in Iowa are compliant with the law in theory, not necessarily practice. It also exemplifies that LGBTQ youth rights may only be considered, at least as it relates to handbook language of this representative sample, when the law forces leaders to do so. More examples of this language will be shared from the findings.

School [B] provided a statement that was all too familiar and read similarly regardless of what text was analyzed. Regarding sexual harassment, this text addressed policy in this way, “Sexual harassment may include unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Harassment or bullying on the basis or age, color, creed, national origin, race, religion, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical attributes, physical or mental ability or disability, ancestry, political party preference, political belief, socioeconomic status or familial status includes conduct of a verbal or physical nature that is designed to embarrass, distress, agitate, disturb or trouble persons” (p. 28). While this language is explicitly stated to support students in schools against sexual harassment based on the gender identity and sexual orientation, this is a compliance statement required by law to be in policy. This was the norm. I searched the texts for statements that went above and beyond the mandated legal statements, and supported more commitment toward equity than other texts and few were found.

Here are two more examples of the typical compliance statements that seemingly promote equity on the surface, but in truth are stated as a matter of following the law. The first example is from School [B], (p.4) and the second example is from School [C].

School [B]

Students, parents, employees and others doing business with or performing services for the [B] School District are hereby notified that this school district does not discriminate on the bases of race, color, age (except students), religion, national origin, creed, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, gender identity or disability in admission or access to, or treatment in, its programs and activities. The school district does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, age (except students), religion, national origin, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or

disability in admission or access to, or treatment in, its hiring and employment practices, (School C Handbook, 2017, p. 1).

School [C]

Educational Program and Employment Non Discrimination Statement It is the policy of the [C]Community School District not to illegally discriminate in either: its educational programs on the basis of race, religion, creed, socioeconomic status, color, sex, marital status, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability; or its employment practices on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, ethnic background, age, disability, or genetic information, (School C Handbook, 2017, p. 1).

Both statements are explicit, yet serve as compliance. They are typical of all nondiscrimination statements found across all 43 texts. These statements of compliancy are not enough to protect LGBTQ youth in schools. A Transformative World View lens would examine the leadership and the reasons why only legally compliant LGBTQ-related language was found in the texts. This is likely because the heteronormative culture presents systemic permanence where non-dominant cultures are silenced.

Commitment to equity is shown through voluntary additional language, not forced by law

Voluntary explicit LGBTQ -related language demonstrates commitment to equity. If school handbooks in Iowa explicitly included LGBTQ-related language then students and families would have some indication that the school or district is committed to LGBTQ youth. Instead, there was only one school that mentioned a GSA Club and only one school in the sample provided a detailed list of expectations of support and privacy for LGBTQ youth. These two examples of the forty-three texts were the exception. One other handbook provided some commitment language in the text.

It is also the policy of this district that the curriculum content and instructional materials utilized reflect the cultural and racial diversity present in the United States and

the variety of careers, roles, and lifestyles open to women as well as men in our society. One of the objectives of the total curriculum and teaching strategies is to reduce stereotyping and to eliminate bias on the basis of sexual orientation, color, creed, gender identity, national origin, socio-economic status, marital status, race, religion, and disability. The curriculum should foster respect and appreciation for the cultural diversity found in our country and as awareness of the rights, duties, and responsibilities of each individual member of a pluralistic society, (School B Handbook, 2017, p.3).

This text example from School [B], was found in the early pages of the handbook which tells the reader of the text that it is important. The language of this text focused on a curriculum objective to eliminate biases, including biases of sexual orientation or gender identity. While I understand that it is impossible to eliminate biases, it is bold of this school to give effort beyond the compliancy statements, to educate and break down the barriers that exist to perpetuate the status quo of oppression in schools for LGBTQ youth. The efforts made by school leaders to transform the language that we use in our school artifacts, like handbooks, can make a difference in the lives of students.

Revisiting Theme # 3 Using Queer Theory

In all, there were 592 times that bullying and/or harassment was mentioned within the sample pages of text from 43 handbooks of a representative group of schools in the state of Iowa. This is noteworthy, because one might appreciate the explicit anti-bullying text of Iowa student handbooks. Explicit language can send a clearer message that bullying will not be tolerated. However, this language was present due to compliance of the law. As a reminder, Queer Theory debunks the idea of heterosexual norms, and instead focuses on deconstructing the notion that heterosexuality is the preferred orientation (Jagose, 1996, Lauritsen and Thorstad, 1974, Ticotto, 2017, and Gunckel, 2017). When examining safety concerns and bullying and harassment language in these handbook artifacts, Queer theorists

would consider bullying and harassment language in texts to support LGBTQ youth to explicitly help keep them safe. However, the fact that the language is likely only present because the law requires it, only strengthens the notion that schools are systemically binary systems where heterosexuality is a preferred orientation.

Conclusion

In summation, Chapter 4 presented three prevailing themes that emerged from the analysis of 43 Iowa school handbooks: (1) presence of heteronormative language and a gross absence of LGBTQ-related language found in the handbooks, (2) an inaccurate conflation of equity and equality, and (3) bullying and harassment or safety language compliantly present. Each of these themes presented will be further discussed in Chapter 5 regarding the implications for LGBTQ youth. Each will also be examined from a Transformative World View providing recommendations for school leaders and educational researchers to further promote equity in schools. In addition, I will discuss how further research could add to the meaning making of these findings.

CHAPTER 5. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings shared in Chapter 4 addressed these three themes found in 43 school handbook artifacts from a representative sample in Iowa: (1) presence of heteronormative language and a gross absence of LGBTQ-related language found in the handbooks, (2) an inaccurate conflation of equity and equality, and (3) bullying and harassment or safety language compliantly present. These data could assume that Iowa is not inclusive and that that school community needs Cultural Proficiency training and supports to become more inclusive. That may be the case. However, the handbook artifacts as mentioned previously, are limited by the knowledge and experiences of the leaders who created the texts. Therefore, it may be that the schools or community are LGBTQ-inclusive, but the creators of the handbooks, likely school leaders, need additional supports or training. That could be the reason why few examples of LGBTQ-related language were found in the 43 texts from the sample of this study. In fact, a gross absence of LGBTQ-related language was found. This Chapter 5 will discuss further these findings.

Queer Theory Framework would argue that the schools and communities of the sample are of the dominant heteronormative culture based on the findings of this dissertation study. Schools are compensatory institutions for students ages 16 and under, yet, school handbooks barely mention LGBTQ youth who are attending these institutions. Instead heteronormative language dominates the 43 handbook texts and leaves out LGBTQ youth for the most part.

The self-reported outcomes of LGBTQ youth in schools nation-wide and in Iowa are significantly worse than for their straight peers, (Robinson and Espelage, 2011,2012,

Proteat et.al, 2011, Garvey and Rankin, 2015, GLSEN, 2015, 2017 McClelland Institute, 2017, Russell, 2011, Toomey, 2011, Iowa Pride Network, 2009). Therefore, it is important for LGBTQ students and families have access to more information related to the LGBTQ schooling experience in handbooks for their reference. My intention is to inform Iowa school leaders of the LGBTQ handbook themes that emerged from this study. My hope is for school leaders to transform their schools and all artifacts which represent their schools would include LGBTQ-related language, especially handbooks since researchers found that explicit language is important to include in artifacts like handbooks, (Wherry, 2009, Workman, 2006). This research is different, because it only included Iowa schools and focused on the handbooks and LGBTQ- related language. In Iowa, the Safe Schools Act provided the legal push for districts to write policies that protect students who identify as LGBTQ. Therefore, some explicit language does exist in every handbook in the sample. However, a clear theme of compliance to this law, not commitment to promoting equity for LGBTQ youth was found.

Based on the findings of this dissertation study, I will discuss the implications of each of the three themes that emerged from the 43 handbooks from the sample. I will also provide a list of recommendations for schools as they write their handbooks. As a reminder the three themes that emerged are as follows: (1) presence of heteronormative language and a gross absence of LGBTQ-related language found in the handbooks, (2) an inaccurate conflation of equity and equality, and (3) bullying and harassment or safety language compliantly present and I will discuss the educational implications as well as considerations for further research on each of the three themes and then offer recommendations that are meaningful considerations for future research in this field. First, however, I will discuss one

model handbook that included the most LGBTQ-related language in its text. I will discuss this model handbook at length to serve as exemplar language for leaders across the state to consider when crafting school handbooks.

One Model Handbook

Throughout the analysis process of these handbook texts, one school handbook modeled LGBTQ-related language. Therefore, I examined this model language which will be described in detail in this section of the paper. This model handbook language will be discussed first, to set the stage for the discussion on what language should be present in school handbooks. While School [B]'s handbook was not perfect, it did provide some model LGBTQ-related language that Iowa school leaders should consider. This model provides a framework to consider when analyzing school handbook texts. This handbook represented not just School [B], but also served as a district handbook for other schools. A choice was made by School [B] to include the middle school district handbook as part of their own, and making accessible to families both a middle school handbook and an addendum of School [B] specific information. This text mentioned 8 times the rights of students who identify as transgendered. This handbook is considered a model for the transformative language that could impact the perceived and actual safety of LGBTQ youth. The language of the handbook artifact will be discussed in this section.

The implications for this research are filled with endless opportunities. Only one school from the sample that posted a school handbook in online demonstrating model LGBTQ-related language; that school is School [B]. This school included language with solid exemplars from which leaders may consider using to critique their own handbook

language. Doing that work will help to transform schools by promoting equity. This researcher only found one school district in the sample of 43 schools in Iowa that produced some model school handbook language, yet national and state-wide LGBTQ youth reported that 85% of LGBTQ youth are victimized at school (GLSEN, 2015, McClelland Institute, 2017, Russell, 2011, Toomey, 2011, Iowa Pride Network, 2009). If LGBTQ students fair similarly in the sample schools as they reported in national and state surveys, this means that other schools across the state may want to consider closely examining their own school artifacts, including handbooks to include more LGBTQ-related language.

School [B] Model Language

School [B]'s handbook is a guide for students, families, and parents. This district professes its vision to become the model urban district of the United States. This school is at least the model for LGBTQ-inclusive handbooks in the state of Iowa. The model language of the text is the only exemplar in the study that provided guidance with regard to gender identity, a definition, and the rights of students with regard to gender identity. It is by no means a model for all language of the text, but did provide more guidance for LGBTQ youth than any other school handbook in the sample. This section of the handbook referenced a common statement of non-discrimination found similarly in most handbooks that this school, “does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, disability, religion, creed, age (for employment), marital status (for programs), sexual orientation, gender identity and socioeconomic status (for programs) in its educational programs and its employment practices” (p. 35). This statement is referred to as a nondiscrimination statement and a similar statement was found in nearly all handbooks. This is state law and

policy in most districts, to not discriminate based on sexual orientation or gender identity. However, most other schools in the sample provided no additional language beyond the legally required nondiscrimination statement or anti-bullying and harassment statement. It is positive that each school handbook had this statement, but it is discouraging that other schools do not use LGBTQ-related language beyond what is legally required in their handbooks. This is also discouraging, because the without explicit language, school handbooks lump students together, as if they are all the same. Equitable institutions are able to distinguish the needs of each student, not forcing students to assimilate and adopt dominant culture norms.

At a minimum, schools might explicitly state that they will not discriminate against LGBTQ youth. School [B]'s handbook states that they strive to, "create a supportive environment for its students. Discrimination, harassment, and bullying of students for any reason, including on the basis of gender identity and/or sexual orientation are prohibited by state law and District policy" (p. 35). This statement to create a supportive environment explains the reason behind policy. Explaining the purpose of policy supports the notion that this school is more committed to equity than other wording of the policy language in handbooks.

The handbook text continued with definitions and guidelines for students and families including: locker room use, restroom use, use of student names and pronouns, privacy rights, and participation in extra-curricular activities. Some district policies are mentioned in most handbooks of the sample, Policy no. 507 of this district was mentioned where, "Complaints of discrimination or harassment based on a student's actual or perceived gender identity or sexual orientation must be handled in accordance with District

Policy no. 507". Definitions are helpful for students, families, and staff. The definitions gender identity, transgender, and sexual orientation provided by School [B] and stated below.

Definitions

- Gender identity: A person's gender-related identity, which may be the same as or different from the person's sex assigned at birth.
- Transgender: an umbrella term used to describe a person whose gender identity or gender expression is different from that traditionally associated with the assigned sex at birth.
- Sexual orientation: an individual's enduring pattern of physical, romantic, or other attraction to another person. Sexual orientation is not the same as gender identity. (School B Handbook, 2017, p. 36)

These definitions help to fill the gap in understanding. When gaps in understanding are closed, it can help to create a safer space for each student, including those who identify as LGBTQ in schools.

Because the identity is a personal topic, School [B] included model privacy language within the section of the text discussing gender identity. The handbook text addresses the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Meaning that only those who have legitimate interests in the students' educational experience in school should have access to student records. Therefore, without parental consent or permission from a student who is 18 years of age or older, students' privacy information, including students' identify, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or transgender status will not be disclosed. This information is helpful for students and families, so that they may feel a sense of privacy regarding their personal identities or preferences.

The handbook text continues with a bold statement of support and autonomy on behalf of the students, “Students have the ability to discuss and express their gender identity openly and decide when, with whom, and how much of their private information to share with others. Schools should work closely with the student and parent(s)/guardian(s) to devise an appropriate plan regarding the confidentiality of the student’s gender identity” (p. 36). In addition, the handbook text provides a statement about how the decision for students concerning identification is a, “highly personal” (p. 36) decision. Therefore, the text encourages students to speak with school staff for any support or accommodations at school.

Minors who would like to keep their identity private from even their parents have rights in schools as well. It may be the case that a student has not discussed this personal decision yet with parents and the school may need to support the student, but at the same time ensure that the student’s safety and health are reported to parents if it is a concern. Therefore, discussion of that in the handbook is helpful to serve as a guideline for students, families, and staff.

Student Names and Pronouns

Calling students by name is an important part of making students feel welcome at school. School [B] addressed the right for each student, including minors to be called by his/her desired name according to his/her identification. In addition, the district stated in the handbook that parental consent is not required for minor students to be called by their preferred name or pronounce corresponding to their gender. Students and families who read this guidance on names and pronouns will know and understand that it is a student’s right to determine his/her identification as male or female and to be addressed according to that

identity. No other text in the sample of handbooks addresses the students' rights to use of pronouns and preferred names. School [B] continues with name rights in personal records that, "Other than documents where the students name and sex assigned at birth are required to be listed, any reference to the student's name and gender should match the gender identity of the student" (p. 36). This is the only handbook in the sample that discussed a student's right to his/her name in relation to his/her identity choice. This language supports equity and dismantles dominant culture that oppresses marginalized subgroups.

Restrooms and Locker Rooms

One can only imagine how difficult it might be for a middle or high school student to decide in which restroom or locker room to use if his or her gender identification does not match what was birth assigned. Only one school in the sample of 43 texts addressed this issue. Restroom and locker room usage is a daily occurrence, often multiple times per day. Yet, only one school handbook provided guidance to students and families for transgendered, gender fluid, or questioning students. The guidance provided in the text allows the students' rights to use the restroom or locker room with which the student identifies. The handbook text recommends discussions of safety and comfort-level of students to take place with students, parents, and administration. Students are also informed that they have the right to a, "safe alternative" (p. 36) should they feel uncomfortable. However, transgendered students are not required to use a gender- neutral restroom, but may do so if they choose.

School leaders must help to balance the privacy rights of each student. Therefore, if any student is uncomfortable undressing in a locker room and requests additional privacy,

that should be accommodated for any student. School [B] addressed this in the handbook, and offered the following accommodations as a general guideline:

1. Use of a private area in a larger room such as a bathroom stall in a multi user restroom, an area separated by a curtain, or a nurse's or PE instructor's office.
2. A separate changing schedule, before or after other students use the facility. (School B Handbook, 2017, p. 36)

Therefore, each student should be afforded accommodations for privacy if requested. This is important, because this LGBTQ-related language may help to ensure that each student feels comfortable in locker rooms where students undress. Furthermore, regarding physical education, if a school participates in gender-segregated physical education, students are permitted to participate with the gender with which the student identifies.

Extra-Curricular Activities and Interscholastic Sports

Students who are transgendered in most schools are left to question whether they may participate in gender-specific activities. In School [B], the handbook is explicit about the students' rights to participate. School [B] provided guidelines for participation in extra-curricular activities and interscholastic sports.

The District encourages participation in District-sponsored activities for all students regardless of their gender identity. In general, student will participate in sex segregated interscholastic sports consistent with their gender identity. However, participation in interscholastic sports may be subject to the rules and requirements of the Iowa High School Athletic Association and/or the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union. Participation in activities and sports will be determined on a case-by-case basis by a team consisting of the appropriate Executive Director, Principal, and Activities Director of the school. If there is no Activities Director assigned to the school, the Executive Director shall choose one from another school within the District. (School B Handbook, 2017, p.37)

This guideline is explicit about the rights of students to participate in sports consistent with their gender identity. However, the text does leave some room for doubt. What remains

unclear regarding the rights of student participation is where the Girls High School Athletic Union may determine that a student may not participate. The discussion topic of students participating in sports according to their gender identity will continue to evolve in educational settings. As more students are coming out as transgender or identifying as gender fluid, it will continue to be a topic requiring additional legal parameters to provide clarity regarding participation. There is some clarity needed yet on this issue with the Girls' Athletic Union to disrupt the normative culture.

Dress Code

School [B] concludes the section on gender identity in the handbook artifact with guidance about student dress code. The handbook provides clarity for students that they may dress in clothing consistent with their gender identity, including at Prom. Dress codes at school remove individual identity, especially when schools determine that students must wear specific birth-assigned gender specific clothing. This school handbook provides clarity for daily wear and a special occasion, prom. Students can express themselves in accordance to their gender identity in the form of clothing. This language supports equity and continues to narrow the gap of understanding of school normative culture and how to disrupt it.

Accountability

Lastly, this handbook text provides guidance that it is the building Principal who is responsible to ensure that staff and students are familiar with these guidelines and a phone number was provided if any student or family member has questions about gender identify in school. The text assigns accountability to the Principal for providing guidance to students and staff for expectations, processes, or procedures related to students and their gender

identity. This accountability helps to increase the likelihood that a school will follow these guidelines to support students.

Since Caitlyn Jenner transitioned publicly in 2015, school and community have had more experiences working with students who identify as transgendered. Students and families are meeting more with school and asking for support for the above topics like names, pronoun use, locker rooms, restrooms, and participation in activities. Therefore, until it becomes more common and the gap of understanding is filled regarding the rights of LGBTQ youth, explicit text of guidance should be present in school handbooks. It does not surprise me that explicit text addressing lesbian, gay, or bi-sexual youth issues were not mentioned in the handbook text. I argue that is because this work was addressed when the original push for safe schools laws in 2007 was enacted. Even during the Mathew Shepard Era of the late 1990's and early 2000's, there was an explicit push to protect lesbian and gay youth. When transforming culture, explicit language is necessary to ensure support and protections, and I argue that explicit language is needed until there is no longer a gap in the extent of mistreatment of LGBTQ youth from their straight peers in school.

Revisiting Model Handbook Using Queer Theory

Since Queer Theory lens takes a critical look at how school leaders might analyze school artifacts and consider ways we might challenge the status quo, this model school handbook language serves as an exemplar. Jagose (1996) discussed Queer Theory as a gay liberation and counter-culture movement. School [B]'s handbook provided several examples from locker room use, participation in school activities, dress code, privacy rights, or use of preferred name and pronouns where the LGBTQ counter-culture was presented. This notion

of disrupting the binary systemic thinking in schools was found throughout School [B]'s handbook.

Implications of Theme #1

Drawing on the tenants of Queer Theory Framework, 42 of 43 handbooks in the sample serve as exemplars of oppression for LGBTQ youth. The implications of school handbooks' gross absence of LGBTQ-related language is impossible to measure. Student voices that are silenced through school artifacts or otherwise perpetuate heteronormative dominance. This implication could be more costly than the risk it takes to speak out on behalf of students who identify as LGBTQ.

Schools must consider future research where other school artifacts are examined with an equity lens to determine if and how school leaders can better support schools in providing a more equitable educational environment. I suggest that each district trains its leaders to examine all school artifacts for equity language and LGBTQ-explicit language to ensure that we can continue to transform schools to disrupt the traditional binary notion of sexuality. This will be a continuous area of growth for each district, and it would be a process where leaders continually examine school-produced artifacts for improvement in promoting equity for each student.

Since the dominant culture prevailed overall in the handbook texts from the sample of 43 schools, this theme created a narrative that the agent experience is the experience of each student in Iowa schools. This is not the case. Many target groups exist in schools and need protections and specific language in school artifacts like curriculum and school handbooks. I recommend that the language of school artifacts be analyzed carefully with a critical Queer Theory lens exposing the consistent meaning that is constructed that

heterosexuality is the preferred orientation. If each school was committed to the promotion of equity and engaged in professional learning around Cultural Proficiency, gains can be made concerning the inclusion and treatment of both dominant and subgroup cultures in schools.

Queer Theorists, like Jagose (1996), would argue that the counter-narrative be told for schools to challenge and disrupt the status quo.

Implications of Theme #2

As a reminder, Halverson (2003) argued that artifacts are defined as routines, procedures, programs, or policies that help leaders shape the practices in schools. Yet, the findings of this dissertation research analyzing 43 handbooks found 1 school handbook with multiple occurrences of LGBTQ-related language and a clear example of promoting equity for LGBTQ youth. Since these data only produced one school district that discussed specifically the rights of transgendered students in school, I recommend that districts invest in professional learning around the promotion of equity. Not only to help leaders take a critical look at artifacts like handbooks, but also to use these artifacts and professional learning to transform schools.

I suggest starting with a text called, *Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders* by Randall B. Lindsey (2009). In this text, there is a rich discussion of the cultural proficiency continuum supports this notion of equity verses equality. Culturally proficient leaders would understand and recognize the barriers to culturally proficient leadership which are: the presumption of entitlement, systems of oppression (schools), and unawareness of the need to adapt (Lindsey et. al, 2009, pp. 4-5). It is important that school

leaders and each school staff member understands that equity does not mean equality and the conflation of these two terms creates a devaluing of subgroups who are already marginalized. By that I mean, if textual language in school artifacts ignore the rights of LGBTQ youth by lumping all students into one category called “students”, the individual needs may not be met for each student. This will be a learning process for school staff, and it may take time. However, I ask each leader to begin examining the difference between equality and equity and use a critical lens when creating and reforming school artifacts, particularly handbooks, where the tone for culture is set amongst the pages.

Heteronormative biases exist in community, which make their way into schools. It is the work of transformative leaders who aim to disrupt and dismantle the continuation of disenfranchising LGBTQ youth in schools. My suggestion for each district to engage in Cultural Proficiency learning will be an ongoing quest of continuous development. This work will rely on the expertise of the leaders in schools, therefore, it is critical to ensure that leaders first examine their own biases about equity and equality as it relates to the needs of LGBTQ youth. Then, start the work of disrupting the systemic oppression in schools together. The literature review of this dissertation provided ample data to suggest that a disruption is needed, as LGBTQ youth nationally and in Iowa reported much worse outcomes than experienced by their peers in school (GLSEN, 2015, McClelland Institute, 2017, Russell, 2011, Toomey, 2011, Iowa Pride Network, 2009).

A suggestion that I have for further research is to study the biases of school leaders in Iowa to capture an understanding of the essence of that experience as it relates to leading in schools as an agent. It would be important to know and understand the deep biases we have as Iowa leaders. Learning together how to include subgroups could be an interesting

quest for an aspiring doctoral candidate in the figure and more importantly that work might help Iowa leaders recognize and remove the barriers to cultural proficiency and promote equity instead. This learning may be used to provide a clearer vision for equity in each school in the state of Iowa. School handbooks might then be examined with a Queer Theory lens by each leader with the hope to implement these said procedures into practice and improve the experiences of LGBTQ youth in Iowa.

Implications of Theme #3

Workman (2006) and Wherry (2009) addressed the need for inclusive, explicit language in order to dismantle the disenfranchisement of marginalized populations. The bullying and harassment language is prevalent throughout the school handbook artifacts. This language was found to include LGBTQ-explicit protections from bullying and harassment.

This was refreshing, but as a reminder, this is a legal obligation for schools in Iowa to include bullying and harassment language. While this theme was one of the strongest themes found in the handbook texts, it presented a challenge in thinking for me to determine the level of support these occurrences provided to LGBTQ youth.

What this means is, when the state law requires bullying and harassment language to be present in handbooks, it can certainly help provide safer environments and does at least explicitly state that bullying and harassment is not allowed based on many attributes, including sexual orientation, sexual preference, or gender identity. However, as presented in the review of the literature, students who identify as LGBTQ are still being victimized at school, ((GLSEN, 2015, McClelland Institute, 2017, Russell, 2011, Toomey, 2011, Iowa

Pride Network, 2009). Therefore, although these 43 schools are not necessarily represented in the exact research surveys where LGBTQ youth reported far worse experiences in schools, it is unlikely that in these 43 sample schools LGBTQ youth fared considerably better than others nation-wide or in Iowa. Therefore, it is important for leaders to not only take note of the literature review and the treatment of LGBTQ youth in schools, or to consider how school leaders might conflate equity and equality, but also to consider how bullying and harassment language could be even more explicit and include more LGBTQ-related language to provide context and supports for students and families.

These explicit examples that were discussed in this dissertation poses critical questions for leaders to examine carefully. These questions are: What message is sent to students and parents when bullying and harassment language is so prevalent throughout the handbooks? Is it working for each student to keep them safe? How can school leaders examine carefully and improve the proactive curriculum, core values, and implementation of supports? How might school leaders engage in critical dialogue and professional learning on Cultural Proficiency to promote equity in schools? How might the artifacts we create in schools promote equity or marginalize and leave out some students?

As a reminder, Queer Theory debunks the idea of heterosexual norms and aims to help society from constructing meaning that heterosexuality is the preferred orientation (Jagose, 1996, Lauritsen and Thorstad, 1974, Ticotto, 2017, and Gunckel, 2017). Framing this work through Queer Theory lens takes a critical look at how school leaders might analyze school artifacts and consider ways we might challenge the status quo, or disrupt the thinking of a binary system of sexuality. With Queer Theory as the framework for this dissertation, I suggest that schools in Iowa, based on this dissertation study, focus more on

commitment than compliance in promoting equity for LGBTQ youth when creating school artifacts like handbooks. The language of commitment was represented by far too few examples in the handbook artifacts of 43 Iowa schools in the research sample. While there was some model language that supported LGBTQ youth found explicitly in the text, there was not enough. In fact, there was a gross absence of LGBTQ-related language overall. I ask my colleagues, school leaders in the state of Iowa, to continue to learn and promote equity in our schools.

This will help us to focus on our commitment to each student, by not lumping each together into statements like all that do not actually represent all students. Since I make recommendations for leadership consideration, I decided to examine the leadership experience of the school sample of 43.

Role of Leadership

Queer Theory presents the notion that heterosexual norms in society systemically oppress LGBTQ youth. (Ticotto, 2017, and Gunckel, 2017). School artifacts devalue LGBTQ youth by only including them when the law requires it. This theme was found throughout the handbook texts when analyzing them through a Queer Theory lens. This theme examined the difference in compliancy-based language choices and voluntary, commitment-based language choices in the text. When leaders understand and embrace equity, then oppression of LGBTQ youth in schools will continue to be disrupted. Also, the choices of commitment-based LGBTQ-language will likely increase as cultural proficiency understanding and overcoming of leadership barriers takes place.

Although this research study's focus was not on the role of school leadership, it would be negligent to not analyze leadership results that may have had an impact on the findings of this study. This research study was framed with transformational leadership in mind; my intent was for Iowa school leaders to read the findings of this study and use this information for future changes in student and/or parent handbooks regarding LGBTQ-related language and to promote equity. My hope is that leaders can be transformational through creating handbooks that are LGBTQ-inclusive. However, understanding the need for explicit language in school artifacts like curriculum and handbooks and gaining stronger understanding of equity is a good first step.

I decided that it would be interesting to learn a little more about the leadership that may impact handbook text. Therefore, I reviewed the educational licensure of each leader from the sample. The Iowa Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE) publicly posts the names and licenses of each person in the state licensed to teach, coach, or lead Iowa schools. Since the websites of the schools lists the names of principals and the BOEE publicly lists the licensure of these principals, I examined the licensure of the sample principal group to gain insight on whether there were any identifiable themes that emerge or relationships between principal preparation, licensure, or experience that might impact a more inclusive student handbook.

To gain better understanding of the principal group who is responsible for creating school handbooks, I researched the BOEE website further and analyzed the data for themes in educational experiences. I learned that 25 of 45 principals had at one time obtained athletic coaching authorization, 11 of 45 held AEA Administrator Licensure. I also learned that 19 had PK-12 Principal Licenses, 16 had 5-12 Principal Licenses, 20 had PK-12 Special

Education Supervision Licenses, nearly all held New Evaluator Approval, 6 held PK-8 Principal Licenses, 20 had PK-12 Principal Licensure, 11 earned AEA Administrator Licenses, 25 had at one time a Master Educator License, 1 had a Special Education Director License, and 2 held an Initial Administrator License. Most principals in this sample held a Professional Administrator License, 33 of 45. It is noteworthy to mention that 3 of the 45 school principals were not located on the BOEE website. It is possible that the school websites were not up to date, therefore, the principals' name could be incorrect on the website. If that is the case, the BOEE would not have the updated information on those 3 principals either.

The most meaningful finding was that among the principal sample group, according to the BOEE web site, 11 of the 45 had earned a PK-12 Superintendent's license (Retrieved 10-30-17 from <http://www.iowa.gov/boee/>). I could assume that the superintendents would have more policy training than other principals in the sample group. Regardless of the type of training, more classes are required to acquire that licensure. However, I argue that the additional education required for superintendents did not noticeably impact the sample's school handbooks with more LGBTQ-related language. The principal who serves in school presented in this research having model LGBTQ-related language does not have a superintendent's license. I would recommend a deeper investigation for future projects of the leadership styles and /or experiences of principals whose school artifacts are considered LGBTQ-related. This would be an interesting study for another aspiring doctoral candidate in the future.

Specific Recommendations for School Handbook Language

It is critical that schools examine their school artifacts, especially handbooks, and ensure that they are LGBTQ-inclusive. I will offer some recommendations on how that can be accomplished in this section.

Explicit language

School leaders should include explicit language protecting Lesbian, Gay, Bi- sexual, Transgendered, and Questioning students from harassment in school handbooks and other artifacts. If the language is not explicit enough, then students and families may not gain a clear understanding of the expectations for each while at school. This explicit language should address restroom and locker room use for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgendered, and Questioning students. It would be important to include information about the rights of students and identify as person in the building responsible for supporting students who have questions. It would be transformational to include explicit language in the curriculum as well that includes Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgendered, and Questioning material. Students in class who are exposed to curriculum that reflects each student might make each student feel welcome and included at school. It is important to also use this explicit language regarding the participation in not only curricular experiences, but also extra-curricular. I suggest that schools also include explicit equity statements indicating the promotion of equity in schools for each student in school artifacts, particularly in handbooks.

Equitable terms

In addition, I suggest that school leaders use non-binary gender language in conversation and in school artifacts. School leaders might consider the use of the term each student, rather than all students, and explicitly discuss preferences among LGBTQ youth. The school handbook is the foundation for expectations and procedures in school. I recommend that leaders use this handbook as a catalyst for change. In doing so, this school artifact must accurately reflect and promote equitable language in the texts because as a reminder, handbook artifacts shape practices in schools (Halverson, 2003).

Professional learning

My biases as an educator remind me that professional learning is critical to the transformation of school culture. Therefore, I highly recommend that leaders in school districts in Iowa consider Cultural Proficiency learning as a key aspect of their work. When doing so, consider specifically populations, like LGBTQ youth, who are often left out of curriculum and handbooks and include them instead. Use the resources around us, like people, and consider ways that we can work together to promote equity. School handbooks are only one artifact that we create in schools, but they do represent for what we stand and how we do business in our schools. My hope is that through professional learning, our mindsets will transform to become more active in promoting equity for each student we serve. This handbook study of 43 Iowa schools represented heteronormative culture, so I recommend professional learning that will help leaders to gain understanding on how to promote equity for LGBTQ youth in schools. It would also be helpful for school leaders to

conduct continuous equity audits to examine school artifacts to ensure that they promote equity, not squash it.

Conclusion

For this research study, I have learned from these data, that school artifacts in Iowa presented these three themes : (1) presence of heteronormative language and a gross absence of LGBTQ-related language found in the handbooks, (2) an inaccurate conflation of equity and equality and (3) bullying and harassment or safety language present, but as a result of compliance, not commitment. What was found, causes me to ask school leaders to first have the mindset that promoting equity is critical to our work as leaders and that explicitly stating protections for persistently marginalized subgroups of the population, like LGBTQ youth, is important. Creating a GSA Club or engaging in professional learning to promote equity is critical to the success of each student. I will conclude this dissertation with a list of future research topics that can only help to make the findings of this discussion more meaningful.

Future Research Topics

This dissertation experience has challenged my thinking and helped me to grow in my understanding of Queer Theory and the impact that heterosexual normative culture may have on LGBTQ youth in schools. This experience has led me to want to learn more about leadership, LGBTQ youth in my school, and how to dismantle the agent culture in our schools to better promote equity. To continue this work, I suggest future topics of research that could be studied to help fill that gap in research and understanding needed to improve our work as Iowa school leaders:

I recommend four research studies that could help to continue to create meaning about how to support LGBTQ youth in Iowa schools. The first recommendation that I have is to have school leaders conduct a survey to learn more about the feelings of safety at each school. These data can be helpful to increase positive experiences for Iowa LGBTQ youth. The second research study would be to Interview LGBTQ Youth in Iowa to examine perceived vs. actual safety. Then, it would be important to consider participating in interviews with school leaders across the state. This study could help to fill a gap in the research not only related to leadership prep experiences, but also on the job training that occurs from working with students and families. The forth research experience I recommend is for schools to conduct continuous equity audits on school artifacts. Curriculum artifacts, school websites, and handbooks can help to promote equity if the language is LGBTQ-related.

Final Conclusion

After examining language in Iowa school handbooks, I reported my findings that school handbooks perpetuate the heteronormativity of society. Because school handbooks are the venue by which student expectations are explicitly listed for all stakeholders and often address the procedures by which the policies are carried out, this study calls for districts to use explicit LGBTQ-related language in school handbooks. In order to understand the role of handbooks as catalyst for change, educators must examine school handbooks as well as all school artifacts to ensure that they promote equity for each student. A Queer Theory framework supports overcoming the constraints or barriers society places on us, and as the results of this study indicated, school leaders might consider learning more

about Cultural Proficiency. That way, we will have tools to take a more critical look at the ways our schools oppress students.

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